

The Stoat

(1978)

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emotional: sadness or pain

growing unease.

student with time for leisure; relaxed.

elegant in comparison to father.

stylish

unknown animal or human

playing golf

A long-legged student in a turtleneck was following a two-iron he had struck just short of the green when he heard the crying high in the rough grass above the fairway. The clubs rattled as he climbed towards the crying, but it did not cease, its pitch rising. Light of water from the inlet that ran to Ballisadare and was called the Calm Sea blinded him as he climbed out of the coarse tussocks, and he did not see the rabbit at once, where it sat rigidly still on a bare patch of loose sand, screaming; and at the same time he glimpsed the long grey body of the stoat slithering away like a snake into the long grass. He took a slow step forward but the rabbit still did not move. Its crying ceased, and he noticed the wet slick of blood behind its ear, and then the blood pumping out on the sand. It did not stir when he stooped to pick it up, but never before did he hold such pure terror in his hands, the body trembling in a rigidity of terror as the heart hammered away its blood through the cut in the jugular vein. Holding it up by the hind legs he killed it with one stroke, but when he turned it over he could find no mark other than where the vein had been cut. He took the rabbit down with him, picking his way more cautiously through the long grass than when he had climbed. He left the rabbit beside the clubs while he chipped and holed out, but as he crossed from the green to the tee he saw the stoat cross the fairway behind him. After watching two simple shots fade away into the rough, he knew he had lost his concentration, and decided to finish for the morning. As he made his way back to the cottage his father rented every August in Strandhill, he twice glimpsed the stoat behind him, following the rabbit still, though it was dead.

constant, persistent
 Tx calm and unpleasant noise.
 violence increasing
 sibilance
 malevolent serpentine

foreshadow McCabe's heart attack.
 continues playing golf, not particularly fazed.

inevitable, inescapable monstrous force / fate

start to see significance of symbolic stoat.

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

vampiric, horrifying.

rabbits cute fluffy, no hope at all. 3rd repeat in one page

like father, cannot escape death, unavoidable.

unnatural, morbid, petrified
 IRELAND
 evily, sneakily escape
 surreptitious, elusive
 afraid, cautious
 extreme distress, horrific
 conventionally evil
 - cautious
 graphic violence

stoat stalking him

knows exactly where to kill.

