

# Runaway



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ALICE MUNRO

Alice Munro was born Alice Laidlaw in rural southern Ontario, Canada, which is also the setting of most of her stories. Munro's father was a farmer, and her mother was a teacher. She began writing when she was a teenager and published her first short story when she was 19 years old and studying English at the University of Western Ontario. She left school after two years to marry James Munro. They moved to West Vancouver, where they had three daughters. In 1963, the family moved to Victoria, British Columbia, and opened a bookstore called Munro's Books. In 1965, Munro published *Dance of the Happy Shades*, a collection of short stories, to critical acclaim. In 1972, after having a fourth daughter, Alice and James Munro separated and Alice went back to the University of Western Ontario to become a writer in residence. There, Munro married her second husband, Gerald Fremlin. Since 2009, Alice Munro has suffered various health conditions that have prevented her from travel and public appearance. Munro's most recent short story compilation is *Dear Life*, published in 2012. In 2013, her husband died, and in the same year, she won the Nobel Prize in Literature.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Munro's work draws heavily on the author's own childhood and upbringing, but Canadian culture evolved quickly throughout her life and career. Munro's ancestors immigrated from Scotland, as did many Canadians at the time. But since then, there have been significant waves of immigration to Canada from other parts of the world, as well as a growing promotion of Canada's indigenous people and culture. In fact, Munro's contemporary Margaret Laurence was famed for her public advocacy for the rights of indigenous people. Munro does not write explicitly of these movements, as they took place largely in urban populations and her focus is on rural life. Alice Munro also wrote in the vein of second wave feminism, which was a movement throughout the 1960s to 1980s. This movement aimed to expand the basic gender equality that first wave feminism focused on and drew attention to how patriarchy dominated culture in more subliminal ways. Munro's female characters often suffer due to limitations that men impose on them, and in fact this is the most significant theme in her work at large.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

"Runaway" is the titular first story in the collection of short stories *Runaway*. Each piece in the collection focuses on a

female protagonist and her complex social relationships, an, in particular, romantic endeavors. As per the title, escape is a prevailing motif throughout the collection—the characters often try (unsuccessfully) to run away from their problems. Three of the stories in this collection center around a single protagonist, Juliet. These were adapted into a film called *Julieta* in 2016. Alice Munro's work is often compared to the short stories of Anton Chekhov. Both authors write about the emotional turmoil of human relationships through an objective and realistic lens, and both center their stories more around psychological narrative than plot. Munro and Chekhov are also both notable for the nonlinear way that they use time in their writing, which is unconventional for short stories. Alice Munro was celebrated for her work's Canadian nationalism, and many her of Canadian contemporaries supported her. Feminist Canadian writer Margaret Laurence was a good friend and literary influence on Munro. Margaret Atwood is another contemporary of Munro, and the themes of her work are similar. Laurence, Atwood, and Munro all write unabashedly about Canada and gender, in ways that were bold for their time.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Runaway
- **Where Written:** Clinton, Ontario, Canada
- **When Published:** 2004
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Short Story, Fiction, Southern Ontario Gothic
- **Setting:** Rural Canada
- **Climax:** Flora appears at Sylvia's house when Clark is there in the middle of the night.
- **Antagonist:** Clark
- **Point of View:** Third Person Omniscient

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Rewriting.** Alice Munro is known for rewriting and republishing her stories several times over. She revised her story *Wood* 30 years after it was first published, although she rewrote both *Passion* and *Save The Reaper* in the same years they were first published.

**Legacy.** Munro's oldest daughter Sheila wrote a memoir about her family titled *Lives And Mothers: Growing Up With Alice Munro*, which depicts Alice Munro as fostering a warm and loving family life for her children, though Sheila also touches on the pressures of having to make one's own life while having such a successful and famous mother.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Carla is at her mobile home in rural Canada when she sees a car pass outside and realizes that it's Sylvia Jamieson, an older neighbor who is returning from a vacation in Greece. Sylvia's husband Leon recently passed away, so Carla has been going to Sylvia's house to help her with chores. Carla hopes her husband Clark doesn't know that Sylvia is back, because he will force Carla to continue going over to help even though Carla doesn't want to. Sylvia is paying Carla for the work, and Clark and Carla need the money. They make a living by boarding horses and giving riding lessons, but business is slow this summer because the weather is bad.

After seeing Sylvia, Carla heads outside to tend to the horses as she thinks about her situation with Sylvia and Clark. Carla previously told Clark that Leon sexually harassed Carla before he died. This is a lie, but now Clark wants Carla to tell Sylvia about it so that she will pay them off to stay silent. Despite this mess, Carla's biggest concern is that her beloved pet goat **Flora** is missing. When Carla goes back inside, she and Clark argue about going to Sylvia's house the next day. Carla ends up crying and Clark shows little sympathy.

The next day at Sylvia's house, Carla and Sylvia are chatting when Carla suddenly starts sobbing. Carla divulges that she's unhappy being with Clark because he is angry all the time. Sylvia proposes that Carla leave and start a new life in Toronto, which immediately enthralls Carla. Sylvia offers to help with the travel, and Carla thinks she can easily find a new job in the city. Later, Carla gets on the bus to Toronto. As she imagines a new life without Clark, she gets upset, changes her mind, and gets off the bus to go back home—unbeknownst to Sylvia.

That night, Sylvia wakes up to a knock at her door and is terrified to see that it's Clark. He tells Sylvia that Carla is back home, and he's angry that Sylvia interfered with his marriage. They're having a hostile conversation about it when, suddenly, Flora runs up to them, seemingly out of nowhere. Clark says he's going to take Flora home, but he doesn't. When he gets home, he doesn't mention anything about Flora to Carla.

Over the next few days, Carla and Clark get along well. Clark still doesn't mention Flora's reappearance and Carla thinks she's still missing. One day Carla gets a letter from Sylvia describing how Flora appeared at her house that night. Carla suddenly realizes that Clark must have either killed Flora or taken her somewhere far away. Carla is upset, but she never mentions it to Clark.

their mobile home in Canada. She met Clark when she was 18, a few years before the beginning of the story, and decided to leave behind her family and their expectations (that Carla go to college and get a high-paying job) to live with Clark and work with horses. Though she did initially fall in love with Clark, he has a bad temper and is emotionally neglectful. Carla is unhappy with him but doesn't see a way out of the relationship—she is dependent on him financially and emotionally and does not have many ties to friends or family. Carla's saving grace is her pet goat **Flora**, so she finds Flora's disappearance highly distressing. She often goes to her neighbor Sylvia's house to help out with chores, which Carla hates, though she eventually develops an affinity for Sylvia after she helps Carla plan an escape from Clark. Carla is ultimately unable to follow through with leaving Clark and resigns herself to staying with him even after discovering that he may have killed Flora, though Carla harbors a deep resentment.

**Clark** – Clark is Carla's husband. The story leaves his background relatively murky, but it is clear that he is not well educated and has moved around a lot, doing various odd jobs for work. He lives with Carla in the mobile home and manages the business boarding horses and giving riding lessons, which is how he makes a living for himself and Carla. Clark strongly resents his family for reasons that are not revealed. He is brooding, moody, and has a hot temper, which causes problems for his and Carla's social lives. He is controlling of Carla and does not allow her much agency, and he neglects her emotionally. Clark seems perpetually annoyed by Carla, which drives her away, but he is also afraid that she will leave him. Clark is controlling and combative not just to Carla, but to everyone around him. When he realizes that Sylvia tried to help Carla escape, he shows up at Sylvia's house in the middle of the night and tries to intimidate and scare her, demanding that she stay out of his life. When Carla's goat **Flora** returns, Clark secretly does away with her (either killing her or taking her somewhere—it's left unclear), and the story implies that he may become violent with Carla if she tries to leave him.

