# The Bear Came Over the Mountain

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ALICE MUNRO

Alice Munro was born Alice Laidlaw in Huron County, Ontario. She started writing and publishing while studying English literature at the University of Western Ontario, though she left the program to marry her first husband, James Munro. Munro remained married to James, with whom she has four children, until 1972; she then returned to the University of Western Ontario as a writer in residence. Munro married Gerald Fremlin in 1976, and the two remained married until his death in 2013. Munro wrote throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and her stories were both published in Canadian periodicals and broadcast on the CBC. Munro published her first short story collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, in 1968. She has published fourteen original short story collections, and is largely considered to be a contemporary master of the short story form. Munro has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Paris Review*, among others; she won the Man Booker International Prize in 2009 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Munro's stories are frequently based her personal life experiences. Her first marriage was traditional for the postwar Northern American time period, with Munro tending to the home and children while her husband worked. This marriage fell apart during the 1960s, and Munro was more sympathetic to the changing social values and increasing liberalism of the time than was her husband. Munro's sensitivity to this shifting cultural landscape can be seen in Grant's reflections on his university career in "The Bear Came Over the Mountain." The 1971 publication of her interwoven collection *The Lives of Girls and Women* cemented Munro, like Margaret Atwood, as part of a Canadian feminist writing tradition that acknowledged and represented the realities of female experience during the mid-twentieth century. Munro increased her political involvement during the 1970s, as campaigns emerged with the intention of censoring works featured in high school literature course curricula. Munro's public defense of censored works led to some negative responses, though her increasingly lauded reputation cemented her as a formidable opponent on the matters of literary politics with which she chose to engage.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

"The Bear Came Over the Mountain," like much of Munro's writing, is set in her home region of Huron County, Ontario. Munro, along with Margaret Atwood (*Cat's Eye*), Jane Urquhart (*The Whirlpool*), and James Reaney (*Poems*), among others, is considered to be a part of the Southern Ontario Gothic tradition. This term was coined in 1972, highlighting the similarities between aspects of the Gothic novel and the dark realism in these authors' works; it also plays on generic connections between these Canadian authors and the Southern Gothic of Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty. "The Bear Came Over the Mountain," like many of Munro's other short stories, uses a simple writing style and subtle observations to examine the intimate details of human relationships while continually moving between present events and past reflections. The collection within which it was published, *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, is composed of short stories that exemplify the complexities of married relationships. As she has done with other stories, Munro intensely revised "The Bear Came Over the Mountain"; its variations can be seen between the original 1999 publication in *The New Yorker* and the 2013 version in the same magazine.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** "The Bear Came Over the Mountain"
- **Where Written:** Ontario, Canada
- **When Published:** 1999 (*The New Yorker*), 2001 (*Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*), and 2013 (*The New Yorker*), republished as a tribute after Munro's winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature.
- **Genre:** Short story, Realism, Southern Ontario Gothic
- **Setting:** Ontario, Canada
- **Antagonist:** Aging, dementia
- **Point of View:** Third-person limited; Grant's perspective

### EXTRA CREDIT

**On Screen.** "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" was adapted into an independent film called *Away From Her* by Canadian writer and director Sarah Polley. The film premiered in 2006 and received widespread critical acclaim.

**Featured in Collection.** *My Mistress's Sparrow is Dead: Great Love Stories, From Chekhov to Munro*, edited by author Jeffrey Eugenides, includes "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" as the final piece in the collection.

## PLOT SUMMARY

Grant, a retired university professor, is taking his wife of several decades, Fiona, to a residential facility for individuals with dementia. Fiona's memory has degenerated significantly over the past year. While preparing to leave, Grant remembers when Fiona proposed to him as a young woman, asking if he thought if would be fun if they got married; at the time he'd thought she was joking for a moment.

The facility, Meadowlake, has a policy that new residents cannot have visitors for one month after their arrival, in order to help them settle in. Grant anxiously awaits the end of this period, checking on Fiona via daily with phone calls to a nurse, Kristy, who keeps him updated. He learns that Fiona catches a cold—as many residents do, Kristy says, like kids starting school—but soon gets better and starts to make friends.

To pass the time, Grant skis and prepares dinners alone, remembering how he and Fiona had shared this ritual in the past. One night, he dreams about showing a letter to a colleague from the roommate of a girl with whom he had an affair, informing him that she had tried to kill herself after he ended the relationship. Despite this colleague having a history of dalliances with students, in the dream he reacts sternly to Grant's news. When Grant wakes up, he goes over the dream and sorts out what really happened: the affair and the letter were real, though the conversation with the colleague was not; in reality, Fiona had had a dismissive reaction towards the girl's pain (though Grant never actually confessed that he had slept with the student). Grant bitterly recollects how he was socially ostracized by his fellow professors after this incident, leading him to promise Fiona a new life and take early retirement so the two could move to Fiona's father's farmhouse.

Grant then considers his life as a philanderer, though he objects to this label. He thinks of other colleagues who had more frequent affairs, and gives credit to the emotional labor he sees himself as performing for his lovers. He rhetorically asks whether it would have been better for him to leave Fiona, stating that he continued to be a supportive husband to her both emotionally and financially. He acknowledges, however, that his early retirement and their move to the countryside was nevertheless a product of his dalliances. Grant feels some gratitude for the fact that he was forced out of his philandering, acknowledging that it was just in time to prevent the more serious ramification of him losing Fiona.

Grant reaches the end of the month and prepares for his first visit to Fiona. That morning, he experiences a feeling of anticipation that he finds similar to the beginning of a new affair. On the way, he buys an expensive bouquet of flowers, ostentatious enough that the nurse, Kristy, remarks on them when he arrives. She directs Grant to Fiona's room, but Fiona isn't there. Unsurprised, Kristy shows him to the communal area, where Grant sees Fiona. Her face looks different to him, and he remarks that she has gained weight. Her **long hair** has also been cut, though she doesn't seem to mind.

Fiona is sitting a table with a man playing bridge. When Grant approaches, she speaks to him in a friendly but distracted way, clearly eager to return to the side of the man with whom she is sitting, Aubrey. Aubrey is living at Meadowlake temporarily while his wife is on vacation. Grant asks Kristy about their relationship, and Kristy dismisses it, explaining that new residents often form such close attachments. During subsequent visits, Fiona continues to treat Grant with a distant politeness, while growing closer with Aubrey. The two frequently play cards, sit in the conservatory, or walk the halls together.

Grant reflects on a turning point in his career teaching Anglo-Saxon and Nordic literature, when married women started going back to school to "enrich their lives." One of these women, Jacqui Adams, was his first lover. The two were together for a year before she moved, and Grant dismissed her easily; by this point, he remembers, younger girls were also starting to attend university and were available for sex. Grant recollects how this demographic shift created drama in the university, with scandals leading to dismissals or some professors moving to more liberal universities. While Fiona was disinterested in this social scene, Grant remembers, it lead to him feeling a "gigantic increase in well-being."

The next time Grant returns to Meadowlake, Fiona and Aubrey are distraught. Aubrey's wife has returned from her extended vacation in Florida and is removing him from the home. While Kristy assures Grant that Fiona will get over Aubrey's departure, Fiona does not. She stops eating and refuses to get out of bed. The nurses begin to talk about Fiona using a walker or moving to a more intensive care section of the facility. This inspires Grant to drive to visit Aubrey's wife, Marian, to discuss the situation.

Marian invites him in, and the two discuss their respective marriages and caretaking roles. Grant asks why Marian does not put Aubrey in Meadowlake full time, assuming that she is doing it out of a sense of nobility. Marian quickly corrects him, laying out the way in which tending to Aubrey at home is the more responsible financial decision for their family. Marian rejects his idea of the visit, but when Grant returns home, he finds she has left him two voicemails inviting him to a singles dance. Grant is intrigued by the nerves in her voice, wondering what changed after he left that inspired her to reach out. He wonders if spending time with Marian would result a change of heart regarding visits between Aubrey and Fiona. Marian calls again, and he listens to the next voicemail, in which she asks if he had called her back as she had missed it. He decides to call her back.

After some time has passed, Grant visits Fiona at Meadowlake. He has brought Aubrey, but Fiona does not remember who

Aubrey is. She does, however, remember Grant, and thanks him for not abandoning her at Meadowlake. Grant responds that he would never have left her.

## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Grant** – Grant is a retired professor of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic literature and husband to Fiona, who has dementia. "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" tells the story of Fiona moving into a residential care facility from Grant's perspective, contrasted with his memories of his affairs and their shared life. Grant secured his position at the university with Fiona's father's financial assistance. The two have no children, though Grant does not seem to mourn this fact. Once women enter Grant's classes as part of larger social shifts during the 1960s and 1970s, Grant begins a series of affairs, which "dramatically increase his sense of well-being" despite the fact that he still loves Fiona and views her with a kind of awe. By contrast, Grant views his lovers, and women more broadly, with a generalized misogyny, looking down at any perceived emotionalism in their behavior or error in their academic inclinations. Grant does not, however, wish to leave Fiona, nor to risk his relationship with her. After an affair with a student goes sour, Grant is pushed out by his colleagues and chooses to retire from the university, moving with Fiona to a farmhouse property left to her by her father. When Fiona enters Meadowlake, Grant visits her frequently. Despite being distressed by her relationship with Aubrey, he does not attempt to keep them apart. In fact, after Fiona expresses consistent distress over Aubrey's departure from Meadowlake, Grant even attempts to negotiate meetings between the two via Aubrey's wife Marian. Though this attempt leads to Grant embarking on a presumed affair with Marian, he does also bring Aubrey to visit Fiona. The story makes clear his love for and commitment to his wife despite his regular trespassing of marital boundaries.

