

Empire Falls Study Guide

Empire Falls by Richard Russo

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Contents

Empire Falls Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Prologue.....	6
Part 1, Chapter 1.....	8
Part 1, Chapter 2.....	10
Part 1, Chapter 3.....	13
Part 1, Chapter 4.....	14
Part 1, Chapter 5.....	17
Part 1, Chapter 6.....	19
Part 1, Chapter 7.....	22
Part 1, Chapter 8.....	23
Part 2, Chapter 9.....	27
Part 2, Chapter 10.....	30
Part 2, Chapter 11.....	32
Part 2, Chapter 12.....	34
Part 2, Chapter 13.....	36
Part 2, Chapter 14.....	38
Part 3, Chapter 15.....	40
Part 3, Chapter 16.....	42
Part 3, Chapter 17.....	43
Part 3, Chapter 18.....	45
Part 3, Chapter 19.....	47
Part 3, Chapter 20.....	49
Part 3, Chapter 21.....	51



[Part 3, Chapter 22.....52](#)

[Part 4, Chapter 23.....53](#)

[Part 4, Chapter 24.....54](#)

[Part 4, Chapter 25.....55](#)

[Part 4, Chapter 26.....57](#)

[Part 4, Chapter 27.....58](#)

[Part 4, Chapter 27.....59](#)

[Part 4, Chapter 28.....60](#)

[Part 4, Chapter 29.....61](#)

[Part 4, Chapter 30.....63](#)

[Part 4, Chapter 31.....64](#)

[Part 4, Chapter 32.....65](#)

[Epilogue and Analysis.....67](#)

[Characters.....68](#)

[Objects/Places.....74](#)

[Themes.....77](#)

[Style.....80](#)

[Quotes.....81](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....83](#)



Plot Summary

It is sometimes difficult to tell if Richard Russo's intent with *Empire Falls* is to describe the human condition in a story about the fate of a small town in Maine or to describe a small Maine town in a story about the human condition. In any event, Empire Falls is a once-prosperous industrial town ruled by four generations of the wealthy Whiting family. Empire Falls has fallen victim to a cheap international labor market with greed on both sides of the labor-negotiating table. Miles Roby, the central contemporary character, is the manager of the Empire Grill with his brother David. Miles has worked at the diner since he was in high school. David is a recovering alcoholic who sobered up after crashing his truck destroying one of his arms and rendering it useless. Mrs. Whiting, the widow of C.B. Whiting, has been uncharacteristically generous with Miles, promising to transfer ownership of the grill to him after her death with the condition that he will continue to manage it until then. Tick, Miles' teenaged daughter, also works at the diner. Miles is wholly devoted to her. Janine is Miles'estranged wife who has promised to marry Walt Comeau. Walt, known as *The Silver Fox*, is an aging wannabe playboy who owns the local health club. Walt is a braggart who loves to rub salt in Miles wounds about Janine. Janine is a former middle-aged fat middle-aged lady who discovered the tortures of the Stairmaster at Walt's club. Now that Janine has developed a knockout body, she has found the joy of sexual fulfillment in Walt's bed. Janine joins Walt in the torment of her husband with no end of sarcasm about his lack of sexual prowess. The novel is a snapshot in the life of Empire Falls and its fascinating tableau of characters. Everyone is waiting for Mrs. Whiting to die to see where she leaves her fortune

There is not a single plot in *Empire Falls*, but many little sub-plots. Tick is the on-again off-again girlfriend of Zack Minty. Zack is the son of Jimmy Minty, Miles' nemesis and contemporary. Jimmy is a police officer aspiring to the Chief's job. Like his father, Zack is not very bright but is kind of a low-life who is following his father's example as a sort of *enforcer* for the Whitings. For some reason that Miles does not understand at first, Mrs. Whiting has had a special interest in Zack and his mother, Grace since Zack was a child. Miles' father Max., an itinerate house painter, is also a low-life. Max appreciates neither Grace's stunning physical beauty nor her loving nature. When Miles was nine-years-old and his father was in jail for being a public nuisance, Miles and his mother took a vacation on Martha's Vineyard where she met a man named Charlie Mayne. Although they were quite discreet, Miles figured out that his mother and Charlie were having an affair. Charlie Mayne was everything his father was not. Charlie was sophisticated, rich, and powerful driving around in his yellow sports car. Jealous of the attention his mother paid to Charlie and excited at the neat thing he learned and did with Charlie; Miles developed a love/hate relationship with him. Many years later, Miles discovered Mr. Mayne was actually C.B. Whiting. The special attention he and his mother received from Mrs. Whiting was all about vengeance rather than genuine concern. The Whitings also had a daughter named Cindy who was born in the same hospital and on the same day as Miles. Cindy has been in love with Miles since childhood. Crippled as a small child when she was ran over by a car, Cindy is an



outcast. In the end it is revealed that Cindy was not ran over by a mysterious green Pontiac but by her own father, C.B., who was running from a fight with his wife.