**Sylvia Jamieson** – Sylvia is Clark and Carla's neighbor. Her husband Leon died recently, and Sylvia has just returned from a vacation to Greece with her friends. Leon was significantly older than Sylvia, but Sylvia is older than Clark and Carla. She is a professor of botany at a nearby university. Sylvia develops a fondness for Carla and enjoys having her over to help with housework. Sylvia appreciates Carla's youthful and positive energy, especially in contrast to Sylvia's similarly aged university students, who she finds annoying. Sylvia tries to help Carla when she learns of Clark's mistreatment, but Sylvia doesn't understand the depth or severity of Carla's entrapment in the abusive relationship. Sylvia's own marriage was healthy, and she thinks of her husband fondly in the aftermath of his death. Sylvia fears Clark when he shows up to her house in the



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Carla** – Carla is a young woman living with her husband Clark in

middle of the night but softens toward him after **Flora** appears. At the end of the story, Sylvia writes a letter to Carla which unintentionally breaks the news that Flora returned. Sylvia is sympathetic to both Carla and Clark in the end, as she is oblivious to Clark's true nature and motives.

**Leon Jamieson** – Leon was Sylvia's husband and a poet. He is already dead at the beginning of the story. Carla and Clark learn from his obituary that Leon had won a big cash prize for his poetry, prompting Clark to scheme a way to get money from Sylvia. Sylvia wonders if **Flora's** seemingly magical reappearance is related to Leon's death.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Joy Tucker** – Joy is a local woman who boards her horse, who she calls Lizzie Borden, with Clark and Carla. She and Clark had a quarrel at one point which worried Carla, but it resolves at the end of the story.

**Ruth** – Ruth is Sylvia's friend who lives in Toronto and was going to let Carla stay with her there.

**Maggie and Soraya** – Maggie and Soraya are Sylvia's friends who accompany her to Greece. They call Sylvia's attachment to Carla a "crush," which irritates Sylvia.



## THEMES

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



### ATTACHMENT, MATURITY, AND STABILITY

The attachments that various characters have to each other in "Runaway" are correlated to their respective levels of maturity and stability. Most significant is Carla's attachment to her husband, Clark—an attachment she feels even though they don't have a particularly loving relationship. Carla is young, around 21 years old, and the story portrays her as immature even for her age. She is unstable: easily affected by others and quick to change her mind about important matters. Her unhealthy attachment to Clark becomes apparent when she is unable to leave him, feeling that without him she wouldn't know how to live. This attachment is paralleled by the couple's pet goat Flora and its attachment to Clark. Flora follows Clark around when she is young, until she becomes a bit older and more mature, at which point she gains independence. The story eventually reveals that Clark tries to get rid of Flora after she gains a sense of autonomy, implying that he is aware of how his relationship with her mirrors his

relationship with Carla. He can't stand the idea of not having control and dominance over Carla, and getting rid of Flora foreshadows what he might do to Carla if she ever becomes mature and independent. He says repeatedly that Flora might have run away to find a billy goat, illustrating his anxiety that Carla will leave him and find another man if she becomes independent. This shows how Clark himself has an unhealthy attachment to Carla, which manifests in emotional volatility and a need for control—a sign of his own instability.

In contrast, Sylvia is older than Clark and Carla and is more stable and mature. Her attachments are much healthier than those of the young couple. Her marriage with her late husband, Leon, seems to have been balanced and loving. Each of them had their own successful careers, independent of one another. And though she is upset by his death, she does not seem unhealthily disturbed. She has a parental attachment to Carla, but even this attachment is healthy and unselfish: she enjoys Carla's company but ultimately values Carla's wellbeing over her own gratification. Through the contrast of Sylvia to Carla and Clark, Munro thus shows that maturity often corresponds with stable attachment—in other words, part of being mature means learning how to foster healthy, balanced relationships.



### RELATIONSHIPS AND CONTROL

"Runaway" depicts Clark as an abusive partner to Carla and illustrates the challenges she faces as she feels stuck in the relationship. Clark has complete authority over their relationship and Carla's life, and he does not care for her emotional needs. He forces her to go to the Jamieson's house when she doesn't want to, and he doesn't seem at all concerned when he thinks Carla is being sexually abused. Carla generally feels powerless, and her actions seem to lack a sense of control. Her lies to Clark about being sexually abused by Leon, Sylvia's late husband, spiral out of control to the point that she feels trapped. When Sylvia proposes that Carla move to Toronto—a new start that would be a massive undertaking—Carla agrees immediately, showing how desperate she is to escape her relationship with Clark. It's not until she's formulated a plan and is on the bus to Toronto that she becomes frightened by the idea of starting anew and decides to return home to Clark, feeling that his presence gives her life meaning, as he has conditioned her to believe. By highlighting this thought process, the story suggests that breaking out of abusive relationships isn't as simple as it might seem in the abstract.

From the outside, Sylvia thinks that leaving Clark is an obvious and simple solution to Carla's relational problems—but Sylvia's own marriage was healthy, so she doesn't necessarily understand the deep-rooted interdependence involved in toxic relationships. Clark's power as a male abuser is far-reaching, and it would be more challenging than Sylvia thinks for Carla to leave. Even Sylvia herself eventually submits to Clark's

domineering nature and ends up apologizing to him for “interfering” in Carla’s life, showing how effective Clark’s manipulation is. In fact, his need for power is itself out of control—he causes problems with people in town and ruins many of his relationships. In the end, the story implies that Clark may have killed Flora, which is the ultimate display of his pathological need to dominate. Thus, the story demonstrates the gravity of the obstacles women trapped in relationships with controlling men face, as well as how these difficulties are underestimated by people on the outside.



## ESCAPE

The word “runaway” in its most literal sense refers to escape. Each main character in the story makes an attempt to escape their respective pasts and problems, but to limited avail. Carla is a runaway in that she leaves her parents, hometown, and future plans of college in the hopes of attaining a more “authentic” life. This doesn’t pan out for her, as she ends up unhappy in her new life. She’s a runaway again when she tries to leave her life with Clark. Flora is a runaway too, in that she leaves her original home when she’s young, then leaves Clark and Carla, too. And, just like Carla, Flora ends up coming back home. Similarly, Sylvia tries to escape the gloomy aftermath of her husband’s death by going on a trip to Greece, but when she returns home, of course, the situation remains. Sylvia is uncomfortable in the house she used to share with Leon and stops sleeping in their bedroom. Eventually, she moves to a new apartment but doesn’t sell the old house, implying that she’s not fully letting go of her former life there and perhaps is keeping the option open to return. Clark, too, seems to be constantly trying to escape from some sort of mental pain. The story doesn’t reveal extensive details about Clark’s past, but it’s clear that he is emotionally troubled and has lost touch with his family. He is a “drifter,” always moving and changing jobs, and he uses the computer as an escape from his unhappy life. But Clark doesn’t find happiness, just as none of the other characters’ escapes are truly successful. In this way, the story depicts running away, or attempting escape, as an ineffective solution to dealing with life’s problems.



## INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM

When Carla initially runs away from her family, she seeks a life away from their expectations so that she can live as she pleases. Her affluent mother and stepfather want her to go to college, but all Carla wants is to live and work among nature and animals. Though she initially agrees to go to college to be a veterinarian, her parents’ expectations repel her. When they express their dislike of Clark due to his lower social status, “they were practically guaranteeing [that she run away with him].” But although she has abandoned her original plan in the hopes of establishing an

“authentic” life, Carla doesn’t end up finding what she’s looking for—or what she *thought* she was looking for. Carla seems to specifically want to escape what she sees as the confines of upper-class life: “She despised [...] their vacations, their Cuisinart, their *powder room*, their walk-in closets [...]” Carla feels that if she does what her parents want, she will be restricted to live the same kind of life that they do. She doesn’t share the values of education and money that they impose on her. She does of course succeed in moving to the countryside to work with horses as she originally wanted, but this doesn’t grant her the fulfillment she hoped it would. In the end, Clark imposes his own expectations and limitations on her, such that she has no independence. It turns out, perhaps, that Carla had misidentified her desire. What she thought was a longing for “authenticity” was really a longing for independence and freedom. But when she left her family, she did it with Clark “as the architect of the life ahead of them, herself as captive.” She goes from living within her parents’ limitations to living within Clark’s. In order to fulfill her desire for independence, Carla would have to take charge of her own path. The story thus suggests that true independence comes from self-reliability—that is, people must be the architects of their own lives and avoid trying to find fulfillment within the confines of what other people want or expect from them.