**Fiona** – Fiona, Grant's wife, grew up relatively carefree in an upper-class home yet now, in her seventies, has dementia. She is a beautiful and charismatic woman who chose Grant out of an array of suitors and proposed marriage to him when they were young. Fiona's parents were wealthy; Fiona's mother was politically active, though Fiona herself has never really cared about politics or social status. She prefers a joking, ironic mode of social interaction, which keeps her from earnestness, effusiveness, or emotionalism—a mode of behavior that Grant respects. Fiona cannot have children, and, after she learns this, adopts two Afghan wolfhounds named Boris and Natasha on whom she dotes (both of whom have died by the time Fiona enters the Meadowlake facility). Fiona does not have any mentioned career. She and Grant, after his retirement, spend their time working on the farmhouse and cross-country skiing. Grant refers to Fiona's reading and love for Iceland, where her mother is from, despite never wanting to visit the country. After entering Meadowlake, Fiona forms a romantic relationship with another resident, Aubrey, and is unable to remember Grant as her husband, treating him with polite distance. Fiona calls Aubrey "dear heart," helps him play cards, and wheels him through the conservatory and the grounds of the facility. When Aubrey leaves the home to return to his wife's care, Fiona is distraught, and refuses to eat or get out of bed. By the time Grant successfully negotiates a visit for the two, however, Fiona has forgotten Aubrey, though she remembers Grant, and thanks him for not "forsaking" her.

**Aubrey** – Aubrey is temporarily a resident at Meadowlake while his wife and primary caregiver, Marian, goes to Florida for the winter; he becomes Fiona's beloved companion at the facility. Grant describes Aubrey as maybe his age or older, with white hair and a melancholy but dignified face. Aubrey does not have dementia, but has neurological issues as the result of an illness. He used to be the local representative of a company that sold pesticides to farmers, but he was fired and accused of owing the company money; after a holiday taken during this time, he contracted an illness that resulted in a high fever, a coma, and Aubrey's present state, in which he cannot walk and struggles somewhat with talking. Aubrey has difficulty with handling cards but loves to play bridge, an activity that Fiona helps him with. Aubrey gets upset when Fiona spends time with Grant, and creates a distraction so that Fiona will return to his side. Aubrey does not have visitors, a fact later explained by his and Marian's son living in British Columbia. He calls Fiona "my love," while Fiona calls him "dear heart," and cries when he is taken out of Meadowlake and back to his home with his wife. At home, he mainly watches the sports channel, as Marian does not want to upset him with too much change or activity.

**Marian** – Marian is Aubrey's wife. Grant first sees her unfolding a wheelchair in the Meadowlake parking lot after her return from a vacation in Florida, readying herself to take Aubrey back home. Grant describes Marian as curvy, with the look of a small-town flirt. Marian does not have much contact with her and Aubrey's only son, and is Aubrey's main caretaker after his illness, predominately for practical financial reasons. She treats her house, in a lower-middle class neighborhood, with loving and fastidious attention, filling the house with accessories, matching décor, and appliances. Grant takes particular notice of the **drapes** in her home, thinking that Fiona would likely poke fun at them. Marian is at first hesitant to allow continued visits between Aubrey and Fiona, but the story's ending reveals that she eventually relents; it also implies that Grant begins to date Marian as a means to ensure Fiona can continue seeing Aubrey.

**Kristy** – Kristy is the main nurse with whom Grant has contact regarding Fiona's care at Meadowlake. Grant describes Kristy as young and heavy, not paying much attention to her physical appearance except for her hair, which is "blonde and voluminous." Kristy is unfazed by the variations in Fiona's

health and wellbeing, nor by Fiona and Aubrey's relationship; she refers to her patients as a collective "them" or "they" with similar behaviors and preferences.

**Jacqui Adams** – Jacqui Adams is the first woman with whom Grant has an affair. She is middle-aged, already married, and enrolled in one of his courses at the university as part of a larger new wave of married women looking to "enrich their lives" through additional education. Grant remembers himself as choosing Jacqui as one option among many willing women. To his mind, Jacqui was the opposite of Fiona, in both physical appearance and personality. Their affair lasts for a year until Jacqui's husband is transferred to a different location. Jacqui shakes when saying goodbye to Grant and writes him letters after she leaves, but Grant does not write back, looking down on the letters for their histrionic tone, and quickly gets involved with a young student.

**The Girl** – This "girl," who remains unnamed throughout the story, was a student with whom Grant had an affair. After ending the affair, Grant received a letter from the girl's roommate, condemning his actions and informing him of the negative ramifications they had on her mental health. Fiona dismisses the letter as melodramatic. Nevertheless, this letter, along with the word "rat" being written on his office door and general awareness of the affair among his colleagues, results in Grant and Fiona receiving the cold shoulder from the university community of which they are a part. This reaction in turn inspires Grant to take early retirement and move, with Fiona, to her father's childhood farmhouse.

**Colleague** – Grant's colleague, who remains unnamed, is the person to whom he shows the letter from his ex-lover's roommate. While Grant recollects his colleague as "among the first to throw away their neckties and leave home to spend every night on a floor mattress with a bewitching young mistress-coming to their offices, their classes, bedraggled and smelling of dope and incense," he dreams of this colleague reprimanding him for his own affair with a student.

**Fiona's Father** – Fiona's father, who passed away many years before the events of the story, was a wealthy and important cardiologist whom Grant remembers as "subservient at home." He retires alone to the farmhouse where he grew up, "bewildered" after Fiona's mother's passing, and leaves the farmhouse, as well as a sizeable inheritance, to Grant and Fiona after his death.

### MINOR CHARACTERS

**Fiona's Mother** – Fiona's mother is Icelandic, vocal about left-wing politics, and conversationally dominating over Fiona's father. Fiona inherits her mother's **striking hair**.

**Grant's Mother** – Grant's mother is a small-town widow and doctor's receptionist. Grant remembers her being alarmed by Fiona's mother's **long hair**, as a larger symbol of her "attitudes and politics." He also sees her as more similar to Marian, Aubrey's wife, labeling both of them as "practical people."

**Mr. Farquhar** – Mr. Farquhar is a bachelor farmer and neighbor to Fiona and Grant. He moved to Meadowlake years before Fiona does, before the facility had been remodeled, and Grant remembers visiting him there while on his way to move Fiona in for the first time.

**Boris and Natasha** – Boris and Natasha are Fiona's beloved Afghan Wolfhounds, whom she adopts after learning that she cannot have children. One of the signs of the increasing severity of Fiona's dementia is her forgetting that Boris and Natasha are dead.

## THEMES

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### LOVE, FIDELITY, AND MARRIAGE

In Alice Munro's short story "The Bear Came Over the Mountain," an older married woman, Fiona, moves into a home for individuals with dementia. There, Fiona starts a romantic relationship with another resident, Aubrey, and seems to forget her husband, Grant, even though he regularly visits her. These events take place against the backdrop of Grant's memories of his own affairs during his career as a university professor. Munro thus poses the question of what it means to be faithful in a marriage; Grant may have had numerous extramarital entanglements, but he visits Fiona every day, and, despite his own discomfort over her new relationship with Aubrey, he tries to negotiate further visits for them after Aubrey's wife, Marian, removes him from the care center. These ebbs and flows in marital loyalty come to a head when Grant begins an implied affair with Aubrey's wife, partially to ensure that he can bring Aubrey to see Fiona again. Without forgiving Grant for his infidelities, Munro nevertheless shows him to be a devoted and loving husband who is willing to sacrifice his own comfort and desires for the wellbeing of his wife. Munro thus makes an argument that sexual fidelity is just one of the many ways to show love and loyalty in a marriage.

While it is clear that Grant's infidelity began early in their marriage and lasted for many years, Munro depicts the duration of his and Fiona's marriage as harmonious and caring. After Fiona moves out, for example, Grant remembers many of their small and interwoven rituals. "They usually prepared supper together," Munro writes. "One of them made drinks and the other the fire, and they talked about his work [...] and about whatever Fiona was reading and what they had been thinking

during their close but separate day. This was their time of liveliest intimacy." Grant's memory of this nightly ritual suggests their enduring interest in each other's lives—a sign of a great marriage. In addition to remaining emotionally close, the two maintained regular "physical sweetness" throughout their marriage. While this "did not often end up in sex," it nonetheless "reassured them that sex was not over yet."

Having spent decades in a marriage that was physically close and emotionally fulfilling, Grant struggles with Meadowlake's policy that he cannot visit Fiona for the first month, calling every day to check on her wellbeing. When he does visit her, he brings flowers. It's clear to readers that he cares for her deeply and misses having her at home. Overall, Grant consistently thinks of Fiona and treats her with conscientiousness and respect, complicating the simpler view of him as an immoral person who has been unfaithful. This offers Munro's first suggestion that fidelity is more complex than mere adherence to monogamy.

Grant himself seems to share Munro's view that an unfaithful marriage can also be a loving one: while he understands that his infidelity could cost him his marriage, he feels that he can make up for this by expressing his love and loyalty in other ways. After a particularly messy end to an affair with a student, for instance, Grant chooses to give up philandering altogether. He understands that his old patterns were "getting to be more trouble than it was worth. And that might eventually have cost him Fiona." Fiona is clearly his priority, and the moment that their relationship could have been threatened, he ceases his extramarital affairs. He also stresses that, even when he was sleeping with other women, he never spent a night away from his wife and he never considered leaving her.

While he never seems to regret his behavior or consider that he could have made different choices, Grant finds some absolution in his otherwise kind treatment of Fiona. He wonders, "would it have been better if he had done as others had done with their wives, and left her?" Since he cared for her emotionally, sexually, and financially, he believes that his deception about his infidelities was kinder than leaving her or telling her about his cheating. Grant thus sees loyalty in marriage as the fulfillment of marital duties—financial, physical, and emotional. Perhaps this is an elaborate justification of his deception, but it does seem that they both have found their marriage fulfilling.