Amidst the many other characters in Empire Falls is John Voss. John is a silent, troubled boy who is in Tick's art class at Empire Falls High School. Forced into a friendship with John, Tick gets him a job at the Empire Grill. John is the sort of boy who invites abuse from his peers. It is ultimately revealed that he has been badly abused by adults as well. John's story culminates in a schoolroom massacre after discovering that the boy carried his grandmother's body out to a landfill and left it there when she died. Unbeknownst to officials and peers, John has been living alone in his grandmother's house.



Prologue

Prologue Summary

Located 50 miles inland from the sea, Empire Falls is a small town in Maine on the Knox River. The Whiting's are the wealthiest and most powerful family in town with a traditional family mansion downtown. Surround the mansion are the industries they have spawned over the generations. Charles Beaumont Whiting, son and heir apparent to the Whiting fortune, returned from 10 years in Mexico where he was pursuing empty dreams as an untalented artist and poet, as well as having a good time chasing women and lying on the beach. When he returns to Empire Falls, he is in his late twenties. Charles grows into middle age through the course of the *Prologue*. Charles is reconciled to his destiny, which is to carry on in the family tradition of running the family industries, although he believes he left his "better self" in Mexico. Realizing he has grey hair, Charles has something of an epiphany. People are mistaking him for his father, Honus and his dreams of Mexico are dead.

The sawmill founded by the Whiting family was originally the economic heart of the town. Later, however, the logging industry moved to another part of the stat and the family diversified into paper, textiles and clothing. All Whiting men seem to have two things in common. The men are short-which is an issue with C.B.-and they end up marrying women who remain loyal to them out of spite even though they have grown to hate them. C.B., however, remains unmarried until the conclusion of the *Prologue*. The Whitings have had the respect and reverence of the Irish, Polish, Italian, and French Canadian immigrants who came to Empire Falls seeking work in their various enterprises. In recent years, that respect has declined and there is considerable resentment against the family. Empire Falls is declining along with the Whiting fortune. There have been bitter battles with the unions, which the Whiting's have won. These battles have created a reluctant, resentful workforce.

C.B. finds that he has a gift for the family business, and takes over management of the shirt factory. Rather than live in the family mansion, he chooses to build an ostentatious Spanish-Style house on the river outside of town, which he calls the *Hacienda*. The Mediterranean style makes him feel taller, which is why he liked living in Mexico as well.

C.B. has grown older and is becoming much like his old man, who is anything but an artist or poet. While building the hacienda, C.B. discovers that the spit of land on the Knox River that he has chosen for his house is sort of a natural cesspool for all sorts of trash floating down the river. Discovering a decaying moose carcass, he is convinced some enemy put it there deliberately. Kneeling before and contemplating the moose for an entire afternoon, C.B. ultimately decides that his enemy is God. Surmising that the deity is harassing him for leaving his best self in Mexico and returning to Empire Falls to become like his father, he thus sets out to alter the course of the river in order to get rid of this divine curse. Engineers hired by C.B. determined that the course of the river is forced into a meandering curve by a rocky outcrop upstream know as the *Robideaux*



Blight. The rocky outcrop creates the eddy that turns C.B.'s property into a smelly landfill. C.B. buys the offending *Robideaux Blight* from the Robideaux family. C.B. thinks he has pulled a fast one over on the Robideaux's, because they were too stupid to realize that, if a wealthy man wanted their land, they should have squeezed him for more.

The Robideaux's, on the other hand, believe they have gotten over on C.B., because he paid so much for worthless land that cannot be farmed. With the help of his family's political clout, C.B. gets permission from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to blast away the Robideaux Blight and rid himself of decomposing moose. C.B. is fully convinced he has improved upon God's work, and more or less let the old boy know what was what when dealing with a Whiting. Knowing that he is condemning himself to a life of misery, C.B. gives in to his temporary lust for the Robideaux daughter, Francine, and proceeds into matrimony. Having no chin, Francine is not pretty in direct light. Even before the nuptials, Francine glibly renames Charles *Charlie*, a name he hates and one nobody has ever dared to call him. Growing to hate the domineering Francine—even before they are married—C.B. yields to his lust anyway, and takes her for his wife. At the end of the *Prologue*, it is unclear who got the better of whom in the land deal. Charlie got the Robideaux Blight cheaply, but he also inherited Francine and the guarantee of a miserable life.

Prologue Analysis

In this 15-page introduction, Russo lays the groundwork for *Empire Fall*, heavily foreshadows what is to come. Seasoned with a hint of tragic relief, Russo quickly establishes that he can be subtle while accomplishing wit with some great one-liners. For example, C.B.'s grandfather decided one day in his eighties to try to murder his wife with a shovel. Even though he was unsuccessful, the incident gives rise to speculations that C.B. might do the same after a few years with Francine. The Prologue closes with C.B.'s observation, that if he had followed his instinct and not married Francine, it would have saved him the cost of a revolver he purchased 30 years later with the intent of taking his own life.



Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

Move forward in time to the present. Empire Falls is in an economic tailspin. All the Whiting factories are closed and boarded up. C.B. is not around. Francine—apparently the last remaining descendent of both the Whiting family she married into and her native Robideaux clan—is nearing the end of her life. The citizens of Empire Falls eagerly anticipate this event since it is not clear to whom she will leave the vast holdings of the Whiting family. Essentially, the citizens are waiting to see who will inherit their town. A number of colorful and apparently central characters emerge in this chapter and the Empire Grill becomes the venue-of-choice for local gossip and debate. Miles Roby, the proprietor, assumes the role as a somewhat less-than-naïve observer and much of the action is viewed through his eyes. Miles has been working at the Empire since he was 16. Owning the business, Mrs. Whiting has promised to bequeath it to Miles upon her death. However, Mrs. Whiting has the reputation for giving gifts that have strings attached, or in circumstances that render them near valueless. For example, she surrendered title to the City of Empire Falls for the traditional Whiting Mansion under the conditions that they would declare it an historical monument and maintain it. The maintenance cost quickly turned the gift into a white elephant. Miles is concerned—only half sarcastically—that Mrs. Whiting is timing her own demise to that of the *Hobart*, the Grill's antique dishwasher and most expensive piece of capital equipment.

Miles has a 16-year-old daughter, Tick, to whom he is wholly devoted. Recently, they have returned from their annual week's vacation together at Martha's Vineyard hosted by Peter and Dawn, Miles' old college friends. Peter and Dawn have done well since college. Dropping out of college in his senior year to be near his dying mother during her last days, Miles has essentially become the Empire Grill. Adamantly opposed to the idea, Miles' mother claimed that if he dropped out of college to care for her, the sacrifices she had made for him would go for nothing. During this period Roger Sperry, former owner of the Grill and Miles' mentor, also took sick and died. These circumstances led to Miles cutting a secret deal with Mrs. Whiting to manage and inherit the Grill. Miles feared that if his mother knew about the deal she would try—and possibly succeed—in talking him out of it.

On this particular day, Miles is staring down Empire Avenue, which dead-ends at the river where the now-abandoned textile mill and shirt factory are sitting. Miles has noticed that, although his customers could gaze either up or down Empire Avenue, they always look down it toward the symbols of the town's more prosperous past. Miles, however, is waiting to catch a glimpse of Tick who will soon be lugging a backpack so heavy that it threatens to deform her up the street from the school. He sees instead Walt Comeau—known in his mind as *The Silver Fox*—pulling into the Grill's parking lot. Walt is Miles' least favorite person in Empire Falls. Walt is loud, braggadocious, full of false good will, owns the local fitness club, and is shackled up with Miles' estranged wife, Tick's



mother. Horace Weymouth, scribe for *Empire Gazette*, is also in the Grill waiting for his daily burger.

Walt bursts into the café full of news that some mysterious guys in expensive suits and a limo with Massachusetts plates were in town on Sunday, inspecting the two boarded-up factories. Miles reflects that this rumor occurs annually, in one manner or another, and speculates that the residents of Empire Falls require some sort of myth of better times to come to get them through the harsh Maine winter. Likening the phenomenon to Elvis sightings in Denney's restaurants, he also reflects that the locals refer to the summer tourists Massachusetts as *massholes*. The autumn legend of hope always involves an expensive car with plates from Maine's southern neighbor.

As the day progresses Miles' brother, David, comes into the restaurant and begins preparing to take over for the evening shift. David has only one good arm. A practicing alcoholic for many years, David was on his way home drunk from a hunting trip with his buds when he drove his vehicle off a cliff. The truck sailed into the upper branches of some trees, ejected David, and continued its flight to a conclusion that would certainly have been fatal had his hunting vest not snagged on the upper limbs of the tree. Hanging there all night, David was unable to speak and get the attention of another hunter who had staked out under the tree to wait for the dawn. It was not until David's bladder let go in the morning that the other hunter noticed him. David has not had a drink since that incident.

Later, Tick comes in. Avoiding the Silver Fox, her mother's new boyfriend, Tick hugs both Miles and David. The three discuss Martha's Vineyard and Tick tells David about a bookstore that is for sale there. Saying she wants to live there, David encourages Miles to look into the bookstore, but Miles demurs. After their conversation, Miles goes out the back where he encounters Charlene, his evening waitress, smoking a joint in her car and listening to the Rolling Stones. Miles chats briefly with Charlene before leaving her to finish her joint. Charlene says that she is not comfortable smoking it around him because he is "...one of those people who can never completely hide his disapproval."