## SYMBOLS

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



## FLORA

Flora symbolizes the freedom and independence that are unattainable to Carla. Munro draws a very clear parallel between Flora and Carla—both are “runaways,” and just as Flora left home but eventually returned to Clark, so did Carla. When Clark first brings Flora home, she is like “a guileless girl in love,” which is exactly how Carla first acted towards Clark when they met. Flora used to follow Clark around just as Carla followed him to live together in the countryside. But Flora’s attachment to Clark is short-lived, and she quickly matures and becomes more independent. Flora’s personality after she’s matured is portrayed as completely autonomous, and even all-knowing. Whereas the horses are enclosed in a pen, Flora has free run of the barn. Flora is “wise” and looks at Carla with “comradely mockery” when Carla feels trapped and dejected, implying that Flora understands the situation and has somehow escaped or risen above it herself. When Flora disappears, Clark says that she may have left to find a male to mate with, revealing his anxiety that Carla will become mature and autonomous like Flora, and that this might lead to Carla leaving him for another man.



Carla's dreams about Flora in the wake of the goat's disappearance are particularly illustrative as to Flora's significance. In the first dream Flora is holding an apple in her mouth, which is an allusion to the Genesis story in the Bible. This imagery likens Flora to Eve, who seeks to gain knowledge and wisdom by taking the forbidden fruit. Flora is the wise and knowledgeable one in this story, and she ends up suffering the consequences of it, just as Adam and Eve do. In this case, Clark is the powerful and controlling force who forbids freedom and independence. Even Flora's white color, symbolizing purity, and her name, referring to plant-life (like the garden of Eden), contribute to the development of the biblical symbolism. In Carla's next dream, Flora runs to a fence and escapes underneath it, leaving Carla behind, and thus solidifying the idea of Flora representing an ideal of freedom and independence—she is able to go where Carla would like to go, but can't. After Flora returns to Clark it is not clear exactly what happens to her, but the story implies that Clark probably killed her. Thus, he ensures that she will never gain independence or run away again, and symbolically quells any notion of Carla doing the same. The extreme measures Clark takes with Flora serve to illustrate how he will do whatever he can to keep Carla dependent on and tied to him, even though Carla's true desire is to be free from him.

for two days, and Carla's concern is growing. Carla dreams of Flora each of the first two nights that the goat is missing. In the first dream, Flora returns holding an apple, which symbolizes knowledge in story of Adam and Eve (the first man and woman) from the biblical Book of Genesis. In the story, God forbids Adam and Eve from eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge—which, when eaten, grants knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve disobey God and are cast out of the Garden of Eden (paradise) as a result. In "Runaway," Flora is repeatedly described as wise and knowledgeable, and she is the only character who seems to understand the extent of Carla's husband, Clark's, selfish and abusive nature. Thus, Flora holding the apple signifies that she symbolically ate from the tree of knowledge and has the capacity to recognize the evil in Clark. Flora, after all, starts out quite attached to Clark but distances herself from him as she grows older and eventually runs away entirely. And since Flora is associated with knowledge and wisdom, it's implied that Carla would be wise to distance escape from Clark, too.

The second dream continues this biblical imagery. In Genesis, a snake convinces Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Whereas the first dream compares Flora to Eve—the one who eats the apple—the second compares Flora to the snake, who leads Eve to knowledge. Munro describes Flora as appearing snake-like, as she "slither[s]" "like a white eel." In the dream, Flora and Carla are in a dangerous situation, and Flora is already injured, which symbolizes the real danger that Clark poses to both of them. Flora tries to lead Carla to an escape, but Carla is trapped behind a barrier. Flora is able to escape in the dream, but Carla is not. Escaping through the barricade represents gaining wisdom, awareness, and independence—Flora knows that Carla needs to find an escape from Clark, but Carla herself never fully realizes this. Thus, Flora tries to lead Carla to knowledge and freedom, like the snake who tries to lead Eve to the knowledge of good and evil. This plays out literally in the story, as Carla seems to be inspired by Flora (if only subconsciously) and tries to escape Clark by running away to a new life in Toronto.

Furthermore, this imagery foreshadows Flora and Carla's fates. In the Bible, God punishes Eve and the snake for their actions. In "Runaway," Clark is all-powerful, and he parallels the role of God in Genesis. As God punishes the snake for leading Eve to knowledge, Clark will punish Flora for leading Carla (it's implied that he kills Flora after she returns home). This sends a message to Carla that leaving home and seeking independence is unacceptable. Just as God expels Eve from paradise, then, Clark will prevent Carla from living the life she truly desires.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Runaway* published in 2005.

### Runaway Quotes

●● In the first dream Flora had walked right up to the bed with a red apple in her mouth, but in the second dream—last night—she had run away when she saw Carla coming. Her leg seemed to be hurt but she ran anyway. She led Carla to a barbed-wire barricade of the kind that might belong on some battlefield, and then she—Flora—slipped through it, hurt leg and all, just slithered through like a white eel and disappeared.

**Related Characters:** Carla, Clark

**Related Themes:**



**Related Symbols:**




**Page Number:** 7

#### Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears at the beginning of the story, as Carla reflects on her goat Flora's absence. Flora has been missing

●● What Clark balked at was tearing up the carpet, which was the same in every room and the thing that she had most counted on replacing. It was divided into small brown squares, each with a pattern of darker brown and rust and tan squiggles and shapes. For a long time she had thought these were the same squiggles and shapes, arranged in the same way, in each square. Then when she had had more time, a lot of time, to examine them, she decided that there were four patterns joined together to make identical larger squares. Sometimes she could pick out the arrangement easily and sometimes she had to work to see it.

**Related Characters:** Carla, Clark

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 8



### Explanation and Analysis


This passage explains how Carla and Clark first moved in together in their mobile home. Carla did a lot of renovations on the home, like painting and putting up new curtains, but Clark wouldn't allow her to change the carpet that she dislikes. This is one of the first examples of Clark's controlling and selfish character. The carpet is also symbolically significant: Carla's inability to see the pattern in the carpet mirrors her inability to see the unhealthy and toxic patterns in her relationship. She doesn't like the carpet but can't see the finer details that it consists of, in the same way that she isn't happy with Clark but doesn't know exactly why. The carpet is in every room of her and Clark's home, just as their marriage consumes all aspects of Carla's life. Clark's refusal to let Carla change the carpet represents his refusal to let her leave the relationship.

One day, when Carla has a lot of time to focus, she can finally pick out the carpet's pattern. But the clarity doesn't last—though she recognizes that there is a pattern, it's hard to discern. This foreshadows Carla's fleeting moment of clarity when she tries to run away from Clark. For a short time, she is certain that she should leave. But again, the clarity fades, and even though the problems in her marriage remain, they easily blend into the background of Carla's life.

●● At first she had been Clark's pet entirely, following him everywhere, dancing for his attention. She was quick and graceful and provocative as a kitten, and her resemblance to a guileless girl in love had made them both laugh. But as she grew older she seemed to attach herself to Carla, and in this attachment she was suddenly much wiser, less skittish—she seemed capable, instead, of a subdued and ironic sort of humor.

