

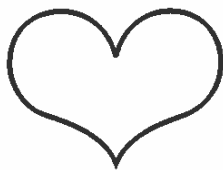
## BEFORE YOU READ

### A MOTHER IN MANNVILLE

#### Reading Focus

##### Heartfelt Needs

The boy at the center of this story has very little to call his own. What do you think a child needs to be healthy and happy? With a small group of classmates, draw a big heart like the one here. Outside the heart, list everything a child needs to survive physically. Inside the heart, list what you think a child needs to be mentally and emotionally healthy. Share the results of your brainstorming with other classmates.



#### Quickwrite

If you could provide the ideal home for



a boy or girl growing up, what would it be like? Choose the most important items listed inside and outside the heart, and tell how you would provide them.

#### Elements of Literature

##### Character: An Inside View

A **character** is anyone who plays a part in a story. In daily life we use the word to mean

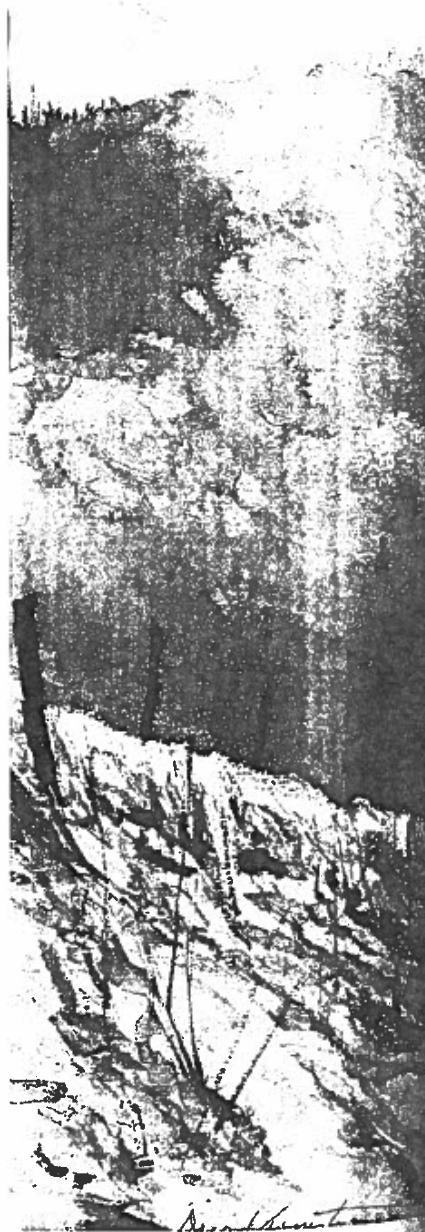
something within a person that can't be seen but can be shown: "She has a fine character!" we say, or "That shows character." As you read "A Mother in Mannville," notice how deeply the writer reveals her characters: We come to know not only what they look like but also what they're "made of," what they carry inside them.

**A** **character** is a person or an animal in a story, play, or other literary work. Writers can create characters by telling us what they look like, what they say, how they act, and how they think.