The story's ending—however ethically and emotionally complex—seems to affirm Fiona and Grant's love and loyalty, cementing Munro's depiction of infidelity as a relatively insignificant transgression in a devoted marriage. At the story's end, Aubrey has left the facility and Fiona's health begins to rapidly decline in response. While Grant has always felt uncomfortable with Fiona's relationship with Aubrey, he shows himself to be selflessly devoted to his wife when he swallows his pride and tries to talk Marian into bringing Aubrey to visit Fiona. While Fiona and Aubrey's relationship is different from Grant's infidelity (since Fiona seems to lack awareness that she has a husband in the first place, her behavior isn't self-consciously unfaithful), Grant seems to acknowledge that, just as he fulfilled his own desires outside of his marriage for many years, it's important for him to help his wife fulfill hers. This adds a new symmetry to their behavior (even if their behavior is not morally equivalent), and shows how much Grant cares.

Grant's ensuing affair with Marian also, paradoxically, shows how much he loves his wife. After Marian refuses to bring Aubrey to visit Fiona, but then invites Grant to a singles dance, Grant decides to go. He doesn't seem particularly drawn to Marian (whom he seems to find depressing and uptight), but his implicit affair with her allows him to care for Fiona—at the end of the story, he is able to bring Aubrey to visit her at last. The great irony of the story's ending is that, after the lengths to which Grant went to bring Aubrey to Fiona, Fiona seems to forget Aubrey altogether, just as she seemed to forget Grant when she first moved to the facility. However, in this final scene, Fiona *does* recognize Grant, even as she treats Aubrey like a stranger. This seems to affirm that, despite all the complications of Grant's affairs and Fiona's relationship with Aubrey, the two have always valued one another above everyone else. Their decades of kindness and devotion to one another are still the defining aspect of their marriage—not their various betrayals and failings.

## MEMORY, AGING, AND IDENTITY

Munro explores both aging and dementia throughout the story, and particularly the ways in which memories inform—or entirely create—one's identity. After Fiona enters Meadowlake and her recollection of her husband and even herself begin to dim, the story explores whether or not individuality can be retained as one forgets their own history. The story reveals a distinct loss of self as Fiona succumbs to dementia, yet by the end of the story Munro also demonstrates that some kernel of her identity survives. In this way, she rather paradoxically presents identity as both intimately linked to memory and divorced from it—as at once the culmination of a life's experiences a certain immutable fact of being.

Munro uses Fiona's shifting physical appearance to illustrate the change in her identity as her dementia—and thus loss of memory—worsens. When she first leaves her home with Grant for Meadowlake, for instance, Fiona wonders what she will wear at the facility. "I guess I'll be dressed up all the time," she says. "Or semi-dressed up. It'll be sort of like in a hotel." This suggests that she feels she will be in costume, in a sense no longer herself now that she's no longer in the place where she built her life with her husband.

Munro also describes Fiona's outfit carefully, writing, "she put on her golden-brown, fur-collared ski jacket, over a white

turtleneck sweater and tailored fawn slacks. She was a tall, narrow-shouldered woman, seventy years old but still upright and trim [...] Her **hair** that was light as milkweed fluff [...] and she still wore it down to her shoulders, as her mother had done." This shows Fiona's personal sense of style and the care that she takes with her appearance—which, in turn, directly evokes her personal history by echoing that of her mother. Yet the next time Grant sees his wife—one month after her arrival at Meadowlake—the first thing he notices is her weight gain. "She looked a little puffy in the face, the flab on one cheek hiding the corner of her mouth in a way it hadn't done before," Munro writes. Having already established Fiona's outward appearance as a reflection of her inward character, this shift from her previous "trim" figure suggests the erosion of her identity as she falls deeper into her dementia. Even so, Munro's language here suggests that Fiona's true self hasn't been erased; instead it is "hiding."

On another visit, Grant notices that Fiona wears "a silly wool hat and a jacket with swirls of black and purple, the sort of thing he had seen on local women at the supermarket," and that "they had cut her hair, too. They had cut away her angelic halo." When Grant asks, "why did they chop off your hair?" Fiona responds, "I never missed it." Her carefully crafted individual identity continues to disappear at Meadowlake. The fact that her hair—a connection to her former self and her mother—is gone is a particularly evocative image that suggests a sharp break with her history. Fiona's dementia thus results in the removal of the external indicators of her identity.

Beyond losing her specific sense of self, dementia seems to rob Fiona of her individuality altogether. Fiona's caretakers patronize and infantilize the patients at Meadowlake, referring to residents as a collective "them" or "they." Munro uses this dialogue to demonstrate that Fiona's caretakers do not consider her an individual with personal tastes or preferences. Grant, for his part, assumes Fiona has different clothes because "they didn't bother to sort out the wardrobes of the women who were roughly the same size and counted on the women not to recognize their own clothes anyway."

When Grant first takes Fiona to Meadowlake, the supervisor dismissively tells him "we find that if they're left on their own the first month they usually end up happy as clams." The nurse Kristy later explains Fiona and Aubrey's relationship to Grant in a similarly infantilizing manner, saying, "they get these attachments. That takes over for a while. Best buddy sort of thing. It's kind of a phase." Kristy is also unfazed by Fiona and Aubrey's sorrow at Aubrey leaving Meadowlake. "They have to get over these things on their own. They've got short memories, usually. That's not always so bad," Kristy says, dismissing the emotional realities of the elderly with dementia specifically because of their inability to remember things. Together, these details continue to suggest the erosion of personal identity and subsequent autonomy that occurs via the loss of memory.

When Grant visits Aubrey's wife, Marian, however, he begins to notice that aging individuals can still retain a sense of who they are. By the end of the story, he is able to apply this realization to Fiona, and recognize that she retains some aspects of individuality despite her dementia. For Grant, this is still expressed through the language of personal appearance. When he visits Marian, he internally critiques her outwards signs of aging while reflecting, "Very few kept their beauty whole, though shadowy, as Fiona had done." Grant then realizes, however, that perhaps he only thinks this way about Fiona because he had known her when she was young; in other words, his vision of Fiona is invariably shaped by his *own* memories of the girl he fell in love with, which in a way preserve Fiona's identity for her.

This revelation appears to make Grant more able to see Marian as an individual, rather than the aging woman he critically assessed when they first met; when he decides to return Marian's call inviting him to a singles dance, he thinks of her breasts and her "gemstone eyes," preserving a sense of the youthful identity of the "small-town flirt" that he sees in her. Similarly, at the end of the story Grant notes that Fiona is wearing a "seasonable but oddly short and bright dress." The ambivalence of this judgment, as opposed to the negativity and shock expressed about her appearance earlier in the story, indicates that he has become adjusted to her changed persona. Fiona seems to have settled as well; she is aware that the dress is not hers, saying, "I never wear yellow." Though much of Fiona has been lost, the story ends on a mildly hopeful note that an individual's identity can be saved via the memories of those who love them.

## GENDER AND POWER

While Grant is presented in the role of the dutiful husband throughout the story—he takes Fiona to Meadowlake, frequently visits her, and brings her gifts—he still adheres to stereotypical gender norms of the mid-twentieth century setting of the story. Contrasted with Aubrey's wife Marian, for example, Grant never considers caring for Fiona at home; he turns the messy daily aspects of her care over to a facility and visits her with gifts such as expensive flowers that "make him look like the guilty husband in a cartoon," perhaps reflective of his aversion of typically feminine domestic duties. Grant is often misogynistic in his internal thoughts as well. Munro illustrates how Grant's actions are structured by his expectations of gender norms in order to highlight the limitations of these norms, implicitly suggesting that they lead to a harmful imbalance of power in relationships.

Grant repeatedly makes observations that indicate his callous treatment of women. When the roommate of a girl with whom he had an affair writes him a letter referring to the girl's suicide attempt, he calls it "threatening in a whining way," unwilling to

grant his former lover emotional maturity or depth. Such an attitude is reflective of sexist tropes that women are silly or vapid, in contrast to serious men. Indeed, Grant left his position after this incident, seeing himself as "pushed out" by a group he derogatorily refers to as "the feminists [...] and the sad silly girl herself and his cowardly so-called friends." Despite this situation, he congratulates himself for his treatment of these women, thinking, "many times he had catered to a woman's pride, to her fragility [...] all so that he could now find himself accused of wounding and exploiting and destroyed self-esteem." Again, his language expresses a distinctly sexist view of women as inherently fragile and needy. Similarly, when his and Jacqui Adams's affair ends, he notes that she "began to shake uncontrollably," remarking coldly, "it was a if she had hypothermia. When she writes to him, he critiques her tone as "overwrought" and does not respond, instead becoming "magically and unexpectedly involved with a girl who was young enough to be Jacqui's daughter." Grant is openly enchanted by his ability to sleep with younger women, and with the fact that these "young girls" do not require "the tender intimations of feeling" he needed to use with Jacqui. Grant relies on sexist tropes to dismiss the feelings of the women he sleeps with, in turn granting himself permission to use them as a vehicle for his own desires.

Even though he sees Fiona as different from these women, his treatment of her is similarly shaped by his sexism. At the beginning of the story, Fiona asks about the Russian wolfhounds she adopted and "devoted herself to for the rest of their lives." While these dogs were clearly significant to Fiona, Grant cannot remember whether they got them after Fiona's mother's death or after finding out that she could not have children. Grant remembers this information flippantly, thinking, "something about her tubes being blocked, or twisted—Grant could not remember now. He had always avoided thinking about all that female apparatus."

He also downplays his affairs, thinking that he does not need to call himself a philanderer, "he who had not had half as many conquests as the man who had reproached him in his dream." Fiona, he acknowledges, was "quite willing" not to participate in the rampant affairs taking place in his academic setting. This does not, however, prevent Grant from participating. Grant's neglect of Fiona's wish to remain outside of the sexual escapades of their social group is part of his larger disrespect for her desires in favor of his own. In dismissing women's emotional interiority, Grant implicitly denies them their full humanity.

This is further reflected by his almost pathological objectification of the women he meets. When women begin attending the university at which he teaches, Grant looks down upon their academic interests, telling some, "If you want to learn a pretty language go and learn Spanish. Then you can use it if you go to Mexico." He describes the interest he incites in these women in objectifying, sexual language, referring to "the great surprising bloom of their mature female compliance, their tremulous hope of approval." He sees every woman through a sexualized lens—describing Kristy, one of the nurses at Meadowlake, as having beautiful hair, for instance: "all the puffed-up luxury of a cocktail waitress's style, or a stripper's, on top of such a workaday face and body."

