



The Runaway

Claire Wong

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The Runaway unabashedly asserts the necessity of human interconnectedness in the creation of meaningful stories.

Fable intertwines with reality in Claire Wong's *The Runaway*, an introspective journey into the heart and power of stories.

When Rhiannon, in a fit of anger, flees from the rustic Welsh village of Llandymna into the depths of Dyrys Woods, the village begins a desperate search for the orphaned teenager. Not wanting to be found, Rhiannon adapts to life in the woods, living off scavenged berries, sheltering in an abandoned mill, and befriending an injured hawk.

But while Rhiannon's drama might seem self-contained, she is connected to a much larger series of stories that pervade Llandymna, stories that become starkly clearer once Adam and Grace, two Ghanaian siblings in search of the origins of their Welsh father, arrive in the village. Soon enough, the darker underpinnings of perceived idyllic life are revealed, and more than Rhiannon must wrestle with issues of place, human relationships, and acceptance.

The narrative is divided by perspectives, providing a subtle demarcation between Rhiannon's first-person voice and everyone else's third-person voices. This lends a sense of quiet, almost magical, isolation to her sections as she copes with her new circumstances in Dyrys Woods. Even when other characters eventually intrude upon her hermitage, the same quality pervades her experiences in the woods up until the climax crashes in noisily, and the solitude she thought she desired is necessarily replaced with shared human bonds.

Characters are drawn in distinct and multidimensional ways. None of the native villagers, including Rhiannon, are without faults, and each must come to terms with his or her more negative traits before the story's end. Rhiannon's adoptive aunt, Diana, is especially rounded, for though her obsession with order and control is unlikable initially, she does manage to garner sympathy as the plot unfolds.

Stories conveyed by Maebh, the village's resident elderly Irish storyteller, veil hidden but germane meanings connected to the village's past, and Rhiannon often draws strength from them, particularly Maebh's stories of the Sparrow Girl. Not until Adam and Grace appear and unearth the truths about their father, Emrys, do Maebh's stories begin to come into sharp focus and display their real meanings.

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MEAGAN LOGSDON (May/June 2017)

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