**Related Characters:** Carla, Clark

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 9

### Explanation and Analysis


This passage describes how Flora came to live with Clark and Carla. The story makes it abundantly clear here that Flora is meant to parallel Carla, and it introduces the idea of Flora as a symbol for Carla's independence. Just as Flora followed Clark around when she was young, 18-year-old Carla also followed Clark to live with him in the countryside. Like Flora when she was young, Carla is desperate for Clark's attention, and she even goes so far as to falsely accuse their elderly neighbor of sexually assaulting her just to pique Clark's interest.

Perhaps the most obvious comparison of Carla and Flora is the description of Flora as "a guileless girl in love," which is exactly what Carla is—young and naïve, and blindly attached to Clark. But this passage also explains how Carla and Flora's characteristics diverge as Flora grows older. Flora detaches from Clark and becomes "wiser," whereas Carla remains attached and naïve. Thus, Flora represents the independence that Carla is unable to achieve.

●● It was almost a relief, though, to feel the single pain of missing Flora, of missing Flora perhaps forever, compared to the mess she had got into concerning Mrs. Jamieson, and her seesaw misery with Clark. At least Flora's leaving was not on account of anything she—Carla—had done wrong.

**Related Characters:** Carla, Clark, Sylvia Jamieson

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 16

### Explanation and Analysis

In the beginning of the story, Carla is outside after fighting with Clark. She calls and whistles for her goat Flora, who is missing, but Flora doesn't come to her calls. The passage serves to highlight how severely and negatively Carla's toxic marriage affects her. Carla is relieved that Flora's disappearance is not Carla's fault, implying that Carla



blames herself for her bad marriage. She thinks that it's her own fault that Clark is always upset, but it's clear to readers that Clark is the problem—he ignores Carla and orders her around. Carla even blames herself for “the mess she had got into” with Sylvia, but Clark is the one who tries to force Carla to confront Sylvia and extort money from her.


This passage also uses Flora to symbolize Carla's attitude toward independence. Flora represents Carla's independence, and Carla is in some way relieved that Flora is gone. Missing Flora means Carla doesn't have to focus on (what she perceives to be) problems she creates for herself, or her own accountability. Carla eventually decides that having no independence is easier than being fully responsible for herself.

“It's said to represent a racehorse,” Sylvia said. “Making that final spurt, the last effort in a race. The rider, too, the boy, you can see he's urging the horse on to the limit of its strength.”

She did not mention that the boy had made her think of Carla, and she could not now have said why. He was only about ten or eleven years old. Maybe the strength and grace of the arm that must have held the reins, or the wrinkles in his childish forehead, the absorption and the pure effort there was in some way like Carla cleaning the big windows last spring.

**Related Characters:** Carla, Sylvia Jamieson

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 19

### Explanation and Analysis

When Carla arrives to Sylvia's house, the two chat about Sylvia's trip to Greece. Sylvia gives Carla a figurine of a boy riding a horse. The statue reminds Sylvia of Carla, which is significant for two reasons: first, the boy on the horse is a young child, pointing to Carla's youth and immaturity. Carla generally lives an adult life—she works and is married—so comparing her to the child reminds readers that she is actually very young and is quite inexperienced and naive. This concept is essential because Carla's immaturity is what allows Clark to take advantage of her. In contrast, Flora's maturity empowers her to separate herself from Clark.

Second, Sylvia says that the horse in the figurine is reaching “the limit of its strength.” This also parallels Carla, who

pushes her limits in her attempt to escape. Though Carla's attempt entails simply boarding a bus to Toronto, the story refers to the journey as “running away,” tying in the image of moving on foot, as the racehorse in the figurine does. Carla pushes herself to leave and live on her own, but she is tormented by self-doubt along the way and, in the end, doesn't succeed. While the racehorse reaches its physical limit, Carla reaches the limit of her strength emotionally.

As Mrs. Jamieson might say—and as she herself might with satisfaction have said—*taking charge of her own life*. With nobody glowering over her, nobody's mood infecting her with misery.

But what would she care about? How would she know that she was alive?

While she was running away from him—now—Clark still kept his place in her life. But when she was finished running away, when she just went on, what would she put in his place? What else—*who else*—could ever be so vivid a challenge?

**Related Characters:** Carla, Clark

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 34

### Explanation and Analysis

On the bus to Toronto, Carla reflects on the decision to leave Clark and imagines what her new life in Toronto will look like. This is a pivotal moment because Carla realizes that she doesn't want to live without Clark—not because she loves him or even wants to be with him, but because she simply does not know how to live without him. Everything Carla does is in relation to Clark, even leaving him, and she has learned to build her identity around him. She considers his bad treatment of her a “challenge” and can't imagine this aspect of her life being absent.

Carla lived with her parents before she lived with Clark, and she resented them and their lifestyle. At that point, her parents' expectations were the “challenge” in her life. She doesn't know how to live independently and not in relation to others, as she's never done it before. The extent to which Carla is distressed by the idea of being without Clark goes to show how unhealthy their relationship is. She is not only reliant on him, but she is reliant on the most detrimental aspects of their relationship.

Her feet seemed now to be at some enormous distance from her body, Her knees, in the unfamiliar crisp pants, were weighted with irons. She was sinking to the ground like a stricken horse who will never get up.

**Related Characters:** Carla, Clark, Sylvia Jamieson

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 35



### Explanation and Analysis


As the bus Carla is on approaches Toronto, she realizes that she wants to return home. In this passage, she is about to stand up and ask the driver to let her off the bus, but she finds it difficult to move. The imagery here focuses on the legs and feet, hinting at the idea of physically running away. The passage reminds readers of the figurine from *Sylvia*, where the horse reaches “the limit of its strength.” Sylvia likens Carla to the horse, and now the story compares Carla to “a stricken horse who will never get up,” showing that Carla has now surpassed the limit that she was approaching before. Carla feels physically immobile, but it represents a deeper immobility—she is emotionally unable to leave.

It is notable that the pants Carla borrows from Sylvia seem “unfamiliar” now that Carla’s plan is unraveling. Lack of familiarity is at the root of Carla’s problem. On some level she wants a new life away from Clark, but she’s so accustomed to him that she can’t imagine a life away from him, and this is enough to deter her from leaving. The borrowed outfit also represents Carla’s attempt at taking on a new identity: wearing different clothes is a superficial change, but really the whole plan she formulates lacks a substantial foundation. At Sylvia’s house, Carla feels confident, but the reality sets in that she doesn’t know anyone in Toronto and doesn’t have a job there. As she contemplates this on the bus, she begins to see not just the clothes but every aspect of the new imagined life as foreign and unfamiliar.

The fog had thickened, taken on a separate shape, transformed itself into something spiky and radiant. First a live dandelion ball, tumbling forward, then condensing itself into an unearthly sort of animal, pure white, hell-bent, something like a giant unicorn, rushing at them. “Jesus Christ,” Clark said softly and devoutly.

**Related Characters:** Clark (speaker), Clark, Sylvia Jamieson

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 39

### Explanation and Analysis

This moment is the climax of the story. Clark goes to Sylvia’s house in the middle of night to scare her and tell her not to talk to Carla anymore, because he wants to maintain control over his wife. While he’s talking to Sylvia, a creature suddenly approaches the house—it’s Flora, Carla and Clark’s missing goat, but Clark and Sylvia don’t realize it right away. The word choice in this passage strongly suggests that Flora is mysterious and perhaps even supernatural. At least, Clark and Sylvia perceive her as such. The color white symbolizes purity and peace, so focusing on Flora’s color as “pure white” portrays her as angelic. This is a sharp contrast to the descriptor “hell-bent,” which, while not necessarily a negative term, evokes images of purgatory. Clark says “Jesus Christ,” which is a typical expression of shock or awe, but the fact that he says it “devoutly” confirms a religious undertone. Earlier, the story compares Flora to the biblical character Eve, and later Sylvia calls Flora an “angel,” so this passage serves to reinforce the story’s overarching characterization of Flora as wise and all-knowing in an otherworldly way.