He assesses Marian in a similar way upon first seeing her, commenting that she should not attempt to flatter her waist considering her weight, then later admiring her breasts. He continues to use objectifying language in his assessment of Marian, thinking, "the fussy way she had of shifting her buttocks on the kitchen chair, her pursed mouth [...] that was what was left of the more or less innocent vulgarity of a small-town flirt." Grant is not attracted to Marian until she pursues him, which reminds him flatteringly of his past affairs. Still, he has to fantasize about her cleavage to maintain interest in returning her call. The story suggests the Grant's behavior is all based in the same regressive gender ideals, which seemingly allow him to dismiss women's feelings and internal lives. In turn, he can better objectify them and maintain his sense of masculine dominance.

By the end of the story, Munro demonstrates that Grant is representative of a certain viewpoint, common for the time period of the story, which relies on misogyny to structure one's understanding of the world. In Grant's case, this misogyny actively inhibits his ability to care for the woman he loves because he refuses to undertake typically feminine duties of both emotional support and nursing, as he does not consider looking after her at home in the way Marian does for Aubrey. Without ever explicitly condemning Grant, the story thus offers an implicit critique of the limiting nature of strict, stereotypical masculinity and misogyny.

## CLASS, PRACTICALITY, AND HUMOR

Munro contrasts Grant and Fiona's whimsy with Aubrey and Marian's practicality. Grant and Fiona, for example, have intellectual discussions over dinner, which they prepare together every night in the simple and colorful rooms of Fiona's design. Marian, on the other hand, has painstakingly filled her house with cheap design elements like **drapes**. Their approach to caring for their spouses is also different, as Grant predominately thinks about Fiona's (or his own) emotional state, while Marian focuses on her and Aubrey's financial realities. The encounter between Grant and Marian ultimately presents unthinking whimsy as a form of elitism; people like Grant and Fiona can behave as they do only because they are of a certain class and lack immediate financial or practical concerns that worry people like Marian. Munro's portrayal of both couples highlights how a sense of carefree spontaneity may be more a marker of social status than any innate personal quality.

Grant sees Fiona's humor as the cornerstone of her personality. When he first describes Fiona's younger years, he says, "sororities were a joke to her, and so was politics." Fiona "made fun" of the men courting her, "and of Grant as well." Fiona's tendency to joke even frames Grant's memory of their engagement: when she proposed to him, Grant "thought maybe she was joking." Grant also directly contrasts Fiona with Marian (and the other women with whom he has affairs). He dreams that, when Fiona learns of the letter written by the suicidal girl, she says, "oh phooey [...] girls that age are always going around talking about how they'll kill themselves"; he later recalls that Fiona's reaction in reality (he really did receive such a letter) was not all the different from "what she said in the dream."

Grant also describes Jacqui Adams, his first lover, as "the opposite of Fiona-short, cushiony, dark-eyed, effusive. A stranger to irony." Grant clearly bristles at serious emotions and admires his wife's ability to greet such issues with flippancy. Indeed, when visiting Marian and Aubrey's house, Grant notes "two layers of front-window curtains, both blue, one sheer and one silky." He remembers that "Fiona had a word for those sort of swooping curtains-she said it like a joke, though the women she'd pick it up from used it seriously." Fiona's nonchalance makes her superior to other women in Grant's eyes, because she doesn't take the mundanities of life seriously.

Yet Munro makes clear that such an attitude is the byproduct of Fiona's financial security, which removes more pressing concerns from her life. Humor, the story suggests, is a privilege. This privilege is further evident in the fact that Grant secures his first job at a university through Fiona's father's money, and is able to take early retirement when Fiona inherits her father's property. Having never faced serious concerns about money, Grant subsequently assumes that Marian had been acting on principle when she reveals that she never considering permanently leaving Aubrey at Meadowlake. Marian is quick to correct him, outlining her situation: "I don't have the money to put him in there unless I sell the house [...] next year I'll have his pension and my pension, but even so I couldn't afford to keep him there and hang on to the house."

Grant finds this conversation familiar and "depressing"—it reminds him of his family and Grant's own mother, who thought about "money first." He assumes that Marian would see him as "a silly person, full of boring knowledge and protected by some fluke from the truth about life." Through this assessment, Grant acknowledges that he married into money but dismisses it as a "fluke." After this conversation he thinks that "being up against a person like that"—what he calls a "practical" person—"made him feeling hopeless, exasperated, finally almost desolate" because of how easily he realizes it could have been his life, if he had not married Fiona.

When he decides to return Marian's call inviting him to a singles dance, he has decided that he feels an affection for Marian's "high-gloss exactness and practicality." Grant's secret, Munro reveals, is thus the fact that he sees himself as one of the "practical people," more akin to Aubrey and Marian than to the upper-class Fiona. He fears that he was picked up on "one of Fiona's eccentric whims." While he strives to be like her and her wealthy family, Munro shows, he may nevertheless identify more with lower middle-class financial practicality. On another level, this suggests that illness and aging are the great equalizers; that they affect everyone, regardless of class or social stature, and as such help Grant come down to earth, as it were. Having been faced with something very serious—something that no amount of flippancy can fix—he can perhaps better appreciate the beauty of practicality.

## SYMBOLS

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

### FIONA'S HAIR

Fiona's hair is a symbol of her identity and individuality, at least in Grant's eyes. Fiona inherits her trademark hair from her mother, which fades as she ages from light blonde to white, and which both women wear long, against Canadian middle-class cultural norms of their time. Fiona's mother, notable for her Icelandic nationality, leftist politics, and outspokenness, is alarmingly to "practical" women such as Grant's mother for her nonconformist behavior and foreign attitudes—both of which are exemplified by her hair. Fiona, while quite different from her mother, similarly stands out from the majority of women that Grant knows. Far from being emotional and practical, Fiona is whimsical and ironic; she dresses in stylish attire that sets her apart from the more sexualized appearances of other women in the story, such as Jacqui Adams, Kristy the nurse, and Marian, Aubrey's wife. Fiona's loss of her individuality and sense of self while at Meadowlake is represented, for Grant, by the cutting of her hair by the staff and her own disregard for this change. Compared to the previous fastidiousness with which Fiona tended to her appearance, the fact that Fiona doesn't even notice her haircut at first indicates an abrupt break with her former self.

### DRAPES

Drapes in the story symbolize the class difference between its two couples—Grant and Fiona vs. Aubrey and Marian. More specifically, they are representative of the difference between Fiona's upper-class background and her corresponding taste, and the middle-class kitsch and practicalities that she and Grant look down on. When Grant walks into Marian and Aubrey's house for the first time, he

notices the painstaking attention with which the interior has been decorated and takes particular notice of "two layers of front-window curtains, both blue, one sheer and one silky." Pondering these, he thinks, "Fiona had a word for those sort of swooping curtains—she said it like a joke, though the women she'd picked it up from used it seriously. Any room that Fiona fixed up was bare and bright. She would have deplored the crowding of all this funny stuff into such a small space." This establishes that Fiona would look down upon Marian's decorating style from her own position of privilege; as a member of the upper-crust, Fiona considers her own taste the definition of chicness and exhibits a flippant sense of elitism.

Later on, after Marian calls Grant and asks him to a single's dance, Grant recollects that the word for such curtains—"drapes"—and thinks, in response to Marian's request, "why not?" He feels a "twinge of bizarre and unreliable affection" thinking about these drapes, which he attributes either to the fact that Marian's household reminds him of Grant's own mother—who was notably of a lower class than Fiona—or to the fact that he is somewhat inebriated. It's clear that while Grant is grateful to Fiona for enabling him to live a more vibrant life than he could have otherwise, he nonetheless feels a sympathetic pull towards the emblems of his small town childhood.

## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Random House edition of *Family Furnishings: Selected Stories, 1995-2014* published in 2014.

### The Bear Came Over the Mountain Quotes

He thought maybe she was joking when she proposed to him, on a cold bright day on the beach at Port Stanley. Sand was stinging their faces and the waves delivered crashing loads of gravel at their feet.

"Do you think it would be fun—" Fiona shouted. "Do you think it would be fun if we got married?"

He took her up on it, he shouted yes. He wanted never to be away from her. She had the spark of life.

**Related Characters:** Fiona (speaker), Grant

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 267

**Explanation and Analysis**

This scene comes at the beginning of the story as Grant reflects on Fiona's vivacious personality. In particular, he focuses on her distant and ironic approach to life, as well as the way that she, as a young woman, made fun of him and her other suitors. The reversal of traditional gender roles here, as Fiona proposes to Grant, establishes gender as one of the main thematic preoccupations of the story. It also suggests that an insecurity about traditional gender roles within the marriage is the driving force behind Grant's infidelity; Grant is later revealed to harbor a distinct strain of misogyny, yet, as this early interaction shows, he clearly is not the dominant party in his relationship with Fiona. However much he loves her, his aversion to this dynamic—in which he is robbed of what he believes is his rightful masculine authority—later becomes apparent in his pursuit of affairs of women very different from his wife.

This moment also reveals that Grant was initially drawn to Fiona precisely because of her whimsical approach to life, exemplified by the language of her proposal: she asks, quite casually, whether he thinks it would be "fun" if they got married. This quote notably comes after the narrator has pointed out that Fiona does not care about social standing or politics, preferring to remain distant from any form of intense engagement with life. "The spark of life" that Grant sees in her, therefore, is rooted in her eccentricities—which are, in Grant's mind, predominately expressed through whimsy, irony, and humor.

Her hair, which was as light as milkweed fluff, had gone from pale blond to white somehow without Grant's noticing exactly when, and she still wore it down to her shoulders, as her mother had done. (That was the thing that had alarmed Grant's own mother, a small-town widow who worked as a doctor's receptionist. The long white hair on Fiona's mother, even more than the state of the house, had told her all she needed to know about attitudes and politics.)

