

Plot context

Marianne reflects on the social divide in Carricklea: her own privileged background versus Connell's working-class family. Despite his background, Connell is admired at school, while Marianne remains marginalised. He takes her to the "ghost estate," an abandoned housing development, where they wander through derelict, rain-soaked spaces. Their conversation shifts from social inequality to personal intimacy, highlighting their different positions and unspoken desires.

Thematic summary

The extract explores class disparity, economic collapse, and intimacy. The ghost estate symbolises Ireland's post-Celtic Tiger recession and the emptiness beneath material wealth. Connell's frustration with inequality contrasts with Marianne's vague detachment, exposing the limits of her privilege. At the same time, the physical closeness between them intensifies the tension between their public distance and private bond, revealing how vulnerability and desire intersect with class and power.

Likewise, it's impossible for her to know which families in town are considered good families and which aren't. It's the kind of thing she would like to know, just to be able to reject it the more completely. She's from a good family and Connell is from a bad one, that much she does know. The Waldrons are notorious in Carricklea. One of Lorraine's brothers was in prison once, Marianne doesn't know for what, and another one got into a motorcycle crash off the roundabout a few years ago and almost died. And of course, Lorraine got pregnant at seventeen and left school to have the baby. Nonetheless Connell is considered quite a catch these days. He's studious, he plays centre forward in football, he's good-looking, he doesn't get into fights. Everybody likes him. He's quiet. Even Marianne's mother will say approvingly: That boy is nothing like a Waldron. Marianne's mother is a solicitor. Her father was a solicitor too.

Last week, Connell mentioned something called 'the ghost'.

Marianne had never heard of it before, she had to ask him what it was. His eyebrows shot up. The ghost, he said. The ghost estate, Mountain View. It's like, right behind the school. Marianne had been vaguely aware of some construction on the land behind the school, but she didn't know there was a housing estate there now, or that no one lived in it. People go drinking there, Connell added. Oh, said Marianne. She asked what it was like. He said he wished he could show her, but there were always people around. He often makes blithe remarks about things he 'wishes'. I wish you didn't have to go, he says when she's leaving, or: I wish you could stay the night. If he really wished for any of those

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things, Marianne knows, then they would happen. Connell always gets what he wants, and then feels sorry for himself when what he wants doesn't make him happy.

Anyway, he did end up taking her to see the ghost estate. They drove there in his car one afternoon and he went out first to make sure no one was around before she followed him. The houses were huge, with bare concrete facades and overgrown front lawns. Some of the empty window holes were covered over in plastic sheeting, which whipped around loudly in the wind. It was raining and she had left her jacket in the car. She crossed her arms, squinting up at the wet slate roofs.

Do you want to look inside? Connell said.

The front door of number 23 was unlocked. It was quieter in the house, and darker. The place was filthy. With the toe of her shoe Marianne prodded at an empty cider bottle. There were cigarette butts all over the floor and someone had dragged a mattress into the otherwise bare living room. The mattress was stained badly with damp and what looked like blood.

Pretty sordid, Marianne said aloud. Connell was quiet, just looking around.

Do you hang out here much? she said.

He gave a kind of shrug. Not much, he said. Used to a bit, not much any more.

Please tell me you've never had sex on that mattress.

He smiled absently. No, he said. Is that what you think I get up to at the weekend, is it?

Kind of.

He didn't say anything then, which made her feel even worse. He kicked a crushed can of Dutch Gold aimlessly and sent it skidding towards the French doors.

This is probably three times the size of my house, he said.

Would you say?

She felt foolish for not realising what he had been thinking about. Probably, she said. I haven't seen upstairs, obviously.

Four bedrooms.

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Jesus.

Just lying empty, no one living in it, he said. Why don't they give them away if they can't sell them? I'm not being thick with you, I'm genuinely asking.

She shrugged. She didn't actually understand why. It's something to do with capitalism, she said.

Yeah. Everything is, that's the problem, isn't it?

She nodded. He looked over at her, as if coming out of a dream. Are you cold? he said. You look like you're freezing.

She smiled, rubbed at her nose. He unzipped his black Puffa jacket and put it over her shoulders. They were standing very close. She would have lain on the ground and let him walk over her body if he wanted, he knew that.

Reflection

- **Thematic:** How does the ghost estate function as a metaphor for both social and personal emptiness?
- **Stylistic:** How does Rooney use descriptive detail of the abandoned house (e.g., the stained mattress, plastic sheeting) to create atmosphere and deepen meaning?
- **Conceptual:** In what ways does the scene highlight the tension between class divisions and emotional intimacy in Connell and Marianne's relationship?