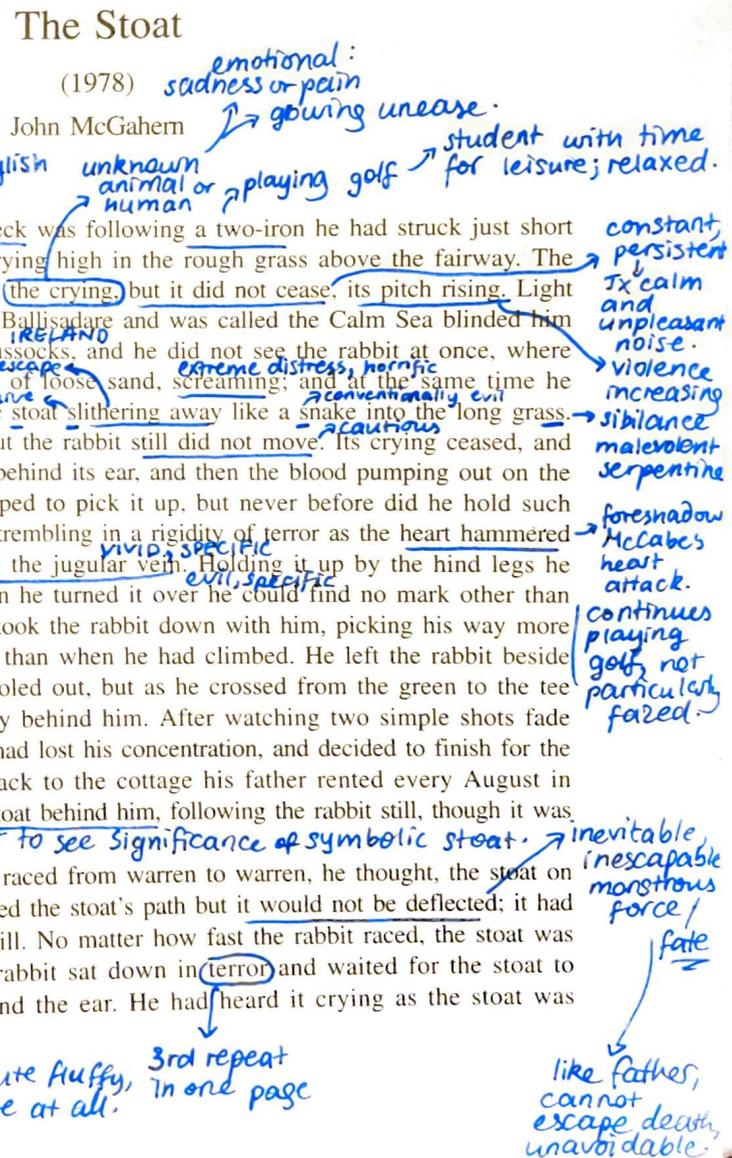
stoat is parasitic, vampiric

not hugely empathetic

amplified sense of horror

kind but oddly cold.

instantaneous, death
 benevolent/kind
 scientific examination.
 evil precision



sitting unlike
son playing golf

lack of purpose

His father was reading *The Independent* on the front lawn of the cottage when he got back, facing Knocknarea, his back to the wind that blew from the ocean. A quick look told the son that he was going through the ads for teachers; he always went through the ads for teachers again after he had exhausted the news and death notices, why he would never know, other than from habit or boredom, since he would never leave now the small school where he was principal and the residence that went with it.

claustrophobic

Another colleague who was in Drumcondra the same year as myself has gone to his reward, he said when he looked up. 'A great full-back poor Weeshie was, God rest him.'

first dialogue of story is about mortality

The son made no answer but held up the rabbit. 'Where did you get that?' 'On the links. I heard it crying. And when I went to look there/was this weasel. It had cut the jugular vein, and the rabbit was just sitting there. It never moved when I went to pick it up.'

accustomed to death

'It must be a stoat. The weasel is extinct in Ireland.'

uncle is highly qualified doctor

'A stoat then. I read something about it, but I never came across it before.'

bitter hostile rebuttal

'It's common. You often hear the squealing in scrubs or bushes. No doubt it'll be another specimen for yourself and your uncle to mull over.'

brutally practical

'Well, it's as good as what you find in *The Independent*.'

woman he intends to marry

'What do you intend to do with it?' Other than to rattle the newspaper loudly the father made no response to the counter thrust.

insulting hostile not exactly supportive

'I thought I'd skin and cook it.'

knowledgable

'Do you think will it be all right?' 'It couldn't be more perfect,' he laughed as he held it up. 'Maybe if I cooked it Miss McCabe might like to have it with us tonight.'

worries about health

'You better not tell her how you came by it,' he looked up in alarm.

link the two side by side

'Of course not. Old Luke had rabbits for sale a few days back as well as suspiciously got sea trout and salmon. He said he bought them off fellows with a ferret.'

still anonymous

'Rabbit - the poor man's chicken. What if she doesn't like rabbit?'

STOAT is important framing device

implicit sense that it could all go wrong

* mocking, belittling treatment of Ms McCabe lonely. selfish desires cynical view

allusions not real

humble life pathetic meagre

harking back to youthfulness

mocking, derisive, doesn't like her regretting smthg

tones of contempt father believes not your mum or my wife?

Miss McCabe's dream was still in the womb of time, he reflected with mock ruefulness, when his father had asked him up to the study the Christmas before. It was not a study in any strict sense, but a small room where he corrected exam papers and kept textbooks and books of his college days, and where he liked to impart decisions in an aura of some solemnity that 'not only affects me, but affects my family as well'. Those occasions that used to arouse fear and foreboding in the growing boy had by this time dwindled to embarrassing and faintly comic charades.

tantrums possessive un-actual extreme weak

'Would you take it very much to heart if I decided to marry again?' 'Of course not. Why do you ask me?' The young man's face showed his amazement.

'I was afraid you might be affronted by the idea of another woman holding the position your dear mother held,' the voice floated brittlely along on emotion that it could not control. The son hoped the father wouldn't break down and cry, for if he did he was afraid he might idiotically join him. The father started to rotate his thumbs about one another as he waited. 'That's ridiculous.' I think you should do exactly what you want to do. It's your life.'

The father looked hurt, as if his life had been brutally severed from the other life by the son's words.

'For years I've been faithful to your mother's memory,' he began painfully. 'Now you're a man. Soon you'll be a fully qualified doctor, while I'll have to eke out my days between this empty house and the school. At my age you don't expect much from marriage, but at least I'd have companionship.'

'There was no need to ask me. In fact, I think it's a good idea.'

'You have no objections then?'

'None. As I said, I think it's a good idea.'

'I'm glad you approve. I wouldn't have gone ahead if you'd any objections.'