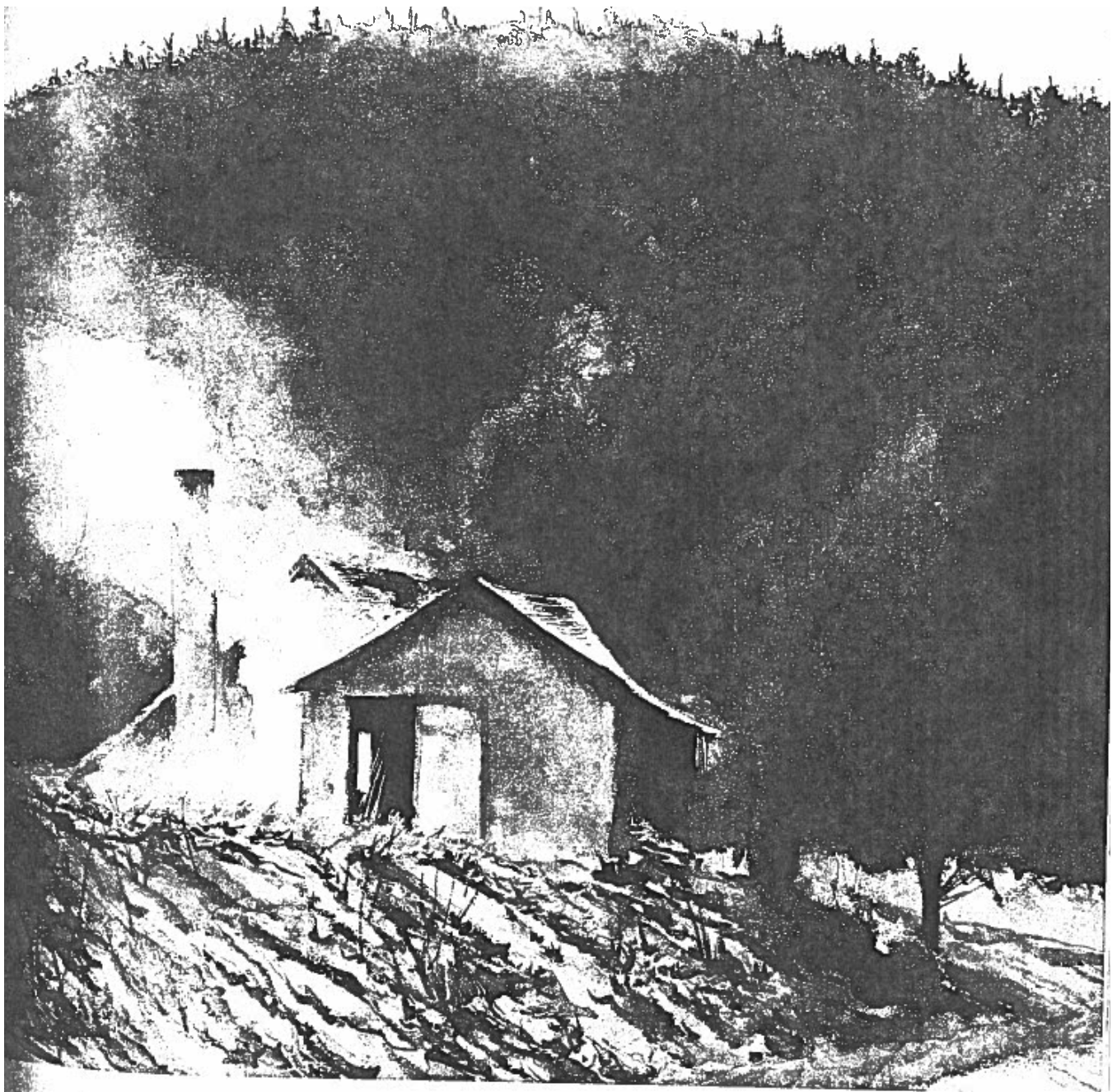
For more on Character, see the Handbook of Literary Terms.

*Cabin Smoke* (1973)  
by David Armstrong.

Courtesy of the Artist.



*The boy was probably twelve years old, but undersized. He wore overalls and a torn shirt, and was barefooted.*



# *A Mother in Mannville*

**Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings**

**T**he orphanage is high in the Carolina mountains. Sometimes in winter the snowdrifts are so deep that the institution is cut off from the village below, from all the world. Fog hides the mountain peaks, the snow swirls down the valleys, and a wind blows so bitterly that the orphanage boys who take the milk twice daily to the baby cottage reach the door with fingers stiff in an agony of numbness.

"Or when we carry trays from the cookhouse for the ones that are sick," Jerry said, "we get our faces frostbit, because we can't put our hands over them. I have gloves," he added. "Some of the boys don't have any."

He liked the late spring, he said. The rhododendron was in bloom, a carpet of color, across the mountainsides, soft as the May winds that stirred the hemlocks. He called it laurel.

"It's pretty when the laurel blooms," he said. "Some of it's pink and some of it's white."