Flora’s depiction as a spiritual being is key to the story—she is not merely a goat but also a symbol of Carla’s independence. Carla may not recognize this consciously, but in Carla’s dreams—representations of her subconscious—Flora tries to lead Carla to freedom. Clark certainly recognizes what Flora stands for, as he intentionally gets rid of Flora as a way to prevent Carla from gaining independence.


“Goats are unpredictable,” Clark said. “They can seem tame but they’re not really. Not after they grow up.”

“Is she grown-up? She looks so small.”

“She’s big as she’s ever going to get.”

**Related Characters:** Clark, Sylvia Jamieson (speaker), Carla

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 



**Page Number:** 40

### Explanation and Analysis

After Flora appears at Sylvia's house, Clark and Sylvia's previously hostile conversation turns suddenly friendly. When Sylvia reaches to touch Flora, Flora threatens to headbutt Sylvia, prompting Clark's comment that "goats are unpredictable." When he says this, he is referring not only to Flora but also to Carla, illustrating his fear that Carla will not be "tame" once she matures. Clark expresses repeatedly that he thinks Flora left to find a male goat, implying that his real fear is that Carla will leave to find another man.

Notably, Clark doesn't actually answer Sylvia's question of whether Flora is fully grown. Instead, his response is that she won't grow anymore. This doesn't necessarily mean that Flora is fully grown, but it means that if she's not, something will stop her from growing more. Flora mysteriously disappears after this passage, and while the story never says outright that Clark kills Flora, his words here strongly indicate that he does. Clark's killing Flora would stop her from growing and would symbolically stop Carla from maturing any further, since Flora (who ran away from home) represents the sort of independence Carla subconsciously wants for herself.

☛☛ A skull that she could hold like a teacup in one hand.  
Knowledge in one hand.


Or perhaps not. Nothing there.


Other things could have happened. He could have chased Flora away. Or tied her in the back of the truck and driven some distance and set her loose. Taken her back to the place they'd got her from. Not to have her around, reminding them.

She might be free.

The days passed and Carla didn't go near that place. She held out against the temptation.

**Related Characters:** Carla, Clark, Sylvia Jamieson

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 47

### Explanation and Analysis

These are the very last lines of the story. Carla receives a letter from Sylvia mentioning that Carla's missing goat, Flora, returned, which comes as shocking news. Since Carla hasn't seen Flora since the goat returned, Carla knows that Clark must have done something to Flora, but she intentionally chooses not to go looking for Flora's body. Realistically, Carla has a pretty good idea that Clark killed Flora—she sees a spot by the lake that is full of turkey vultures for a few days after the night Flora reappeared, implying that the goat's dead body may have attracted the birds. Carla also questions why Clark's feet were so wet on that same night, implying that Clark may have drowned Flora or put her body by the lake. But Carla doesn't want to find a body or remains, because then she would be certain that Clark killed Flora. Carla finds it easier to live in ignorance and continue imagining that perhaps Flora is still alive.

The story again alludes to the biblical story of Adam and Eve that is first referenced in Carla's dreams about Flora. In the Bible, Eve eats forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, and in doing so chooses to acquire knowledge of good and evil. In Carla's dream, Flora holds an apple in her mouth, signifying that Flora—like Eve—possesses knowledge of good and evil, and thus that Flora sees Clark as evil while Carla remains unable to. The idea of holding Flora's skull like "knowledge in one hand" recalls Carla's dream. The skull is like the apple—the apple contains the key knowledge, and the skull, which once contained the brain, is literally the vessel of knowledge. Carla intends to stay with Clark because, in her mind, it is a better alternative to leaving and being alone. Thus, she will not metaphorically eat the apple or hold Flora's skull, so that she can never be certain of Clark's malevolence.



## 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.

## RUNAWAY

Carla is at home when she hears an approaching car and hopes it is not her neighbor Mrs. Jamieson returning from a vacation in Greece. She looks out and sees that it is, in fact, Mrs. Jamieson, and something about her neighbor's facial expression makes Carla recoil. She wonders if her husband, Clark, is aware that Mrs. Jamieson has returned from her trip—or, if not, when he will realize. Carla predicts that Mrs. Jamieson will soon call them on the phone.

Carla goes outside to check if the ground is dry because she is supposed to be teaching a horseback riding lesson later in the day, though she suspects the student won't come. It's July, and it's been an exceptionally rainy summer so far—the trails and grass around their mobile home are flooded. The previous summer, tourists came for trail rides and horseback riding lessons frequently, but business has been much worse this summer. The rain has damaged the horse-riding ring, and Carla and Clark are both spending a lot of time and money on fixing it.

Clark is inside on the computer while Carla is outside. He is looking for a way to buy roofing for the repairs. This is made difficult by the fact that they can't go to the local supply shop, because Clark owes the owners money and once started a fight with them. Carla thinks how Clark often starts fights with people in town that result in his severing ties and relationships, much to his and Carla's inconvenience. He got into a disagreement with a woman named Joy Tucker who boards her horse (whom she calls Lizzie Borden due to the horse's bad temper) with them. Now Clark refuses to care for Lizzie, leaving the responsibility to Carla.

*Since Carla hears the car outside before she sees it, it's likely that she was listening for and anticipating Mrs. Jamieson's arrival. Carla knows right away who's in the car, suggesting that the area they live in must be fairly remote—there aren't many cars passing by Carla and Clark's house. Carla has a strong reaction to realizing that Mrs. Jamieson is back from vacation, implying that there's something significant about Mrs. Jamieson being home. Since Carla thinks Mrs. Jamieson is going to call soon, it seems like Mrs. Jamieson might want something from her.*



*This passage paints a fuller picture of the story's setting: Carla and Clark live in a mobile home, which means they probably aren't affluent. They also have a horseback riding ring and trails around their property, so they live in a rural area. They make money from teaching horseback riding, and since they're struggling due to fewer students booking lessons, it seems that this is their main income. Carla guesses that her afternoon student won't show up, indicating that students have been canceling lessons frequently.*



*Clark's use of the computer and internet places the story in the 21st century. The fact that he owes the local shop money is further evidence of his and Carla's financial struggles, and the story suggests that Clark's temper may be partly to blame for these issues. The story portrays Clark here as selfish and uncaring, including toward Carla. Carla seems to tolerate Clark's behavior, at least on some level, as she avoids the people he's angered and picks up the duties he's shirked. This begins to suggest that Carla has a passive role in her marriage. Munro draws a parallel between Clark and Lizzie, as both are unfriendly and quick-tempered. Joy Tucker calls her horse Lizzie Borden as a joke, after the infamous 19th-century woman who was accused of murdering her parents with an axe but was acquitted of the crime.*



Despite these hardships, what's troubling Carla the most is the fact that their pet goat, **Flora**, has been missing for two days. Carla fears that a wild animal has killed Flora, and she recalls dreaming of Flora both nights that she's been gone. The first dream was of Flora returning home while carrying a red apple, and next of Flora being hurt and running away, escaping through a fence "like a white eel." Outside, Carla pets the horses and talks to them about Flora. A couple of them are affectionate and almost seem worried about Flora themselves, but Lizzie Borden bites Carla's hand instead.

Three years ago, when Carla moved into the mobile home with Clark, she grew excited about redecorating. Clark even went along with making home improvements for a time. Now, Carla sometimes feels down when Clark is in a bad mood, as he stares at the computer and refuses to interact with her. In these moments, she goes out to the barn with the horses. This is also where they normally keep **Flora**, whose friendly presence always lifts Carla's spirits. Clark bought Flora from a farm when she was young, and at first, she followed him everywhere. As she aged, she bonded more with Carla, instead, but also gained more awareness and autonomy. Flora "allowed [Carla] no sense of superiority." Now, Carla heads inside and asks Clark if there's any news on the "lost goat" notice he posted online. He says no and suggests that Flora might have run away to mate.