The son was curious if there was already some woman in mind, but did not ask.

When later that day his father showed him the ad he had written he was grateful for the dismay which cancelled laughter.

Teacher fifty-two. Widower. Seeks companionship. View marriage.

'What do you think of it?'

'I think it's fine. It couldn't be better.'

'I'll send it off then so.'

Neither had any idea that so much unfulfilled longing for the woe that is marriage

wandered around in the world till the replies began to pour in. Nurses, housekeepers, secretaries, childless widows and widows with small children, house owners, car owners, pensioners, teachers, civil servants, a policewoman, and a woman who had left at twenty years to work at Fords of Dagenham who wanted to come home to marry. The postman enquired slyly if the school was seeking a new assistant, and the woman who ran the post office said in a faraway voice that if we were looking for a housekeeper she had a relative who might be interested.

'I hope they don't steam the damn letters. This country is on fire with curiosity,' the father complained.

embarrassed, a bit nervous, sensitive.

undermining, mocking, derisive, superior of pretty serious matter

empathy, genuine emotion, care for son.

limited existence resentment

son superior

repetition - fed up wants it over with?

son more superior - compassion

loves son deeply

lonely pragmatic unromantic desperate

fact, matter-of-fact, not emotional

faceless, anonymous, unromantic

asymmetrical listings

sheer number of people

joke suggests job application

The son saw much of him that spring term, as he met many of the women in Dublin, though he had to go to Cork and Limerick and Tullamore as well. In hotel lounges he met them, hiding behind a copy of the Roscommon Herald, which was how they were able to identify him.

'You've never in your life seen such a collection of wrecks and battleaxes as I've had to see in the last few months,' he said, a cold night in late March after he had met the lady from Dagenham in the Ormond. 'You'd need to get a government grant to do them up before you could think of taking some of them on.'

'Do you mean in appearance or as people?'
'All ways,' he said despairingly. Because of these interviews the son was able to spend all that Easter a surgeon in a county town, who had encouraged him against his father in his choice of medicine, the father wishing to see him in a bank. After dinner, on the first night, the uncle suggested a long walk. 'It's one of those clear frosty nights. We can circle and come back through the town. It's about four miles.'

'That's fine with me.'
A car passed on the road as they set out. The headlights lit the white railing and fleshly boles of the beech avenue down to the ragged thorns of the road below. They did not start to stride out properly till they reached the road. The three-quarter moon and the stars gave light enough for them to see their breaths in the frosty night.

'My father's going to get married, it seems,' he confided, in the ring of the footsteps. 'You're joking,' his uncle paused.

'I'm not. He's had an ad this long while in the papers.'

'An ad. You're surely joking.'

'I'm not. I'm in deadly earnest.'

'An ad,' suddenly the uncle became convulsed with laughter, and was hardly able to get the next words out, 'And did he get ... replies?'

'Bundles. He's been interviewing them.'

'And have you seen any of the ... applicants,' he had to pause again on the road.

'No, but he said you'd need a government grant to do some of them that he's seen up before you could think of marrying them.'

'A government grant ... stop it. This is high farce. The man must finally have gone off his rocker.'

'Apparently he's just found someone. A schoolteacher in her forties. She's no beauty, but a shining light compared with the wrecks and battleaxes he's been interviewing.'

'Have you seen this person?'

'Not yet. I'm supposed to see her next week.'

'My god, if you hang round long enough you see everything,' he combed his fingers through his long greying hair as he walked. 'At least, if he does get married, it'll get him off your back.'

'You don't like my father much?'

'He's a decent enough fellow but I find him dull. Probably not nearly as dull as he finds me.'

not rude but damning with faint praise
strained relationship
self-centred
cynicism

UNCLE IS teaching son too... not completely antagonistic
The Stoat 301

They had circled the town. Lighted poles appeared in the thorn hedges, and then a paved sidewalk.

'We might as well have a drink in the Grand Central,' the uncle said as they came into the town. 'The trouble with being a bigwig in a small town is that there's either the Grand Central or nowhere,' and though he nodded to some people sitting in armchairs as they passed through the lounge, he headed straight for a corner of the bar. 'We'll stand. That way we can't be so easily cornered. You know, if your father does succeed in getting himself hitched, you'll be able to spend much more time here. I'd like that.'

'He'd like that too. With his uncle everything seemed open: 'Life seems to have no purpose other than to reproduce itself. Life comes out of matter and goes back into matter. We inherit it and pass it on. We might as well take as decent a care of it as we can. You cannot go against love and not be in error.' Nothing was closed. This freedom was gaiety, even though it seemed that it caused him to seem mostly lonely. 'I feel guilty about it but the truth is that my father bores me. I fear and hate the unconscious.'

