

Plot context

At a school fundraiser, Marianne helps with raffle tickets when a group of older men arrive uninvited. One of them gropes her in front of her classmates, who laugh instead of intervening. Shaken and humiliated, she leaves the room, and only Karen offers comfort while the others excuse or minimise the assault.

Thematic summary

The extract exposes gendered power, humiliation, and social complicity. Marianne's assault highlights the violence embedded in peer culture and the moral failure of bystanders. Rooney reveals how cruelty and silence reinforce hierarchy and isolation, contrasting Karen's empathy with the others' indifference. The scene captures how shame and conformity sustain social cruelty.

He nods over at the door, where some older guys have arrived. They're not supposed to be here, the nightclub said it would be ticket-holders only. Marianne doesn't know who they are, someone's brothers or cousins maybe, or just men in their twenties who like to hang around school fundraisers. They see Eric waving and come over. Marianne looks in her purse for the cash pouch in case they do want to buy raffle tickets.

How are things, Eric? says one of the men. Who's your friend here?

That's Marianne Sheridan, Eric says. You'd know her brother, I'd say. Alan, he would've been in Mick's year.

The man just nods, looking Marianne up and down. She feels indifferent to his attention. The music is too loud to hear what Rob is saying in Eric's ear, but Marianne feels it has to do with her.

Let me get you a drink, the man says. What are you having?

No, thanks, says Marianne.

The man slips an arm around her shoulders then. He's very tall, she notices. Taller than Connell. His fingers rub her bare arm. She tries to shrug him off but he doesn't let go. One of his friends starts laughing, and Eric laughs along.

Nice dress, the man says.

Can you let go of me? she says.

Very low-cut there, isn't it?

In one motion he moves his hand down from her shoulder and squeezes the flesh of her right breast, in front of everyone. Instantly she jerks away from him, pulling her dress up to her collarbone, feeling her face fill with blood. Her eyes are stinging and she feels a pain where he grabbed her. Behind her

the others are laughing. She can hear them. Rachel is laughing, a high fluting noise in Marianne's ears.

Without turning around, Marianne walks out the door, lets it slam behind her. She's in the hallway now with the cloakroom and can't remember whether the exit is right or left. She's shaking all over her body. The cloakroom attendant asks if she's alright. Marianne doesn't know any more how drunk she is. She walks a few steps towards a door on the left and then puts her back against the wall and starts sliding down towards a seated position on the floor. Her breast is aching where that man grabbed it. He wasn't joking, he wanted to hurt her. She's on the floor now hugging her knees against her chest.

Up the hall the door comes open again and Karen comes out, with Eric and Rachel and Connell following. They see Marianne on the floor and Karen runs over to her while the other three stay standing where they are, not knowing what to do maybe, or not wanting to do anything. Karen hunches down in front of Marianne and touches her hand. Marianne's eyes are sore and she doesn't know where to look.

Are you alright? Karen says.

I'm fine, says Marianne. I'm sorry. I think I just had too much to drink.

Leave her, says Rachel.

Here, look, it was just a bit of fun, says Eric. Pat's actually a sound enough guy if you get to know him.

I think it was funny, says Rachel.

At this Karen snaps around and looks at them. Why are you even out here if you think it was so funny? she says. Why don't you go and pal around with your best friend Pat? If you think it's so funny to molest young girls?

How is Marianne *young*? says Eric.

We were all laughing at the time, says Rachel.

That's not true, says Connell.

Reflection

Thematic: How does the scene expose the social dynamics that allow cruelty and humiliation to go unchallenged?

Stylistic: How does Rooney's understated narrative voice intensify the emotional impact of Marianne's experience?

Conceptual: What does this moment suggest about the link between silence, complicity, and power?