*The story has just established that Clark and Carla have severe financial struggles and a problematic marriage, so the fact that Carla cares more about the goat than anything else suggests that Flora is more significant than just a pet. It's possible that Carla identifies with Flora on some level. Carla's dreams about Flora contain clear biblical imagery: Flora holds an apple in her mouth like Eve in Genesis, and Flora being "like a white eel" likens her to the serpent from the same story. In the first dream, Flora having the apple indicates that she has acquired knowledge (in the Bible, the apple represents forbidden knowledge). In the second, she represents escape and freedom. Carla's treatment of the horses shows that she is a nurturing and caring animal-lover. She even cares for Lizzie despite her mean nature, just as Carla seems to take responsibility for Clark while getting little in return.*



*The fact that Clark ignores Carla when he's in a bad mood is further evidence that he's a neglectful partner to her. Carla is sensitive to Clark's moods, and when she's feeling down, she goes outside to her animals for comfort instead of seeing friends. This habit shows that she's socially isolated. Flora's origin story mirrors Carla's, in that both left their homes at young ages to live with Clark. Flora was very attached to Clark at first, and Carla still is. Notably, the story ascribes Flora human traits like wisdom and awareness. The fact that she used to follow Clark around everywhere subtly mirrors Carla's own dynamic with him, as she seems to long for his attention in spite of his cold treatment of her. As an older goat, though, Flora no longer affords her owners any "sense of superiority," which suggests that Flora refuses to be put in a passive role like the one Carla seems to occupy in her marriage. Given that Carla's dreams in the previous passage symbolically associated Flora with knowledge and freedom, the story seems to be suggesting that it would be wise for Carla to break away from Clark, as Flora has, but that something is stopping her from doing so. On another note, it's clear that Flora is very important to Carla, so the fact that Clark doesn't seem worried about the animal further characterizes him as cold and uncaring.*



Clark says that Sylvia (Mrs. Jamieson) called while Carla was outside and asked if Carla could come over to help clean the next day. He says that he agreed on her behalf, and that she should call back to confirm. Carla doesn't want to call Sylvia and tries to change the subject. The two argue about it briefly—Clark is insistent—and Carla goes to take a shower. She emerges to find Clark sitting at the computer, and she hugs him and starts crying, pleading for him not to be upset with her. This annoys Clark, who hardly responds to the emotional outburst, simply telling Carla to make dinner. She obeys and starts cooking, but she keeps crying too much to continue. She goes outside, avoiding the barn so as not to be reminded of **Flora**. Lizzie whinnies at her with disregard.

*Whereas Carla refers to Sylvia as “Mrs. Jamieson,” as a young person would, Clark calls Sylvia by her first name, indicating that Carla is less mature and is perhaps infantilized in her marriage. This passage reveals Clark’s controlling behavior toward his wife, as he orders her around and is completely apathetic to her desires and emotions. He wants her to go to the Jamieson’s (though it is not clear why he’s so insistent) and doesn’t back down even when Carla cries. Carla doesn’t push back on this dynamic. Though she’s unhappy in the relationship, she wants to please Clark, which suggests that she’s overly attached to and dependent on him. Given Carla’s passivity and lack of autonomy at home, her preoccupation with Flora might go beyond missing her companion. Her distress could also be tied to the fact that she identifies with the animal—given that they’ve both felt beholden to Clark—and longs for the sort of freedom Flora has found by running away (hence the story’s title). On another note, Lizzie’s reaction to Carla symbolically associates her with Clark, as both are callous and indifferent.*



Recently, leading up to this rift, Clark and Carla read Leon Jamieson’s (Sylvia’s husband) obituary in the paper. Leon was much older than Sylvia, and he was a poet, while she was a professor of botany. Clark and Carla learned from the obituary that before he died, he had won a significant cash prize for his poetry. Clark responded to this by formulating a plan to threaten Sylvia and make her pay them. Carla tried to brush his idea off, but he insisted. He made Carla promise to “break down and tell Mrs. Jamieson the whole story.” This is typical of Clark, who often becomes obsessed with impractical schemes.

*It becomes clear that Clark wants Carla to go to the Jamieson’s house because he thinks they can get a sum of money out of Sylvia. The exact nature of Clark’s scheme, and what “the whole story” entails, remain cryptic. The scheme seems dishonest, though, since it involves threatening Sylvia, and Carla is not eager to participate. This is yet another example of how Clark tries to intimidate and control not only Carla but also other people around him. That Carla tries unsuccessfully to brush him off again suggests that Clark has a great deal of control over her—she seems unwilling or unable to effectively advocate for herself.*



Carla reflects on the story Clark wants her to tell Mrs. Jamieson—the story is, in reality, a lie she told Clark. She told him that when Leon was sick and dying, he tried to sexually molest Carla when she was at their house. Carla has told Clark numerous accounts of this, finding that the fabricated story excites them both. She knows she can’t now go back on the lie and feels that sometimes she almost believes it’s true herself. It is true, though, that she regularly went to the Jamiesons’ to help around the house, but Leon never abused her. Carla has continued to go to the Jamiesons’ house even after Leon’s death, and though she hates going, she is grateful that Sylvia pays her.

*Here, the puzzling scheme finally becomes clear: Clark believes that Leon tried to molest Carla before he died, and that Sylvia will pay Carla and him off to keep quiet about it. The story seems to imply that Carla’s account of Leon’s abuse is a lie Carla told in a desperate attempt to make Clark jealous (or simply get his attention) and, as a result, revive her troubled marriage. But in fact, Clark apparently finds the idea of Carla being molested exciting rather than disturbing. He didn’t try to stop her from going to the Jamieson’s house when he thought she was being molested there, after all. Only when he believes there is money involved does he try to intervene, showing how little he cares about Carla. He seems to view women (at least Carla) as sexual objects, which is perhaps why he also automatically assumes that Flora (a female goat) has left to find a mate.*



At the Jamiesons' house, Sylvia is looking forward to seeing Carla. Sylvia enjoys Carla's presence and is grateful for Carla's help cleaning the house and clearing it of Leon's belongings. One day, Carla kissed Sylvia's head as they cleaned, which has stuck in Sylvia's mind. Now, Carla arrives and talks about Sylvia's trip to Greece. Sylvia gives Carla a figurine of a horse that reminded her of Carla. In Greece, Sylvia told her friends about Carla, and they called Sylvia's fondness for the girl a "crush," which annoyed her.

Carla seems distracted as she and Sylvia talk, and eventually the conversation turns to **Flora**. Carla starts sobbing uncontrollably, which Sylvia finds off-putting. Carla reminds Sylvia in this moment of her "soggy" university students. Carla's crying is so intense that Sylvia questions whether it's really about Flora. Carla discloses that she can't stand living with Clark and that she feels like he hates her. Sylvia suggests that Carla leave, which Carla brushes off at first as impossible. Then she says that if she had enough money, she would leave immediately for Toronto. Sylvia offers to pay for the journey and says Carla can stay with Sylvia's friend Ruth in the city. Sylvia calls Ruth to let her know, lends Carla clothes, and makes her lunch.