**Related Characters:** Grant's Mother, Fiona's Mother, Grant, Fiona

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 268

**Explanation and Analysis**

As Fiona and Grant prepare to head to the Meadowlake facility for the first time, the narration focuses on Fiona's carefully maintained appearance. Throughout the story,

Fiona's hair represents her individuality, epitomizing the unique qualities that Grant loves about her. Her hair is something she inherits from her mother, a politically leftist Icelandic woman who conversationally dominates her wealthy cardiologist husband. The "attitudes and politics" represented by this hair, for Grant's mother, seem to be a lack of adherence to practical social norms and a persistent, almost aggressive individuality in the face of conformity.

Fiona's adoption of this hairstyle thus aligns her with her mother and the unconventional power dynamic within her parent's marriage. Grant's affection for this hair shows that, despite his complex feelings about the power dynamic between him and Fiona, this individualism is central to his love for her.

> These were the Russian wolfhounds she had adopted many years ago, as a favor to a friend, then devoted herself to for the rest of their lives. Her taking them over might have coincided with the discovery that she was not likely to have children. Something about her tubes being blocked, or twisted—Grant could not remember now. He had always avoided thinking about all that female apparatus. Or it might have been after her mother died.

**Related Characters:** Boris and Natasha, Fiona, Grant

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 270

**Explanation and Analysis**

One of the incidents that clarified the severity of Fiona's dementia occurs when she wanders away from Grant in the supermarket and is found by the police in the middle of the road several blocks away. After they ask her a series of questions, she in turn asks them about her beloved wolfhounds—despite the fact that they have been dead for a long time.

Grant's reflection on these dogs, reveals his general neglect for Fiona's internal emotional state as well as the casual misogyny with which he dismisses "female" issues. He cannot even remember if Fiona adopted these dogs after finding out she could not have children or after her mother died, both of which are major life events and clearly had an impact on Fiona judging by her adoption of Boris and Natasha. Not only does Grant not acknowledge the moments in Fiona's life in which she might not approach the world with her trademark whimsy and humor, but he also dismisses a serious experience due to a performatively masculine disinterest in the realities of female biology and experience.

> "Whereas we find," the supervisor said, "we find that if they're left on their own they usually end up happy as clams."

**Related Characters:** Grant, Fiona

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 272

**Explanation and Analysis**

The supervisor at Meadowlake explains the facility's policy to Grant, which is that new residents cannot receive visitors for a month after they move in. This is meant to make the transition to living in the facility smoother, yet this comment by the supervisor introduces the dismissive language that the Meadowlake staff often uses to speak about the residents (epitomized by the generalizing use of "them" or "they" to refer to their needs and habits). Fiona's elision of personal identity once she moves in to Meadowlake is not just a product of her dementia, therefore, but is also facilitated by the way that the staff treats her.

The use of the phrase "happy as clams" is also fairly derogatory, showing how the Meadowlake staff not only neglect the individuality of the residents, but also actively infantilize them. Later, the nurse, Kristy, compares Fiona catching a cold to "when your kids start school"; both of these phrases show that the staff view the needs of the residents as simple and childish, essentially facilitating the loss of individuality initiated by aging, dementia, or other brain injuries.

> They had usually prepared supper together. One of them made the drinks and the other the fire, and they talked about his work (he was writing a study of legendary Norse wolves and particularly of the great wolf Fenrir, which swallows up Odin at the end of the world) and about whatever Fiona was reading and what they had been thinking during their close but separate day. This was their time of liveliest intimacy, though there was also, of course, the five or ten minutes of physical sweetness just after they got into bed—something that did not often end in sex but reassured them that sex was not over yet.

**Related Characters:** Fiona, Grant

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 274-275

**Explanation and Analysis**

This passage describes a nightly ritual that illustrates the close and intimate marriage shared by Grant and Fiona. Grant thinks of this as he prepares his dinners alone, waiting to contact Fiona at the end of her first month at Meadowlake. He clearly misses the closeness that they share, and neglects to answer the phone or socialize with their friends as these forms of social connection do not come close to his bond with Fiona. While their life together during their later years has been quiet, it is clear that Grant appreciates this nightly ritual and the tranquility of their daily routines.

Mentioning the "physical sweetness" they've shared adds another layer to this closeness, as the two are shown to still be physically attracted to and engaged with each other, rather than simply falling into a comfortable companionship. The establishment of this idyllic marriage will be complicated later in the story by revelations of Grant's philandering.

> Just in time, Grant was able to think, when the sense of injustice had worn down. The feminists and perhaps the sad silly girl herself and his cowardly so-called friends had pushed him out just in time. Out of a life that was in fact getting to be more trouble than it was worth. And that might eventually have cost him Fiona.

**Related Characters:** Colleague, The Girl, Fiona, Grant

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 277

**Explanation and Analysis**

After dreaming about the girl who threatened to kill herself after their affair ended, Grant begins to ponder his life as a "philanderer." Following this incident with the girl, Grant was socially ostracized by his colleagues, which led to his retirement from the university and his move to the countryside with Fiona. Grant's disdain is directed in multiple directions here: he looks down on the emotional state of his ex-lover, refusing to contemplate the severity of her suicide attempt; he dismisses the feminist cultural movement that is already changing the way in which relationships between professors and students could be conducted; and he condemns the hypocrisy of his colleagues and friends who engage in similar behavior. While Grant is unrepentant for his behavior, he acknowledges that it had the potential to cost him Fiona, and clearly demonstrates that he values his marriage over his infidelities.

> She was a heavy young woman who looked as if she had given up on her looks in every department except her hair. That was blond and voluminous. All the puffed-up luxury of a cocktail waitress's style, or a stripper's, on top of such a workaday face and body.

**Related Characters:** Grant, Kristy

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 278

**Explanation and Analysis**

Grant's assessment of Kristy, a nurse and his main point of contact at Meadowlake, introduces his habit of misogynistic objectification when meeting women. He looks down on her weight while simultaneously appreciating her hair and denigrating it by comparing it to two professions that are simultaneously sexualized and shamed for this sexualization, the cocktail waitress and the stripper. The ease with which Grant makes this comparison, and the fact that he takes the time for this assessment even as he prepares to see Fiona again for the first time after a month, shows how much of an innate habit this objectification is for him.

She was wearing a silly wool hat and a jacket with swirls of blue and purple, the sort of thing he had seen on local women at the supermarket.

The fact must be that they didn't bother to sort out the wardrobes of the women who were roughly the same size. And counted on the women not to recognize their own clothes anyway.

They had cut her hair, too. They had cut away her angelic halo. On a Wednesday, when everything was more normal [...] and when Aubrey and Fiona were again in evidence, so that it was possible for Grant to have one of his brief and friendly and maddening conversations with his wife, he said to her, "Why did they chop off your hair?"

Fiona put her hands up to her head, to check.

"Why—I never missed it," she said.

**Related Characters:** Fiona, Grant (speaker), Aubrey

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 287-288

**Explanation and Analysis**

This section demonstrates the way in which clothing serves as a symbol of individuality, both for Fiona and the other Meadowlake residents as a whole. For Grant, Fiona's tasteful and stylish attire represents her class and individuality. While not as central or nuanced as her hair, which offers a complex array of symbolism regarding marriage and class backgrounds, Fiona's clothing is still a hallmark of her wealth, her taste, and the way in which she retained her beauty as she aged. To see her in such unbecoming clothes, therefore, represents the way in which she continues to change from who she used to be due to her lack of memory. It also, however, adds to the ways in which Meadowlake aids in this loss, by neglecting to separate the clothing of its residents.

Even more remarkable than this new attire, for Grant, is the loss of Fiona's traditional hairstyle. His depth of feeling about this is revealed by the statement "they had cut away her angelic halo." Throughout the story, Grant shows a disdain for emotional effusiveness; he is shocked by the florid term of endearment which Fiona uses with Aubrey, "dear heart." And yet, the depth of feeling he has about Fiona's hair, and, by extension, about the unique elements that define her personality, becomes clear as he slips into the dramatic and emotional language that he normally disdains.

For her part, Fiona doesn't even notice that her hair is missing, which represents her own loss of her sense of self. Intriguingly, however, it also suggests that perhaps this hair, and all that it symbolizes for Grant, never meant the same things to Fiona.

She was the opposite of Fiona—short, cushiony, dark-eyed, effusive. A stranger to irony. The affair lasted for a year, until her husband was transferred. When they were saying goodbye in her car, she began to shake uncontrollably. It was as if she had hypothermia. She wrote to him a few times, but he found the tone of her letters overwrought and could not decide how to answer.

**Related Characters:** Fiona, Jacqui Adams, Grant

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 290

**Explanation and Analysis**

At this point in the story, Grant is reflecting on the demographic changes that took place during his time as a university literature professor. While at first his students are all male, soon married women began to join his classes in order to "enrich their lives." Then, girls began to attend university as well. This hints at the larger historical and cultural contexts of the story; Grant was a university professor during the 1960s and 1970s, when broad social changes and increasing liberalization, along with the feminist movement, led to a dramatic increase in women attending university.

Grant seems to seek "the opposite of Fiona" in Jacqui, both physically, emotionally, and – perhaps most significantly – in the lack of irony with which she approaches life. While this fulfills a certain need in Grant, he ultimately disrespects Jacqui for it, as her emotional response to their parting leads to his disinterest. While Grant seeks women unlike Fiona in his affairs, he ultimately does not respect women other than Fiona.

Young girls with long hair and sandalled feet were coming into his office and all but declaring themselves ready for sex.

**Related Characters:** Grant

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 290

**Explanation and Analysis**

This again indicates the historical context of the story. The changing university demographics resulted not only in married women attending classes, but also in a wave of young women enrolling in college. The description of these women with "long hair and sandalled feet," like references to incense and marijuana at other points in the story, points to hippie culture and wider sexual freedoms. Grant's perspective, however, that these girls were "declaring themselves ready for sex" is suspect. Perhaps the more open and direct attitude assumed by female university students was something that Grant interpreted sexually, just as he assesses all components of a woman's appearance through a sexualized lens.