A few Saturdays later he was to meet Miss McCabe in Dublin. Both his father and she were desperately nervous. It made him feel that he was the parent and they the children anxious for his approval. Miss McCabe wore pale tweeds and serviceable brown shoes. She was somewhere in her forties, rather frail, and excitable. He liked her, but he would have encouraged his father to marry her whether he did or not, as he was anxious for the whole play to be over.

'Well, what was your impression?' his father asked him afterwards. That she was so desperately nervous that she spilled both coffee and a small bowl of cream at the uncheon, that she was anxious for approval to such a point that no person should or ought to be from another ... these he did not say. Who was he to give or to withhold approval from one who had been wandering round in the world long before he ...

'I think Miss McCabe is a fine person,' he said. 'Of course not.'

'You have ... no objections then?'

'I'm glad,' he said and started to explain their plans.

She would come with them to Strandhill this summer, and stay in one of the hotels close to the usual cottage they took for August. If all went well they would become engaged before they went back to the schools at the end of the holidays.

They had been at Strandhill a week now, the boy golfing or studying, the father spending much of his time with Miss McCabe. Sometimes the son would see them arm in arm on the promenade from the tees close to the shore. The sight disturbed him, as if their defence was too brittle against the only end of life, and made it too disturbingly obvious, and he would try to shut it out with the golf ball.

'Will you be seeing Miss McCabe?' the boy asked as he put the coffee and sandwiches on the table.

'I might drop into the hotel. She's going to the salt baths.'

There was a hot salt bath close to where the old cannon pointed out on the ocean, asbestos covered, the yellow funnel of a ship for chimney from which plumes of steam puffed. She went every afternoon for the hot baths and a massage. She had rheumatism.

short sentence emphasise that she is frail etc needs support

smug, self-centred, satisfied, arrogant
narcissistic, braggadocious
selfcenter back to him
endear to son
emotional manipulate
vast, sweeping general advice, not strict directing for father
perhaps alone
professional, formalist
practical, plain, unexciting
weak, dying forebodes her heart attack
father always looks for approval
maybe there is love here
lack of sympathy
feels uncomfortable by father's relationship
death brought up again and again
death is omnipresent
stout

like job application
similar profession
accepts and respects Uncle
manliness
repetition
disbelief
CRAUEL
opposed to sympathy, uncle laughs cruelly at brother's desperation
laughing so much can barely speak
descenting to peril?

pondering
uncle is hope, talks of life rather than hope
sense of superiority from son
cold but emotional expression
uncle alone
perhaps alone
practical, plain, unexciting
forebodes her heart attack

confrontational
cynical, dismissive
deserve
mental state
cruel view
conflict, envy
uncle is son's hero
with his uncle

selfish lack of sympathy
at ease
kind, respectful
puts father at ease
tone of contempt
aimlessness
not fullsome praise

direct quotation from father - reflecting copying father a lot
mundane, unexciting
contempt
questioning sanity
contempt
anonymity
derision

death brought up again and again
death is omnipresent
stout

carefree leisure activity
more golf → golf helps him forget worries

offering to cook → kind respectful to father

'And you? What do you intend? Are you studying?'

'No. I'll get in a round, and come back early to cook that rabbit. But ask Miss McCabe. It's just a folly on my part to want to cook it, and I don't mind at all if you'd both prefer to eat as usual at the Kincora.'

unity broken up aged, leisurely calm serene

They left the cottage together after lunch, the father with a walking stick, the son with the golf clubs, and parted at the lane that led to the clubhouse.

youth

As he went round the course he climbed in that instinct that draws people to places that have witnessed murder or violence to where he had heard the crying that morning, but the blood had dried from the sand, and the place was uncannily still; the coarse tussocks rustling in the sea wind, the strand covered with the full tide, and a white sailing boat tacking up the inlet from Ballisadare to the mouth of the ocean.

ominous that every thing seems so perfect

death may change things, malvolence remains

He skinned and dressed the rabbit that evening, clinically teasing out the dried blood where the vein had been cut, and Miss McCabe came at eight. The father was plainly uneasy until she exclaimed that the rabbit was delicious.

cold, unemotional detached MENACING?