*Up until now, Munro's third-person narration closely followed Carla, relaying mostly Carla's own inner thoughts and feelings. At this point, it changes and becomes closer to Sylvia's perspective, so that the reader has more insight into Sylvia's thoughts. Sylvia doesn't fully understand her own affection for Carla, but by suggesting a "crush" and focusing on how Carla kissed Sylvia's head, the story implies subtle romantic undertones to Carla and Sylvia's relationship.*



*Sylvia's feelings toward Carla change immediately and drastically when Carla starts crying, and Sylvia is reminded that Carla is still young and immature. Carla says she's not actually crying about Flora, but in a way, she is—Flora's escape represents the freedom Carla craves, though Carla may not consciously know this. It's notable that Carla says she is unhappy because she feels like Clark is always mad at her, but she doesn't say that he controls and manipulates her—she doesn't realize this is the case. Sylvia doesn't seem to understand the extent of Clark's emotional abuse either, since she assumes that Carla leaving Clark is an obvious and simple solution. In a very short time, Carla goes from believing it would be impossible to leave Clark to impulsively and excitedly preparing to board the bus to Toronto, which suggests that she's wanted to escape her marriage for some time but hasn't been able to do so. On another note, Sylvia seems unbothered by the idea of Carla leaving town, even though she clearly cares about Carla. This shows that Sylvia, an older and more mature woman, isn't as dependent on other people as Carla is (Carla, after all, is desperate to get Clark's attention and please him).*





Carla and Sylvia drink wine and formulate a plan for Carla's departure. In a note for Sylvia to drop off to Clark, Carla mistakenly writes, "I will be all write," leading Sylvia to believe that Carla is more disoriented than she originally thought. As they drink, Carla divulges information about her past. She shares that when she was 18, she fell in love with Clark while they were both working at a horse stable. Now she thinks maybe she wasn't in love and that their relationship was "probably just sex." Clark worked odd jobs his whole life, and Carla's parents didn't like him. They wanted her to go to college, but instead she ran away with him and lost contact with her family.

Later, after Carla has boarded the bus to Toronto and Sylvia drops off the note to Clark in the mailbox, Sylvia goes for a walk and reminisces about how she used to go on walks with Leon. She feels irritated and anxious thinking about Carla. She calls Ruth first to warn her of Carla's aloof attitude, and then again to see if Carla has arrived, but no one answers the phone either time. She goes to bed on the couch, not having slept in her and Leon's bed in months, and dreams of being on a bus. She awakes to a knocking on her door.

*As Carla reveals more of her true nature to Sylvia, first with the sudden crying spell and now the misspelling, Sylvia comes to see her more as she really is: inexperienced and barely out of adolescence. Earlier, it was revealed that Carla moved in with Clark three years before the events of the story. So, if she was 18 when they met, then Carla is around 21 in the story's present. There are several details in this passage that hint at Carla and Clark's unhealthy relationship: first, the fact that Clark has worked many different jobs might imply that he's significantly older than Carla. Their age difference, especially given Carla's inexperience and naivete, could create an unbalanced power dynamic in their relationship and make it easier for Clark to manipulate Carla (as he's been shown to do). Next, Carla's reflection that their relationship wasn't founded on love, but "probably just sex," suggests that neither of them genuinely values each other. Finally, one partner isolating another from family and friends is a classic sign of an abusive relationship, so it's possible that this is another aspect of Clark's control over Carla. Together, these underlying factors make it clear that running away from Clark may not be the straightforward escape plan Sylvia believes it will be, since Clark has a great deal of power over Carla.*



*Sylvia's perception of Carla flipped completely: she used to find Carla's presence invigorating but is now annoyed by the thought of her, as she's realized how immature Carla is. But Sylvia still does a lot for Carla, showing Sylvia's kind and generous nature. On another note, while Sylvia clearly misses Leon (she avoids the bedroom they shared together), she seems emotionally stable and relatively undisturbed by his death. This is notably different from how distraught Carla was over Clark's treatment of her earlier in the story, when she cried and pleaded with him and then sobbed when she arrived at Sylvia's house. Carla is frantically attached to Clark, while Sylvia seems to be a stable, complete person even amid her grief over Leon, which again speaks to Carla and Clark's unhealthy relationship dynamic. This is especially important given that the story has established Carla as immature and naïve, and Sylvia as a mature and somewhat maternal figure to Carla. These contrasts between the two women suggest that healthy, stable relationships—in which people genuinely care for each other but aren't overly dependent on each other—are important parts of maturity.*



When Carla first boards the bus, she is afraid Clark will see her, but she relaxes as she gets farther from town. At Mrs. Jamieson's house, leaving for Toronto seemed like the only good option Carla had. She feels that she has risen to meet Mrs. Jamieson's expectations and doesn't want to let her down. As the bus gets farther, Carla notices that the landscape looks nicer and has an urge to tell Clark about what she sees. But she realizes she won't have a chance to speak to him again. Then, she realizes that she'll never find out if **Flora** returns. The bus journey reminds Carla of when she first left home as a teenager with Clark. She recalls how she left a note for her parents, explaining her "need of a more authentic kind of life."

*Carla perceives that Sylvia has expectations of Carla's future success, showing that Carla views Sylvia more as a parental or authority figure than a friend. Her perception reinforces her own immaturity and again implies that Sylvia's secure attachment style is what true maturity looks like. Even though Carla followed through with leaving Clark, she still thinks about him and wants to confide in him, which suggests that he still has lingering influence over her. That Carla thinks of Flora while fleeing to Toronto again symbolically links them as a pair of "runaways" and suggests that Flora has achieved the sort of freedom Carla wants for herself deep down. Carla is trying to detach herself from Clark, just as Flora did as she grew up. Carla also reminisces about the first time she left home (her first "runaway"). This second attempt to leave home implies that her marriage to Clark hasn't been the "authentic kind of life" she hoped for—though she's now living the life she thought she wanted, she's unhappy, emotionally neglected, and stagnant.*



As Carla sits on the bus thinking of Clark, she begins to cry. She imagines being alone in Toronto, how unfamiliar everything will be, and trying to get a job. She becomes increasingly overcome with emotion as she tries to imagine a future without Clark, and she concludes that she can't live without him—everything she does is in relation to him. Without Clark, she thinks, "How would she know she was alive?" Now extremely upset and practically in hysterics, she gets up and yells for the bus driver to stop. She gets off the bus and calls Clark to come get her, and he agrees to do so.

*Carla's emotions change dramatically and quickly. She has now gone from believing leaving would be impossible, to confidently planning a move to Toronto, to realizing she can't live without Clark—all within a day. Her belief that she can't live without him shows the mental and emotional toll that his abuse has taken on her: he has made her dependent on him. Her thought process shows the complexity of an emotionally abusive, controlling relationship: leaving Clark isn't the simple solution Carla and Sylvia thought it would be, as Carla has been manipulated to believe that she can't live without her husband. On some level, she yearns for some kind of escape to a different life. But just as Sylvia's trip to Greece didn't resolve her grief, Carla's attempt to run away doesn't solve her problems.*



Back at the Jamiesons' house, Sylvia opens the door to the knocking, but no one is there. As she looks around in confusion, she hears someone laugh. It's Clark, who is just out of sight behind the window. Sylvia is afraid of him and realizes she should have gotten dressed before coming to the door. Clark offers her a bag of clothes, and Sylvia realizes they're the clothes she lent Carla. Terrified, she asks where Carla is, and Clark responds that she's at home in bed. Sylvia examines Clark's menacing and disagreeable appearance and remembers Leon once saying that Clark was "unsure of himself." Nonetheless, she knows that Clark could hurt her. Clark points out how scared Sylvia was when she first opened the door, and he asks if she thought he murdered Carla, to which Sylvia responds that she was merely surprised to see him.