> Grant caught sight of two layers of front-window curtains, both blue, one sheer and one silky, a matching blue sofa and a daunting pale carpet, various bright mirrors and ornaments.

Fiona had a word for those sort of swooping curtains—she said it like a joke, though the women she'd picked it up from used it seriously. Any room that Fiona fixed up was bare and bright—she would have deplored the crowding of all this fancy stuff into such a small space.

**Related Characters:** Fiona, Marian, Grant

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 298

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Aubrey returns home, Fiona falls into a deep despair, refusing to eat or get out of bed. Grant drives to Aubrey and Marian's house to speak with Marian about potentially arranging visits between the two. When Marian invites him in, he notices the fastidiously clean house and its devoted ornamentation. The difference between Marian and Fiona is exemplified by the drapes, a word which Fiona cannot even say without humor. Having grown up wealthy, she is not used to cramped spaces and looks down upon "crowd" their "fancy" items into such small homes.

While this difference in interior design style is partially one of class, it is also a matter of personal taste. Grant cannot help but remember Fiona's opinion in this situation, which hearkens back to his description of Fiona's parents' relationship as one in which her mother expressed opinions and her father smiled and acquiesced.

> His uncles, his relatives, probably even his mother, had thought the way Marian thought. They had believed that when other people did not think that way it was because they were kidding themselves—they had got too airy-fairy, or stupid, on account of their easy and protected lives or their education. They had lost touch with reality. Educated people, literary people, some rich people like Grant's socialist in-laws had lost touch with reality. Due to an unmerited good fortune or an innate silliness. In Grant's case, he suspected, they pretty well believed it was both.
>
> That was how Marian would see him, certainly. A silly person, full of boring knowledge and protected by some fluke from the truth about life [...]
>
> He might have married her. Think of it. He might have married some girl like that. If he'd stayed back where he belonged.

**Related Characters:** Fiona, Grant's Mother, Marian, Grant

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 304

**Explanation and Analysis**

After leaving Marian's house, Grant reflects on the class differences between them. This section defines Grant's worldview as divided between "practical" people, or middle-class, and Fiona's world as well as that of the university. Grant acknowledges that he comes from the practical world, and that he was only able to leave it because of his marriage to Fiona and the financial benefits that came with this union. Grant is both intrigued and repelled by how close he came to having a practical, middle-class life, married to someone like Marian. His use of the word "belonged" to refer to his origins indicates both his sense of the extreme luckiness of his position, but also the fact that he still believes that he actually belongs in Marian's world, and not in Fiona's. This explains why he is drawn to women like Jacqui Adams, or Marian, as they allow him a comfort that reminds him of his family. Because he does not respect these origins, however, he also does not respect these women, but he needs to engage with them in order to feel

more confident in himself.

"I'm happy to see you," she said, and pulled his earlobes.

"You could have just driven away," she said. "Just driven away without a care in the world and forsook me. Forsooken me. Forsaken."

He kept his face against her white hair, her pink scalp, her sweetly shaped skull. He said, "Not a chance."

**Related Characters:** Grant, Fiona (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 308

**Explanation and Analysis**

At the end of the story, Grant brings Aubrey to visit Fiona. He is presumably having an affair with Marian, which enabled his renegotiation of this visit. Yet Fiona does not remember Aubrey when Grant brings him up. She does, however, remember Grant this time. Her pulling of his earlobes epitomizes the way in which she manages to be remote while drawing Grant in through this inaccessibility; rather than simply hugging him (an impulse Grant feels towards her at various points in the story), she literally tugs him towards her.

Fiona still expresses gratitude to Grant for not leaving her, a statement that could be extended to be an acknowledgement, on her part, of Grant's infidelity. Just as Grant does not want to leave Fiona for another woman, however, he does not leave her at Meadowlake. He is still able to appreciate her hair even though it is different; despite her dementia, Fiona's individuality remains and he is able to love this limited or altered version of his wife. Fiona, in turn, is able to preserve a sense of who they are as a couple. Fiona and Grant thus remain devoted to each other in their own particular way and through their own complex dynamic.

# 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 BEAR CAME OVER THE MOUNTAIN

Fiona lives with her parents in a large house that is at once "luxurious and disorderly." Her father is an important cardiologist while Fiona's mother is a politically left-wing woman from Iceland. Fiona does not care about politics, which are a "joke" to her; so too are sororities, though she owns "her own little car and a pile of cashmere sweaters." Fiona is being courted by several young men, including Grant, and while she makes fun of them all, she proposes to Grant during a day at the beach. Grant thinks she's joking at first, but never wanting "to be away from her," accepts, thinking to himself that "she had the spark of life."

*This introduction demonstrates how Fiona comes from a privileged and wealthy background, as well as the ironic distance with which she approaches life. The fact that Fiona proposes to Grant—and that Grant believes that she is joking—also highlights the complex gender dynamic between the two which will come into play more later in the story.*

Grant, now much older, remembers this as he and Fiona are leaving their home. Fiona notices a scuff on the floor from her shoes and cleans it up, musing while she does so about what she would wear where she is going and figuring that she will be "dressed up all the time." Grant admires Fiona's tasteful and stylish outfit, while also observing her long white **hair**, which she wears in the same style as Fiona's mother, and remembers how this had alarmed Grant's own small-town mother as an indication of their difference in values.

*Fiona's reaction to the scuffed floor, as well as Grant's description of her fastidious personal appearance, acts as a symbol for Fiona's elitism and individuality. Grant sees Fiona's hair, in particular, as representative of her uniqueness and difference from his own practical middle-class background. Fiona's hair connects her to her own mother and history, establishing it as a clear symbol of her identity.*

Grant then remembers how, a year ago, he had started noticing Fiona leaving yellow post-it notes around the house. While Fiona often left herself little notes, such as titles of books she wanted to read, these more recent notes were labels to help her remember what various household drawers contained. Then, Fiona forgot how to get home from town or from her walks in the woods. Fiona did not seem overly concerned about these lapses in memory, and simply wondered if she needed to take vitamins. Her mental state, however, continued to deteriorate.

*At first, the lapses in Fiona's memory don't seem to drastically alter her personality; she has always left herself notes, and now just is leaving herself more. As her illness progresses, however, she will become less like herself.*

In one instance, Fiona thought she and Grant had only recently moved into the house in which they had lived for twelve years. They visited a doctor who was reticent about labeling the issue but acknowledged that Fiona's memory was deteriorating. Speaking to the doctor, Grant tried to explain that Fiona has always been flighty and ironic; at first, he thought that her forgetfulness is part of a "private amusement" or a "joke."

*Fiona's condition clearly reaches a point where Grant feels he needs to be concerned. Even so, Grant's confusion over the severity of Fiona's deterioration reveals just how central joking and irony are to Fiona's personality; at first, Grant is not even sure if anything is actually wrong as he is so accustomed to Fiona engaging in "private amusements" and waiting for him to catch on.*

Fiona continued to get worse until she could no longer function on her own. Once, she disappeared from the supermarket and was picked up by the police walking down the middle of the road. She'd then asked the officers about her long-dead Russian wolfhounds Boris and Natasha. Thinking of the dogs in the present, Grant remembers how Fiona may have adopted them after finding out that she couldn't have children, though he can not remember exactly why as he "avoided thinking about all that female apparatus." Unsure of the timeline, however, Grant wonders if she actually adopted them after Fiona's mother died.

*Grant's response to Boris and Natasha demonstrates both his lack of care for Fiona's emotions—he cannot remember whether she adopted to dogs after her mother's death or finding out that she couldn't have children, let alone recollecting the specifics of her infertility—as well as the dismissiveness with which he treats "female" realities.*

Many people, Grant assumed, might have seen Boris and Natasha as one of Fiona's "eccentric whims," just as they might have viewed *him* in the early days of their marriage. Some of this, he acknowledges, is contributed to by the fact that Fiona's father's money helped secure his position as a professor of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic literature at the local university.

*Grant reveals that his career is predicated on his father-in-law's money, which enabled his hiring by the university, as well as his insecurities about why Fiona chose to marry him. Grant is clearly not originally of Fiona's social class.*

The care facility where Fiona is moving has a rule that no one can be admitted during December, due to the high emotional strain of the holiday season. So, in January, she and Grant drive there together. On the way, Fiona reminisces about a time they went cross-country skiing in a nearby hollow. Grant wonders to himself how she can still hold such memories "so vividly" while losing aspects of basic functionality, and struggles with the desire to turn around and go home.

*Dementia and aging are shown to be erratic and confusing. Fiona can remember specific intimate moments with her husband, which points to the strength of their bond. Because her sense of self is still present in these moments, Grant is unable to gauge the severity of her mental deterioration.*

Another rule at Meadowlake is that new residents cannot receive visitors for the first thirty days in order to ease their settling in. The supervisor assures Grant that "if they're left on their own the first month they usually end up happy as clams." Grant remembers visiting their neighbor, a bachelor farmer named Mr. Farquhar, several years prior at Meadowlake. The facility has since been renovated, but Grant cannot help from picturing Fiona in the old Meadowlake as he calls the nurses daily for updates on her.

*The supervisor's statement reveals the infantilizing and generic view with which Meadowlake views its residents, tending to refer to individuals as a collective "them" or "they." Grant's inability to envision Fiona in the new Meadowlake suggests that, in some ways, he remains stuck in the past that Fiona herself is forgetting.*

Grant speaks most frequently with a nurse named Kristy. Kristy lets him know that Fiona catches a cold, comparing this incident to "kids at school" getting sick, but Fiona gets better after a round of antibiotics and seems "less confused" than when she first arrived. She also starts to make friends. While he waits to visit, Grant refrains from socializing with their friends or even picking up the phone, instead skiing and quietly preparing his supper while remembering when he and Fiona shared this intimate ritual.