I was there in the autumn. I wanted quiet, isolation, to do some troublesome writing. I wanted mountain air to blow out the malaria<sup>1</sup> from too long a time in the subtropics. I was homesick, too, for the flaming of maples in October, and for corn shocks and pumpkins and black-walnut trees and the lift of hills. I found them all, living in a cabin that belonged to the orphanage, half a mile beyond the orphanage farm. When I took the cabin, I asked for a boy or man to come and chop wood for the fireplace. The first few days were warm, I found what wood I needed about the cabin, no one came, and I forgot the order.

I looked up from my typewriter one late afternoon, a little startled. A boy stood at the door, and my pointer dog, my companion, was at his side and had not barked to warn me. The boy was probably twelve years old, but undersized. He wore overalls and a torn shirt, and was barefooted.

1. **malaria**: disease producing chills and fever, transmitted by certain mosquitoes.

He said, "I can chop some wood today."

I said, "But I have a boy coming from the orphanage."

"I'm the boy."

"You? But you're small."

"Size don't matter, chopping wood," he said. "Some of the big boys don't chop good. I've been chopping wood at the orphanage a long time."

I visualized mangled and inadequate branches for my fires. I was well into my work and not inclined to conversation. I was a little blunt.

"Very well. There's the ax. Go ahead and see what you can do."

I went back to work, closing the door. At first the sound of the boy dragging brush annoyed me. Then he began to chop. The blows were rhythmic and steady, and shortly I had forgotten him, the sound no more of an interruption than a consistent rain. I suppose an hour and a half passed, for when I stopped and stretched, and heard the boy's steps on the cabin stoop, the sun was dropping behind the farthest mountain, and the valleys were purple with something deeper than the asters.

The boy said, "I have to go to supper now. I can come again tomorrow evening."

I said, "I'll pay you now for what you've done," thinking I should probably have to insist on an older boy. "Ten cents an hour?"

"Anything is all right."

We went together back of the cabin. An astonishing amount of solid wood had been cut. There were cherry logs and heavy roots of rhododendron, and blocks from the waste pine and oak left from the building of the cabin.

"But you've done as much as a man," I said. "This is a splendid pile."

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#### WORDS TO OWN

**isolation** (i'sə·lā'shən) *n.*: state of being alone; solitude.

**visualized** (vizh'ŏŏ·əl·izd') *v.*: pictured.

**mangled** (man'gəld) *v.* used as *adj.*: torn and crushed.

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I looked at him, actually, for the first time. His hair was the color of the corn shocks and his eyes, very direct, were like the mountain sky when rain is pending—gray, with a shadowing of that miraculous blue. As I spoke, a light came over him, as though the setting sun had touched him with the same suffused glory with which it touched the mountains. I gave him a quarter.

“You may come tomorrow,” I said, “and thank you very much.”

He looked at me, and at the coin, and seemed to want to speak, but could not, and turned away.

“I’ll split kindling tomorrow,” he said over his thin ragged shoulder. “You’ll need kindling and medium wood and logs and backlogs.”

At daylight I was half wakened by the sound of chopping. Again it was so even in texture that I went back to sleep. When I left my bed in the cool morning, the boy had come and gone, and a stack of kindling was neat against the cabin wall. He came after school in the afternoon and worked until time to return to the orphanage. His name was Jerry; he was twelve years old, and he had been at the orphanage since he was four. I could picture him at four, with the same grave gray-blue eyes and the same—independence? No, the word that comes to me is “integrity.”

The word means something very special to me, and the quality for which I use it is a rare one. My father had it—there is another of whom I am almost sure—but almost no man of my acquaintance possesses it with the clarity, the purity, the simplicity of a mountain stream. But the boy Jerry had it. It is bedded on courage, but it is more than brave. It is honest, but it is more than honesty. The ax handle broke one day. Jerry said the woodshop at the orphanage would repair it. I brought money to pay for the job and he refused it.

“I’ll pay for it,” he said. “I broke it. I brought the ax down careless.”

“But no one hits accurately every time,” I told him. “The fault was in the wood of the handle. I’ll see the man from whom I bought it.”