'I never knew rabbit could be so good,' he added. 'I suppose it's just prejudice again. It was always known as the poor man's chicken.'

father happy afraid to try something different

'We must praise the cook too. As well as a future doctor we have also a good cook on our hands,' Miss McCabe was so much in her element that she was careless. 'It's much nicer to eat here than at the Kincora. Luke seems to have very good trout as well. Some of them look as fat as butter. You must allow me to cook them for dinner some evening soon. It's crazy not to have fish when at the ocean.'

OUR SON

'Miss McCabe likes you enormously,' the father sang after he had returned from leaving her back to the hotel. 'She has savings, and she says you'll be welcome to them if you ever need money for post-graduate work or anything like that.'

kind considers herself part of the family

That won't be necessary. My uncle said I can have as much as I need on loan for those purposes,' the son said cuttingly, and the reference to the uncle annoyed the father as much as Miss McCabe's offer had the son. Irrationally, he felt soiled by meal and rabbit and whole evening, as if he had taken part in some buffoonery against the day, against any sense of dignity, and he was determining how to avoid the trout dinner and anything more got to do with them.

hopeful for future offering selfless generous presumptuous intrusive competitive feels close to uncle

not selfish unlike all others. she's kind

'Write then.' 'I'll write.'

matter of fact

As it turned out there was no need for avoidance. A uniformed bellhop came from the hotel the next evening to tell that Miss McCabe had suffered a heart attack in the salt baths that afternoon. The doctor had seen her and she was resting in her hotel room. She wished to see the father.

abrupt. sudden, unexpected.

no emotional adjectives

'Will you come?' the father asked. 'It's you she wants to see.'

dismissive scathing no commiseration

When he got back from the hotel he was incredibly agitated. He could not sit still. 'She's all right,' he said. 'She just had a mild heart attack in the hot baths, but she still thinks we'll get engaged at the end of the month.'

HE doesn't

'But I thought that was the general idea.'

still feel pity for him

'It was. If everything went well. Who wants to marry a woman who can pop off at any minute?'

son doesn't understand him

It sometimes happened, even in the act, the son had heard, but he said nothing. 'Isn't it enough to have buried one woman?' the father

UNEMOTIONAL

MORBID

EMOTIONAL FRUSTRATED doesn't want to go through so much pain again

stagnant, colloquial. surprising, sudden, blunt, unemotional

only thinks of positivity

'Did you tell her?'

'I tried. I wasn't able. All she thinks of is our future. Her head is full of plans.'

'What are you going to do?'

he's socked by father's cruelty and lack of emotion

'Clear out,' he said, to the son's dismay.

'You can't do that.'

cowardly

'It's the only way to do it. I'll write to her.'

'What . . . if she doesn't take it?'

'There's nothing I can do about that.'

death inevitable, omnipresence of death running futile

As if all the irons were being suddenly all truly struck and were flowing from all directions to the heart of the green, he saw with terrifying clarity that it was the stoa the father had glimpsed in Miss McCabe's hotel room, and he was running.

'What'll you do about the cottage? It's rented till the end of the month.'

trying to run away from death

'It doesn't matter about the cottage. The rent is paid.'

'Where'll you go to?'

FATHER IS COWARD

'Home, of course. Aren't you coming?' he asked as if he assumed it was foregone.

'No,' he saw his chance. 'I'll stay.'

'What if Miss McCabe sees you?' the father asked in alarm.

YOU CANNOT GO AGAINST LOVE IN ERROR

'There's nothing I can do for her or she for me.'

He was not staying by the sea either. Tomorrow he would leave for his uncle's.

They were all running. total frantic terror, rabbits fleeing from death

'What if she asks about me?'

'Naturally, I'll try to avoid her, but if I meet her I'll say I don't know. That it's not my affair. How soon are you going?'

separate

'As soon as I get the stuff into the boot of the car.'

COWARDELY

'I'll give you a hand so.'

desperate sense of urgency

pathetic, dodging talking to this person directly

'Are you sure you won't change your mind?'

'No. I'll stay.'

'Write then.'

laconic

'I'll write.'

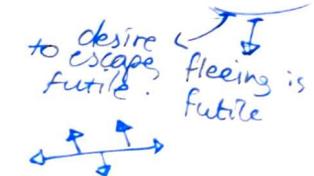
uncle is dominant figure

Already he could hear his uncle's mordant voice. You have to take a test to drive a bloody old car around. But any pair of imbeciles of age can go and take a marriage licence out and set about bringing a child up in the world, which is a much more complicated activity than driving an old car around! There would be good talk for several days, and there was the story of the stoa and the rabbit.

mocking father dismissive

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

cynical



repeated to remind us of omnipresence of death