*Kristy's commentary on Fiona continues to establish the way that Meadowlake does not acknowledge the individuality of its residents. The comparison to schoolchildren further infantilizes the elderly and ill. This scene also further establishes the closeness between Grant and Fiona.*

One night during this period, Grant dreams that he receives a letter from the roommate of a girl with whom he once had an affair. He shows this letter to a colleague, who reacts with consternation, advising Grant to prepare Fiona. In the dream, Grant then enters a lecture hall full of young women in mourning and glaring at him, while Fiona, sitting in the front, dismisses their emotional distress, saying "oh phooey, girls that age are always going around talking about how they'll kill themselves."

*Grant clearly does have some lingering guilt about his infidelities, which are implied here to have affected his career as a professor. Fiona's dismissive reaction to something as severe as suicide—even in a dream—highlights her intensely flippant nature.*

When he wakes up from this dream, Grant reviews what actually happened and what was a part of his dream. While he did not really consult his colleague, he *did* receive such a letter (as well as the word "rat" written on his office door). He told Fiona simply that the girl had a crush on him, rather than acknowledging the affair, and Fiona responded much as she had in the dream. While Grant did not face any direct ramifications in his job, after the incident became well known, he stopped being invited to social events held by colleagues and other university professors. This motivated Grant to promise Fiona "a new life."

*Grant disparages the emotionalism of the girl's response, again looking down upon or neglecting to take seriously the emotional reality of the women with whom he is involved. Grant does not confess his affairs to Fiona, complicating the image of a devoted and close marriage established earlier in the story. Fiona's dismissive reaction again suggests her snobbery and flippancy.*

Grant thinks to himself that his life as a philanderer, though he disputes this label, had actually included generosity, in in the sense that he emotionally catered to the women with whom he became involved. While he acknowledges that he deceived Fiona, he wonders whether it would have been better for him to leave her instead of continuing to support her emotionally and financially.

*Grant's attitude towards his infidelities is unrepentant. He views women's emotions with condescension, while also seeing his marriage in a traditional light. Assuming that Fiona's needs are met if he does not leave her and caters responsibly to his career, Grant does not consider fidelity as central to his love for Fiona.*

Grant acknowledges, however, that their life *had* been affected by his affairs. After the incident with the girl, he retired, and the two moved to Fiona's father's farmhouse in Georgian Bay, which Fiona inherited after his death.

*Grant's infidelities have a wide-ranging impact on his and Fiona's life, as they leave their social world and his career behind in order to isolate themselves in a rural farmhouse. Their financial security is again shown to be dependent on Fiona's inheritance, underscoring that Grant is of a lower class.*

This move precipitated a "new life" for Grant and Fiona. They kept socializing to a minimum, though they did make some friends, and occupied their time skiing and working on the house. Grant stopped having affairs. Though at first he felt a sense of injustice about this change, Grant then became grateful, recognizing that it might have come just in time to salvage his marriage and ensure that he did not lose Fiona.

*Grant does not seem to feel much guilt about his affairs. However, he clearly still loves Fiona despite this behavior, valuing his marriage to her over his infidelities. Ageing and retirement, here, are linked to settling down, as the two enter a peaceful, symbiotic, and quiet shared existence.*

Grant again recalls his many affairs as he prepares to visit Fiona at Meadowlake after her first month. He feels a sense of anticipation that reminds him of the first meeting with a new lover. He buys Fiona an ostentatious bouquet, which Kristy, the nurse, notes he must have "spent a fortune on" when he arrives. Grant assesses Kristy's appearance critically, thinking that she "looked as if she had given up on her looks in every department except her hair [...] all the puffed-up luxury of a cocktail waitress's style, or a stripper's, on top of such a workaday face and body."

*Grant again appears to be a doting husband, nervously buying Fiona expensive flowers. His interest in Fiona here is complicated by its evocation of his memories of the beginning of an affair, however. This subtly suggests Fiona as a new or different woman, reflecting the loss of her identity due to her dementia. Grant's misogyny resurfaces in his calculating and derogatory assessment of Kristy's appearance.*

Kristy shows Grant to Fiona's room, which is devoid of personal décor. Fiona is not there, so Kristy shows Grant to the main common area, where Fiona is sitting with a group of patients playing cards. Grant notes that her face looks heavier than before. Fiona is sitting very close to one man, helping him with his cards. When Grant arrives, she greets him with friendly chatter and offers him a cup of tea. This alerts Grant to her mental state, as Fiona clearly does not remember that Grant does not drink tea. Grant comments on the man Fiona was sitting with, and she introduces him as Aubrey, whom she knew when she was a teenager from a visit to the farm. Grant realizes that Fiona has also forgotten that they lived in this farmhouse together.

*The lack of décor in Fiona's room highlights the lack of individual expression at Meadowlake. Grant's preoccupation with physical appearance again emerges here, as he judges Fiona's weight gain. Given that Fiona previously took such care with her appearance, however, this change also legitimately seems to signal a shift in or loss of her identity. Indeed, Fiona's dementia is more pronounced here as she forgets key facts about her life; it is unclear whether or not she even knows who Grant is. Loss of memory is thus linked to a loss of selfhood, as Fiona is unable to reenter to close intimacy of her and Grant's marital bond.*

Fiona is distracted from her conversation with Grant by Aubrey, who clearly wants her to return to the table. Grant notices "a blush spotting her newly fattened face." Fiona goes back to Aubrey and taps his hand with hers.

*Aubrey and Fiona clearly have an intimate relationship, which echoes Grant's own infidelities (though, importantly, Fiona does not know she is being unfaithful). Kristy's obscuring of the full details of Fiona's time at Meadowlake becomes apparent again here, as the "friend" Fiona made is shown to be romantic.*

Grant speaks to Kristy, who brushes this relationship off as normal, saying that many new patients form these kind of close attachments. She advises that Grant learn to take Fiona's mental state—and potential memory of him— "day by day."

*Kristy's dismissal of Fiona and Aubrey's relationship returns to the lack of individual acknowledgement and respect with which the Meadowlake staff treat their residents.*

Grant continues to visit, but Fiona simply treats him with polite distance. Grant learns from Kristy that Aubrey does not have dementia, but rather got sick on holiday and went into a coma, resulting in some neurological damage.

*Fiona no longer seems to remember that Grant is her husband at all, which is ironic given Grant's clear devotion to her at this point in their lives. While Grant is deeply unhappy with the situation, he remains committed to visiting Fiona and ensuring her wellbeing.*

Fiona and Aubrey spend most of their time together at the card table, though they also walk to halls together or sit in the conservatory speaking to each other lovingly. When Fiona spends time with Grant Aubrey expresses his distaste through dropping his cards.

*Grant's love for Fiona becomes clearer as he continues to visit but does not interfere with or prevent Fiona's time with Aubrey.*

Grant makes an effort to respect their relationship, reducing his visits to twice a week. Because Aubrey does not receive visitors, however, he and Fiona often disappear during this time, sometimes to their rooms, a fact about which Grant feels "a truly malignant dislike."

*Grant's desire for Fiona to be happy even trumps the implication of a sexual component to Aubrey and Fiona's relationship. This reveals Grant's genuine care for Fiona, despite his own infidelities.*

One day, Grant sees Fiona wheeling Aubrey outside. He registers that she is wearing a "silly" wool hat and a jacket that looks like something worn by "local women at the supermarket." He wonders if the Meadowlake workers do not bother to sort out the wardrobes of the female residents. More alarming to Grant, however, is the fact that the staff have cut off **Fiona's trademark long hair**. When he asks her about the haircut, Fiona remarks with surprise, stating that she did not notice it.

*Fiona's loss of individuality is expressed through the change in her personal appearance. She no longer is "dressed up" in her tasteful attire, but clad in unfashionable clothes that, Grant implies, are worn by women of a lower social class. Even more definitive is the loss of Fiona's long hair, which, for Grant, represents her difference from the majority of women he knows, as well as a connection to her own past.*

Grant flashes back to his teaching career. At the beginning, he remembers, he gets "the regular sort" of students (i.e. male), but soon married women start to go back to school in order to "enrich their lives." Women join his courses, for example, if they have a Scandinavian background or enjoy historical novels about the Nordic or Anglo-Saxon eras which Grant specializes in. The relationships they form with their professors, Grant muses, often are part of this "enrichment," as many start to have affairs. While Grant speaks to many of these women harshly, some, he thinks, are attracted to his tone and continue to visit his office.

*This passage offers a hint at the larger context of the story by alluding to the demographic changes experiences by universities during the liberalization of the 1960s and 1970s in North America. Grant's response to these changes—to look down on the motives of the women in his classes and to speak harshly to them—again alludes to his misogyny.*

Grant's first lover, one of these women, is named Jacqui Adams. She is the opposite of Fiona in both appearance and personality. Their affair lasts a year, until her husband's transfer. While Jacqui writes him letters after her move, Grant quickly loses interest, repelled by the intensity of her emotions for him. He is also distracted, because now, women are starting to join the university as undergraduates, and Grant begins to sleep with students, stating "young girls with long hair and sandalled feet were coming into his office and all but declaring themselves ready for sex."

*Grant seems to use his affairs to seek the opposite of Fiona; he continues, however, to look down on any effusive emotion while respecting Fiona's restraint. His fixation on the "young girls" with whom he might have sex shows how he interprets all of his relationships with women through a sexualized lens.*

The arrival of young women at the university and the larger shifting attitudes towards sex taking place in the sixties creates a great deal of drama at Grant's university. "Scandals burst wide open" and some of Grant's colleagues receive reprisals and firings, though this does not stop the new sexual openness between academics themselves as well as their students.

*The 1960s cultural context of this story is shown to have had social ramifications in Grant's world, opening up the possibility for affairs on a new level which most of Grant's colleagues take advantage of. Fidelity, for most of Grant's community, is not honored.*

While it seems to Grant that most people in his social world are involved in this sexual revolution, he acknowledges that Fiona remained disinterested in it. However, as a result of his affairs, Grant begins to feel more confident in himself and more appreciative of his life.

