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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

Runaway by Alice Munro

Summary

Here are the infinite betrayals and surprises of love—between men and women, between friends, between parents and children—that are the stuff of all our lives.

In Alice Munro's superb new collection, we find stories about women of all ages and circumstances, their lives made palpable by the subtlety and empathy of this incomparable writer.

Throughout this compelling collection, Alice Munro's understanding of the people about whom she writes makes them as vivid as our own neighbors. Here are the infinite betrayals and surprises of love—between men and women, between friends, between parents and children—that are the stuff of all our lives. It is Alice Munro's special gift to make these stories as vivid and real as our own.

Discussion Questions

1. Most of these stories involve young women who act upon a strong desire for sexual or romantic fulfillment or for escape from a stifling life. Is desire liberating or confining? Do these characters really know what they want or need? Does Munro suggest that desire is provisional and subject to change? Do the stories imply that life is inherently unstable and unknowable?
2. Writer Alan Hollinghurst has observed, "Munro's stories have always felt exceptionally capacious; they have the scope of novels, though without any awkward sense of speeding up or boiling down. . . It's almost impossible to describe their unforced exactness, their unrushed economy" [The Guardian, February 5, 2005]. Which techniques does Munro employ to accomplish this illusion of space and time in only forty or fifty pages?
3. In "Soon," Juliet comes across a chatty letter she had written to Eric the summer she visited her parents [p. 124]. In it she finds "the preserved and disconcerting voice of some past fabricated self" [p. 125]. How does this idea of false self-representation work in various stories? Do characters tend to misrepresent themselves mainly in letters, or in person as well? Do they believe in these "fabricated selves" that they create for themselves and others?

4. Most of the stories in *Runaway* involve an older woman who is looking back at a determining moment in her youth. How do these characters view their younger selves? What are the qualities that accompany their reminiscences about the past—sentimentality, irony, bitterness, regret, a desire to change the story?

Summary from www.Goodreads.com

Discussion Questions from www.Bookbrowse.com