It was only then that he would take the money. He was standing back of his own carelessness. He was a free-will agent and he chose to do careful work, and if he failed, he took the responsibility without subterfuge.

And he did for me the unnecessary thing, the gracious thing, that we find done only by the great of heart. Things no training can teach, for they are done on the instant, with no predicated experience.<sup>2</sup> He found a cubbyhole beside the fireplace that I had not noticed. There, of his own accord, he put kindling and “medium” wood, so that I might always have dry fire material ready in case of sudden wet weather. A stone was loose in the rough walk to the cabin. He dug a deeper hole and steadied it, although he came, himself, by a short cut over the bank. I found that when I tried to return his thoughtfulness with such things as candy and apples, he was wordless. “Thank you” was, perhaps, an expression for which he had had no use, for his courtesy was instinctive. He only looked at the gift and at me, and a curtain lifted, so that I saw deep into the clear well of his eyes, and gratitude was there, and affection, soft over the firm granite of his character.

He made simple excuses to come and sit with me. I could no more have turned him away than if he had been physically hungry. I

2. with no predicated experience: not based on any previous experience or training.

#### WORDS TO OWN

**suffused** (sə·fyŭōzd') v. used as *adj.*: filled with a glow.  
**integrity** (in·teg'ra·tē) n.: literally, “completeness.” In people, *integrity* usually refers to honor and sincerity.  
**clarity** (klar'ə·tē) n.: clearness.  
**subterfuge** (sub'tər·fyŭōj') n.: any sneaky strategy; here, trying to get out of an unpleasant situation.

suggested once that the best time for us to visit was just before supper, when I left off my writing. After that, he waited always until my typewriter had been some time quiet. One day I worked until nearly dark. I went outside the cabin, having forgotten him. I saw him going up over the hill in the twilight toward the orphanage. When I sat down on my stoop, a place was warm from his body where he had been sitting.

He became intimate, of course, with my pointer, Pat. There is a strange communion between a boy and a dog. Perhaps they possess the same singleness of spirit, the same kind of wisdom. It is difficult to explain, but it exists. When I went across the state for a weekend, I left the dog in Jerry's charge. I gave him the dog whistle and the key to the cabin and left sufficient food. He was to come two or three times a day and let out the dog, feed and exercise him. I should return Sunday night, and Jerry would take out the dog for the last time Sunday afternoon and then leave the key under an agreed hiding place.

My return was belated and fog filled the mountain passes so treacherously that I dared not drive at night. The fog held the next morning, and it was Monday noon before I reached the cabin. The dog had been fed and cared for that morning. Jerry came early in the afternoon, anxious.

"The superintendent said nobody would drive in the fog," he said. "I came just before bedtime last night and you hadn't come. So I brought Pat some of my breakfast this morning. I wouldn't have let anything happen to him."

"I was sure of that. I didn't worry."

"When I heard about the fog, I thought you'd know."

He was needed for work at the orphanage and he had to return at once. I gave him a dollar in payment, and he looked at it and went away. But that night he came in the darkness and knocked at the door.

"Come in, Jerry," I said, "if you're allowed to be away this late."

"I told maybe a story," he said. "I told them I thought you would want to see me."

"That's true," I assured him, and I saw his relief. "I want to hear about how you managed with the dog."

He sat by the fire with me, with no other light, and told me of their two days together. The dog lay close to him and found a comfort there that I did not have for him. And it seemed to me that being with my dog, and caring for him, had brought the boy and me, too, together, so that he felt that he belonged to me as well as to the animal.

"He stayed right with me," he told me, "except when he ran in the laurel. He likes the laurel. I took him up over the hill and we both ran fast. There was a place where the grass was high and I lay down in it and hid. I could hear Pat hunting for me. He found my trail and he barked. When he found me, he acted crazy, and he ran around and around me, in circles."

We watched the flames.

"That's an apple log," he said. "It burns the prettiest of any wood."

We were very close.

He was suddenly impelled to speak of things he had not spoken of before, nor had I cared to ask him.