*Grant's self-interested neglect of Fiona's preferences again comes across here. While he knows that Fiona would prefer not to be involved in the sexual scandals of the university, this does not stop him pursuing affairs because of the personal benefits he experiences. Grant's insecurity about his marriage to Fiona due to her assumption of certain traditional roles, such as her marriage proposal and financial resources, is thus tempered by his ability to have affairs with women who are different, but, to his mind, less than, Fiona.*

On his next visit to Meadowlake, Grant brings Fiona a book of watercolors illustrating Iceland, as she had developed a recent interest in the country. He finds her and Aubrey distracted and distressed, however, as Aubrey is leaving Meadowlake to go home, as Aubrey's wife has returned from her vacation in Florida. Fiona comforts Aubrey, who is crying, using affectionate phrases such as "dear heart" which Grant had not heard her use before, and asks Grant to intervene. Grant asks Kristy if he should stay. Kristy asks, "What for? She's not sick, you know." When Grant clarifies that he thinks he might need to keep her company, Kristy assures him that "they have to get over these things on their own," so he leaves, seeing a woman he assumes is Aubrey's wife in the parking lot.

*Fiona continues to behave differently, comforting Aubrey with language that is different to her traditional way of speaking. This loss of individuality is compounded by the nurse Kristy, who cannot even fathom why Grant might want to stay and comfort Fiona. Grant's willingness to do so, however, emphasizes his devotion to his wife.*

Although Kristy says that Fiona will recover from her grief, she does not, refusing to eat or get out of bed. After the staff start to talk about putting her on a walker or moving her to a more intensive care section of Meadowlake, Grant decides to visit Aubrey's wife and see if he can negotiate a visit.

*Fiona's intense mourning demonstrates both the significance that Aubrey has for her and the gulf between Meadowlake's approach to treatment and Grant's consideration of Fiona's emotional state. Kristy interprets Fiona's grief as part of her decay, discussing putting her on a walker, rather than considering the emotional reasons for Fiona's refusal to get out of bed. This medicalization of dementia and aging is thus linked not just to a loss of individuality but also to a neglect of the feelings of the elderly.*

Grant remembers the neighborhood as a place where their friends had moved with young children, and notices that some young families still live there, though some houses are more run down. Aubrey's house, though, is well-kept. Aubrey's wife, Marian, assumes that Grant is there with a grievance about Aubrey and Fiona's relationship, and treats him coldly. Once Grant clarifies that he does not have any issues on this front, however, Marian invites him in. Grant looks at Marian's "trim waist and wide buttocks," judging her makeup and her wrinkles.

*This neighborhood symbolizes the different between the story's two couples—Grant and Fiona vs. Aubrey and Marian. On the one hand, the neighborhood is lower-middle class and suburban, while Grant and Fiona live in an old restored farmhouse. On the other, the neighborhood symbolizes the move made by families with children and corresponding aspirations, which Grant and Fiona were never able to achieve. Grant's assessment of Marian continues the trend of his misogynist, cold sexualization of the women with whom he interacts.*

Grant notices the care that Marian has taken with the home, conveyed by the living room's curtains, matching sofa and carpet, and various ornaments. He reflects that Fiona would have scorned this type of interior design, preferring simpler and bright rooms; in particular she had a joking "word for **those sort of swooping curtains**."

*The contrast that Grant notes between Marian's interior decorating and Fiona's tastes, symbolized by the reference to the curtains, hints at his attraction to her, as, like Jacqui Adams, Marian is clearly the opposite of Fiona.*

Grant and Marian share a cup of coffee in the kitchen. Grant compliments the coffeemaker, seeking a point of connection, which Marian states was a gift from her and Aubrey's son. She expresses dissatisfaction with her son's lack of involvement with Aubrey's care and the fact that he rarely visits them, despite having time for holidays in places like Hawaii.

*Marian's complaints continue to both solidify her lower middle-class identity and to highlight the difference between her everyday concerns and Grant and Fiona's detached irony.*

Grant uses this topic to try and steer the conversation towards Fiona, asking if Marian wouldn't mind bringing Aubrey back to Meadowlake to visit her. He also offers to provide transportation, if Marian doesn't have the time, though he surprises himself when he offers this.

*Grant's devotion to Fiona's happiness becomes apparent again here, as he surprises himself by the lengths to which he is willing to go in order to try to make Fiona happy.*

Marian serves him homemade ginger cookies while Grant poses this question, then says no, stating that she doesn't want to upset or confuse Aubrey through this change in his routine, as well as the inconvenience for her. Grant repeats his offer to take Aubrey himself, which Marian also rejects, saying that Grant wouldn't know how to take care of him. Marian gets a cigarette and offers Grant one, telling him that she has "quit quitting." Grant remembers quitting when he started his affair with Jacqui. He wonders if Marian has so many wrinkles because she smokes, musing on the contrast between her aged skin and "youthfully full and uptilted breasts." He sees this contradiction as typical for women of Marian's age, whereas Fiona "kept [her] beauty whole, though shadowy," though Grant acknowledges he might simply have this perception because he knew Fiona when she was young.

*This scene aligns cheating with cigarettes, for Grant, as a kind of crutch or addiction that helps him deal with life's stresses despite being unhealthy. Grant's assessment of Marian continues to be heavily sexualized, though he compares her manner of aging to Fiona, again setting Fiona apart from what he sees as the norm.*

Grant asks if Marian ever considered putting Aubrey in Meadowlake full-time. When Marian says no, he assumes this is out of a sense of nobility. She quickly corrects him, however, explaining that it makes more sense for Aubrey to live with her until she can get both their pensions, in order to hold on to the house. She explains that Aubrey was actually fired (and accused of owing his company money) before he got sick, and that the illness at least helped them evade his debts. Marian comments that Grant must think she is "a mercenary type of person," which he denies.

*The impact of Grant and Fiona's wealth on their lives is discussed most openly at this point in the story, as Grant does not even think about the costs of Meadowlake when he asks Marian why she doesn't place Aubrey there full-time. This reveals the deep gap between their classes.*

Grant is depressed by his conversation with Marian, which reminds Grant of his mother and the small-town world in which he grew up, exemplified by their "money first" attitude. He wonders if Marian sees him and his quest to ensure Fiona's happiness as out of touch with reality due to their relative wealth, thinking that she must see him as "a silly person [...] protected by some fluke from the truth about life. A person who didn't have to worry about holding on to his house and could go around dreaming up the fine generous schemes that he believed would make another person happy." Grant muses that he would probably have married someone like Marian—who, he thinks, must have been a "small-town flirt" when she was young—if he had "stayed back where he belonged."

*This paragraph offers a significant summarization of Grant's worldview. He sees Marian as exemplary of a certain type of person— "practical people," such as his mother and the other residents of his hometown—to which Fiona stands in contrast. While Grant recognizes how unrealistic his approach is in light of Marian's financial considerations, he also sees that his background keeps him very close to this worldview. Grant's love for Fiona is thus clearly connected to the opportunities she afforded him to ascend beyond his humble beginnings.*

Grant acknowledges that Marian must have had some hopes of a better life when she married Aubrey, with his white-collar job, and wonders if she is disappointed with her life. He does not afford her too much empathy, however, quickly criticizing these "practical people" for their financially-based calculations about life.

*Despite sympathizing with Marian and feeling like he can understand her, Grant still looks down on her approach to life. In particular, he condemns her focus on money above all else.*

When Grant returns home, he has two voicemails from Marian asking him to attend a singles dance with her. While she clarifies that she understands that neither of them is really single, she adds that she thought it would be a nice activity. Grant is intrigued, wondering what had changed in Marian's mind to make her call him. He begins to fantasize about Marian's experience of the situation, feeling satisfied that he had brought out her vulnerability. He feels like "anything is possible," even imagining that he could convince her to bring Aubrey to meet Fiona.

*While Grant personally enjoys Marian's call and experiences an echo of the "wellbeing" that his past affairs made him feel, one of his first thoughts is still of how he can turn the situation to Fiona's advantage. Again, he demonstrates his commitment to his wife despite his infidelities.*

Grant continues to imagine Marian waiting for him to call, calculating the distance of his drive, before he reminds himself that Marian is too sensible to wait by the phone for him. The phone rings again, and Grant does not pick up, but listens to Marian's third message. She had heard the phone ring while she was downstairs, and was wondering if Grant had called.

*Grant's enjoyment of Marian's call is based in his appreciation of her vulnerability. Grant's tendencies toward infidelity are thus rooted in a need to feel a masculinized power over a woman, a feeling that Grant could not experience with Fiona.*

While drinking, Grant remembers that the word for the curtains that Fiona mocked by Marian decorated her house with is "**drapes**." He remembers her ginger cookies and coffee mugs on a ceramic tree, thinking that Grant's mother would have admired the "high-gloss exactness and practicality" of Marian's home. He then fantasizes about her cleavage, almost forcing himself to think of Marian in a sexual light as he drunkenly returns her call.

*While fantasizing about Marian's interest in him, Grant begins to feel more sympathetic with her approach to life, symbolized by her "drapes" and the other elements of her personal taste. This shows that, beyond the power dynamic, part of Grant seeks a more familiar class dynamic or social world in his extramarital affairs despite the benefits he gains from the elevation of his class status through his marriage to Fiona.*

Later, Grant visits Fiona at Meadowlake again. He notes that she is wearing a short dress, which Fiona also comments on, seemingly aware that she is not dressed in her own clothes. Grant tells her that he has brought Aubrey to visit her. Fiona does not remember Aubrey. Instead, she hugs Grant and thanks him for visiting her, saying that he could have driven away and left her in Meadowlake. Grant holds Fiona and responds, "not a chance."

*Grant's ability to bring Aubrey seems to indicate that he is now having an affair with Marian, an entanglement that he has nonetheless used to try to make Fiona happy. Fiona's clothes again represent the status of her individuality. This time, she recognizes that she is not wearing her own dress, showing that she is having a good day in which she has more memories. She also remembers that Grant is her husband and thanks him for staying with her, a statement which, in its light ambiguity, could be extrapolated to their marriage as a whole. Grant holds Fiona and puts his face to her hair—that mark of her individual identity—and tells her that he would never leave her, reiterating his commitment and their bond despite his (apparently continued) philandering.*

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