*Clark intentionally tries to scare Sylvia by hiding and laughing, and the way he approaches creates a strange and ominous mood. By intimidating Sylvia in this way, he's trying to gain control over the situation, much like he controls Carla. Sylvia considers that Clark may be insecure, as Leon said, but he can be insecure and still threatening. And Leon was right: Clark's intense reaction to Carla's attempt at leaving shows that he is insecure in his marriage. In this way, the story shows Leon to be wise and Clark to be immature and unstable in his relationships, much like Carla is. Clark has not been physically violent thus far, but he himself introduces the idea that he is capable of violence when he asks Sylvia if she thought he killed Carla. Sylvia says no, but in reality, it seems like the thought may have crossed her mind. She answers that she is just surprised, which is not true—she is terrified but is trying to remain composed.*



Sylvia explains that she was trying to help Carla, and Clark tells her that Carla called him in tears to come get her. Sylvia says Carla had seemed glad to be leaving. Clark tells Sylvia not to get involved in their lives anymore, and Sylvia retorts that Carla is an independent person. Clark takes a hostile and sarcastic tone, demanding an apology from Sylvia, to which she obliges. As the conversation is ending, Sylvia screams with shock as she notices something unidentifiable approaching. Both are frightened as they watch “an unearthly sort of animal” race toward them through dense fog, illuminated by a car’s headlights. As it approaches, they realize it’s **Flora**.

Clark and Sylvia are relieved to see **Flora**, having thought at first that there was some kind of supernatural creature. Clark is baffled, remarking that they never expected her to return, and he asks Flora if she’s been away looking for a mate. Clark tells Sylvia that goats are not as tame as they seem, especially not “after they grow up.” When Sylvia says that Flora doesn’t look matured yet, Clark responds that she won’t grow anymore. Sylvia and Clark part ways cordially, and Sylvia agrees that she won’t involve herself in his and Carla’s relationship anymore. Clark says he’s heading home with Flora. Sylvia steps inside to answer a phone call from Ruth. Later, she’s unable to sleep, kept up by thoughts of Flora’s fantastical reappearance. She wonders if the event could be related to Leon’s passing.

Clark wakes Carla as he enters their house. He tells her that he heard something in the middle of the night and went to check on things. He says that while he was up, he returned the clothes to Sylvia, but he doesn’t mention anything about **Flora**. Carla is alarmed and asks if he talked to Sylvia about “any of that stuff,” to which he responds that he didn’t. She pleads for him to believe that everything she told him about Leon was “made-up,” and he says he believes her. As they get into bed, Carla notes that Clark’s feet feel like they’ve been wet, which he attributes to dew. Clark tells her how upset he was to get her note and that he would feel empty without her.

*Although Sylvia doesn’t know the full story of Clark and Carla’s relationship, she still suspects that Clark is dangerous. Still, she easily apologizes and agrees to stay away from Carla, which shows the power of Clark’s manipulative intimidation. Meanwhile, Flora’s sudden reappearance suggests that Carla (who’s symbolically linked to Flora as a fellow runaway) will return to Clark, too. The goat’s “unearthly” appearance imbues her with mystery and religious symbolism, again suggesting that she is somehow wiser and purer than the humans in the story—almost like an angel.*



*Clark was sure that Flora ran away to look for a male goat to mate with, now that she is older and more mature. This belief seems to symbolize his anxieties about his marriage. When he tells Sylvia that goats are not tame once they grow up, it’s implied that he’s talking about Carla too—he thinks that if Carla matures and becomes self-aware, she will leave him. Thus, it’s foreboding when Sylvia says that Flora doesn’t appear fully grown and Clark responds that she won’t grow anymore. Flora has paralleled Carla throughout the story, and Carla isn’t fully matured either. So, Clark’s response to Sylvia’s remark implies that he won’t allow Carla to grow any more. Connecting Flora to Leon again attributes supernatural qualities to Flora, as though she is ghostly or heavenly.*



*Carla’s insistence that she lied about Leon assaulting her suggests that she knows Clark fears her leaving him, especially for another man. Clark, meanwhile, lies about why he left the house in the middle of the night, as he doesn’t want Carla to know that he confronted Sylvia or that Flora came back. The story does not say what Clark did between leaving Sylvia’s and returning home, and at this point it is still ambiguous. It is strange that Clark’s feet got wet enough to soak through shoes and socks, as though he waded into a body of water. He attributes the wetness to dew, but it’s already clear that Clark is willing to lie to Carla. He doesn’t express anger to Carla but instead is nicer to her than usual, suggesting that he knows he’s in danger of her leaving and must do what he can to make her stay. His profession that he would be empty without Carla mirrors how she felt on the bus when she thought about leaving him, and it signifies that Clark is emotionally dependent on Carla—they are codependent.*



The weather turns over the next few days, and it's finally warm and sunny out. Business starts to boom once again with trail rides and lessons. Clark and Carla are getting along much better than before. Clark jokes that if Carla leaves again, he'll "tan [her] hide," and Carla finds herself as attracted to him as ever. Joy Tucker, Lizzie Borden's owner, comes back from vacation, and it seems like things between her and Clark are repaired. Joy asks about **Flora**, and Clark says she's gone, simply remarking, "Maybe she took off to the Rocky Mountains."

One day shortly thereafter, Carla finds a letter in the mailbox from Mrs. Jamieson. In it, Sylvia apologizes for getting too involved in Carla's life and for conflating freedom and happiness. Sylvia writes that Carla should find happiness in her present situation with Clark. To Carla's surprise, the letter goes on to describe in detail the scene when **Flora** appeared at Sylvia's doorstep. Sylvia writes that the experience brought her and Clark together in friendship, and that it was a significant and marvelous occasion. She writes that Flora is a "good angel." Immediately, Carla burns the letter to ashes and flushes it down the toilet.

Carla goes about her days ordinarily and doesn't mention the letter or **Flora** to Clark. She shows him no contempt, though she has "a murderous needle somewhere in her lungs." Sylvia moves to a new apartment in a nearby town, but she doesn't sell the old house. As autumn approaches, Carla becomes more comfortable thinking about the possibilities of what may have happened to Flora. She sometimes considers going to search for the goat's remains and imagines holding Flora's skull like "[k]nowledge in one hand." Sometimes, she considers the possibility that Clark didn't kill Flora and instead took her somewhere far away to be free. Carla never goes searching for Flora.

*Now that the story is past its climax, the general tone changes. The weather is sunny, and everyone is getting along (Even Clark and Joy Tucker, who had a rift at the start of the story). This change is eerie and sinister, though, because Flora seemingly disappeared again, and Clark offers no explanation as to what happened to her. It's especially ominous that Clark jokingly threatens to kill Carla and then tells Joy that he doesn't know where Flora is. Both interactions imply that Clark most likely killed Flora after leaving Sylvia's. As Flora represents Carla's potential freedom, Clark symbolically killed any opportunity for Carla to gain independence.*



*Sylvia has limited knowledge of Carla and Clark's marriage, and because Sylvia wasn't in a toxic relationship herself, she greatly underestimates how serious and harmful Carla's situation is. Of course, Sylvia assumed that Clark had brought Flora home and told Carla about Flora's appearance at Sylvia's house. She didn't think she would be breaking this news to Carla in the letter, which was meant as a kind gesture. But Carla is shocked by the news and seems to know immediately that Clark did something to Flora. She burns and flushes the letter in order to deny this dark reality.*



*The fact that Carla doesn't do anything after finding out that Clark likely killed Flora shows that Clark has succeeded in trapping Carla in the relationship. She is very angry at him but can push the feeling away when she wants to. The story again alludes to the Bible: Flora seemed to have had a forbidden sort of wisdom, like Eve in Genesis, which is why she distanced herself from Clark and eventually ran away. In contrast, Carla chooses ignorance: she does not ask Clark what happened or go looking for Flora. Holding Flora's skull in one hand is like possessing the forbidden fruit—it is symbolic of acquiring knowledge, just as Flora held an apple in Carla's dream. In this case, Carla would be choosing to know for sure whether Clark killed Flora, and choosing ignorance instead allows Carla to continue imagining the possibility that Flora is still alive. Symbolically, Carla chooses not to pursue independence in favor of the safety of staying with Clark. The story thus ends somewhat pessimistically, suggesting that controlling, codependent relationships like Clark and Carla's can be incredibly difficult to escape from. If Clark was willing to kill Flora to prevent her from running away, there doesn't seem to be much hope that Carla will be able to achieve freedom.*





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