"You look a little bit like my mother," he said. "Especially in the dark, by the fire."

"But you were only four, Jerry, when you came here. You have remembered how she looked, all these years?"

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#### WORDS TO OWN

**communion** (kə·myŏn'yən) *n.*: deep understanding; communicating thoughts without speaking.

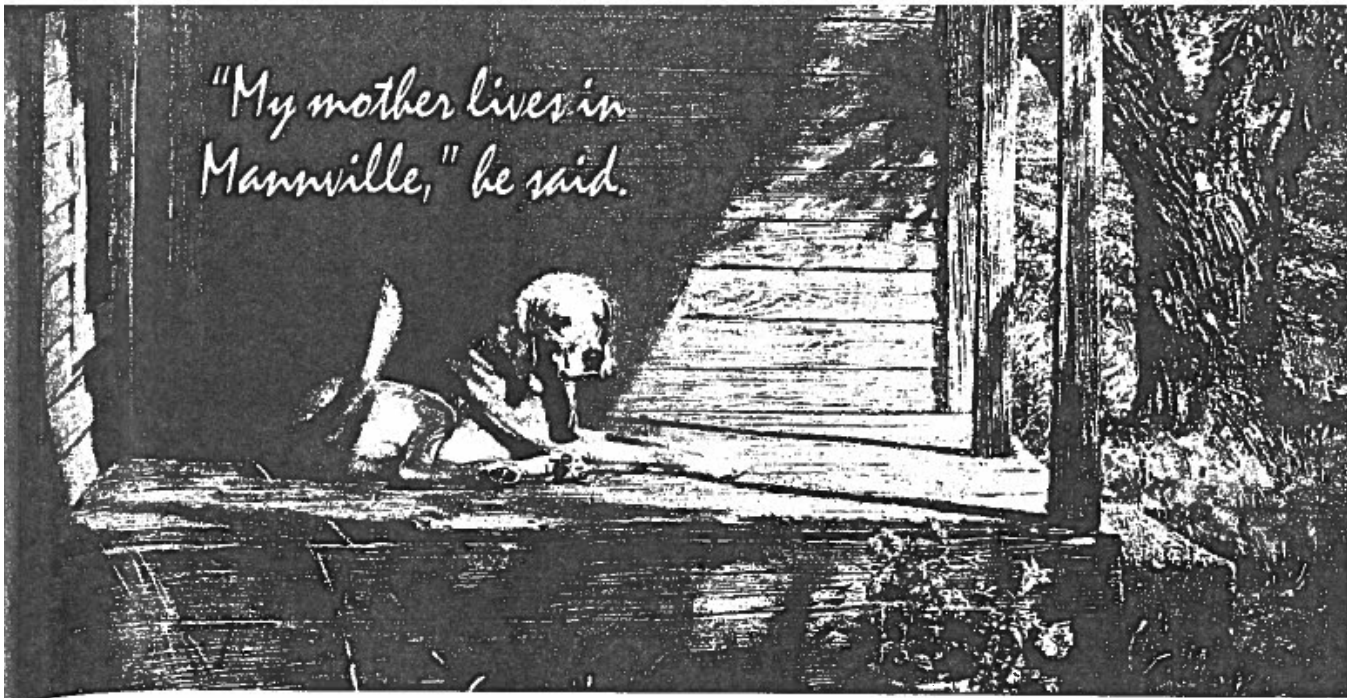
**sufficient** (sə·fish'ənt) *adj.*: enough.

**belated** (bē·lāt'id) *adj.*: late or delayed.

**treacherously** (trech'ər·əs·iē) *adv.*: dangerously; untrustworthily.

**impelled** (im·peld') *v.*: driven.

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*School's Out* by Robert K. Abbett.

Courtesy of the Artist.

"My mother lives in Mannville," he said.

For a moment, finding that he had a mother shocked me as greatly as anything in my life has ever done, and I did not know why it disturbed me. Then I understood my distress. I was filled with a passionate resentment that any woman should go away and leave her son. A fresh anger added itself. A son like this one—The orphanage was a wholesome place, the executives were kind, good people, the food was more than adequate, the boys were healthy, a ragged shirt was no hardship, nor the doing of clean labor. Granted, perhaps, that the boy felt no lack, what blood fed the bowels of a woman who did not yearn over this child's lean body that had come in parturition out of her own? At four he would have looked the same as now. Nothing, I thought, nothing in life could change those eyes. His quality must be apparent to an idiot, a fool. I burned with questions I could not ask. In any, I was afraid, there would be pain.

"Have you seen her, Jerry—lately?"

"I see her every summer. She sends for me."

I wanted to cry out, "Why are you not with her? How can she let you go away again?"

He said, "She comes up here from Mannville whenever she can. She doesn't have a job now."

His face shone in the firelight.

"She wanted to give me a puppy, but they can't let any one boy keep a puppy. You remember the suit I had on last Sunday?" He was plainly proud. "She sent me that for Christmas. The Christmas before that"—he drew a long breath, savoring the memory—"she sent me a pair of skates."

"Roller skates?"

My mind was busy, making pictures of her, trying to understand her. She had not, then, entirely deserted or forgotten him. But why, then—I thought, "I must not condemn her without knowing."

"Roller skates. I let the other boys use them. They're always borrowing them. But they're careful of them."

What circumstances other than poverty—  
“I’m going to take the dollar you gave me for taking care of Pat,” he said, “and buy her a pair of gloves.”

I could only say, “That will be nice. Do you know her size?”

“I think it’s eight and a half,” he said.

He looked at my hands.

“Do you wear eight and a half?” he asked.

“No. I wear a smaller size, a six.”

“Oh! Then I guess her hands are bigger than yours.”

I hated her. Poverty or no, there was other food than bread, and the soul could starve as quickly as the body. He was taking his dollar to buy gloves for her big stupid hands, and she lived away from him, in Mannville, and contented herself with sending him skates.

“She likes white gloves,” he said. “Do you think I can get them for a dollar?”

“I think so,” I said.

I decided that I should not leave the mountains without seeing her and knowing for myself why she had done this thing.

**T**he human mind scatters its interests as though made of thistledown,<sup>3</sup> and every wind stirs and moves it. I finished my work. It did not please me, and I gave my thoughts to another field. I should need some Mexican material.

I made arrangements to close my Florida place. Mexico immediately, and doing the writing there, if conditions were favorable. Then, Alaska with my brother. After that, heaven knew what or where.

I did not take time to go to Mannville to see Jerry’s mother, nor even to talk with the orphanage officials about her. I was a trifle abstracted about the boy, because of my work and plans. And after my first fury at her—we did not speak of her again—his having a mother, any

3. **thistledown** (this’l·down’): soft fluff attached to the flower of the thistle.

sort at all, not far away, in Mannville, relieved me of the ache I had had about him. He did not question the anomalous relation. He was not lonely. It was none of my concern.

He came every day and cut my wood and did small helpful favors and stayed to talk. The days had become cold, and often I let him come inside the cabin. He would lie on the floor in front of the fire, with one arm across the pointer, and they would both doze and wait quietly for me. Other days they ran with a common ecstasy through the laurel, and since the asters were now gone, he brought me back vermilion maple-leaves, and chestnut boughs dripping with imperial yellow. I was ready to go.

I said to him, “You have been my friend, Jerry. I shall often think of you and miss you. Pat will miss you too. I am leaving tomorrow.”

He did not answer. When he went away, I remember that a new moon hung over the mountains, and I watched him go in silence up the hill. I expected him the next day, but he did not come. The details of packing my personal belongings, loading my car, arranging the bed over the seat, where the dog would ride, occupied me until late in the day. I closed the cabin and started the car, noticing that the sun was in the west and I should do well to be out of the mountains by nightfall. I stopped by the orphanage and left the cabin key and money for my light bill with Miss Clark.

“And will you call Jerry for me to say good-bye to him?”

“I don’t know where he is,” she said. “I’m afraid he’s not well. He didn’t eat his dinner this noon. One of the other boys saw him going over the hill into the laurel. He was supposed to fire the boiler this afternoon. It’s not like him; he’s unusually reliable.”

#### WORDS TO OWN

**abstracted** (ab·strak’tid) *adj.*: absent-minded.

**anomalous** (ə·näm’ə·ləs) *adj.*: abnormal; strange.



I was almost relieved, for I knew I should never see him again, and it would be easier not to say goodbye to him.

I said, "I wanted to talk with you about his mother—why he's here—but I'm in more of a hurry than I expected to be. It's out of the question for me to see her now, too. But here's some money I'd like to leave with you to buy things for him at Christmas and on his birthday. It will be better than for me to try to send him things. I could so easily duplicate—skates, for instance."

She blinked her honest spinster's eyes.

"There's not much use for skates here," she said.

Her stupidity annoyed me.

"What I mean," I said, "is that I don't want to duplicate things his mother sends him. I might have chosen skates if I didn't know she had already given them to him."

She stared at me.

"I don't understand," she said. "He has no mother. He has no skates."

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#### WORDS TO OWN

**duplicate** (dōō'pli·kāt') v.: copy or double.

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## MEET THE WRITER

### "Marjorie's Going to Tell Stories"

"Writing is agony," says **Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings** (1896–1953). Rawlings grew up in the state of Washington and graduated from the University of Michigan with honors. For ten years after she left college, she did a lot of moving and traveling, working as a newspaper reporter and writing stories. Frustrated at her difficulty in getting these stories published, she impulsively bought an orange grove in Cross Creek, Florida. Delighted with the people and scenery she found in the Florida backwoods, she made them the main subjects of many of her writings.

Rawlings won her greatest fame with her best-selling novel *The Yearling* (1938), about a Florida boy and his love for his pet fawn. The novel won the Pulitzer Prize, was translated into thirteen languages, and was made into a successful movie. Even in childhood, Rawlings told stories. She said:

“ I can remember very distinctly the feeling of smugness that came over me when one of the youngsters would run up the street, calling to any stragglers, 'Marjorie's going to tell stories!' and then the hauteur [snobbery] with which I refused to begin until everyone was there. There was a tumultuous Irish child that shrieked and screamed if any of the details depressed him—particularly, what I realize now, must have been my very celebrated imitation of a wolf howl. He got to be such a nuisance that I recall saying sternly, 'You'll have to take Jimmy home now—there's going to be a wolf in the next one.' ”





# MAKING MEANINGS

## First Thoughts

1. Talk to a partner about your responses to the story. You may want to start by finishing these statements:
  - When I read the ending of the story, I . . .
  - I felt sorry when . . .
  - I admired . . . because . . .
  - I think the narrator should . . .

## Shaping Interpretations

2. Why do you think Jerry tells the narrator he has a mother? Whom are the gloves for, if he has no mother?
3. How does the narrator's relationship with Jerry change as the story goes along? How can you tell? How do you think the narrator really feels about Jerry?
4. Animals play a key role in many of Rawlings's stories. In your opinion, how is Pat, the dog, important in this story? (How do Jerry and Pat get along, and what does this tell you about Jerry?)
5. Why do you think the narrator gets angry when Jerry tells her that he has a mother living in Mannville? What does this reaction tell you about her character?
6. Early on the narrator admires Jerry for his honesty. Do you think she changes her mind? Do you think Jerry is honest or dishonest? Explain your views.

## Connecting with the Text

7. Look back at the words you listed inside and outside the heart you drew for the Reading Focus on page 356. Would you make any changes in the items you chose for the Quickwrite now that you've read about Jerry? What do you think this story is saying about the need for love?

## Challenging the Text

8. The surprise ending of the story does not resolve the problems of either character. Do you feel cheated by the ending? Why or why not?

### Reviewing the Text

"A Mother in Mannville" is narrated by the main female character. With two of your classmates, take turns retelling the story as though you were Jerry, the boy. While your classmates narrate, listen carefully to be sure they include all important details.