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

The reader is quickly and deeply ensconced in the small town of Empire Falls complete with the comedic qualities of its real-to-life local characters and the slow misery of it's terminally declining economy. Gone are the days of vital industry and commerce except in the memories and false hopes of some of the residents. Here are the days of stasis. Author Richard Russo's words are rich with wit and symbolism. Events are viewed through the detached and objective lenses of Miles Roby's eyes from the vantage point of the Empire Grill-perhaps the closest thing to a community center in the small town.



Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

Father Mark interrupts Miles as he is contemplating the steeple of St. Catherine's Catholic Church. Miles has agreed to paint the church to save money for the parish. Remembering how he loved to climb as a boy, Miles is now terrified of heights. Father Mark invites him to cookies and coffee in "The Rectum," their private name for the *rectory*, which grew out of Miles' boyhood confusion of the two words. Miles recalls that he had seriously considered becoming a priest in high school and still sometimes wonders if he should have done that rather than wed himself to the Empire Grill. Miles and Father Mark discuss Miles' recent vacation at Martha's Vineyard with Tick and his all-but-final divorce from his wife, Janine. Miles tells the priest that while at the Vineyard, Tick went to mass with him most mornings which they considered a good sign for the self-proclaimed, teenaged agnostic. It seems, however, that Tick tends to associate belief in God with the Mercedes and Lexus' she saw in the parking lot of the church on Martha's Vineyard.

Father Tom, a demented old priest who is living out his last days in the Rectum, suddenly interrupts the coffee and cookie session. Father Tom disrupts the conversation by calling Miles a *peckerhead* and his mother a whore. Father Tom is living out his last days in the Rectum, and may be the only reason St. Catherine's Parish is still operative. Father Mark explains that the Bishop is essentially afraid to let Father Tom-whose favorite word is *peckerhead*, but who knows far worse epithets-out of "St. Cat's rectory" where he has lived for 40 years, lest he might do even more damage to the Ecclesia. Father Tom has already driven several prisoners to Episcopalianism and agnosticism. When Miles asks where Father Mark might be sent when St. Cat closes, he replies that he believes the Diocese is "not through punishing me." It seems that Father Mark, who has a PhD. in Judaism and used to hold a teaching position in Massachusetts, is something of a rebel. Father Mark and some other activists once attacked a nuclear sub with ball peen hammers. The activist thought it was symbolic, but the military thought it was treason, and that put some Church leaders in a rather awkward position in their efforts to save their errant priest from the inevitable firing squad. Later on a call-in radio show, he advised a gay young man to maintain a loving, monogamous relationship, regardless of his sexual orientation. This did not fly well with the Church, so Father Mark flew to Empire Falls.

Miles visits the house he grew up in on Long Street for a nostalgic look back at the past. The house is ramshackle affair with scars where the porch, which was already deteriorating when Miles lived there, once stood. Miles' father was something of a drunkard who made his living as a house painter. Even though he hated to paint his own house, he had arranged with the owner for reduced rent in turn for keeping the house painted. To get back at the property owner for having to do such an onerous chore, he painted the house with whatever dribs and drabs he had left from his other projects without regard to color. As a result, Miles grew up in a multi-hued abomination, referred



to by his friends as "The Joke House." A few minutes after he arrived at his former abode, a young policeman, apparently new to the force, because he did not know Miles, pulls up in front of his car. Playing grownup cop, the policeman gives him a bad time over a recently expired registration plate. Jimmy Minty, apparently a more senior cop, pulls up in his red Camero and calls the young cop aside. When the young cop returns to Miles' car, he is friendlier.

Miles goes next to the Department of Motor Vehicles temporarily housed in the guesthouse at the old Whiting mansion since the City Hall dome caved in last winter during an ice storm. Seeing Mrs. Whiting sitting in the office of the Planning and Development commission, Miles views it as something of an oxymoron in the decaying town of Empire Falls. Francine Whiting is the chairwoman of the commission. Not feeling up to going through a *State of the Grill* exercise, Miles waits until his business partner is distracted before slipping into Motor Vehicles Spotting Jimmy Minty again as he drives up in his Camero Miles reflects on the thought that Minty is not one of his favorite Empire Fallers. Although they apparently grew up together, Miles seems to think of him with some trepidation. Miles enters into a conversation with Marcia, the DMV clerk, about how the state of Maine changed the picture on the license plates from a lobster to a chickadee because the lobster looked like a cockroach. Miles pretends he remembers Marcia's name but actually read her nametag. On the way out of DMV, Francine Whiting, who is on the phone, ambushes Miles and orders him into the Planning Office with a hand gesture.

Before sitting down, Miles looks around for Timmy, Francine's attack cat, who loves to draw Miles' blood. Francine puts her hand over the mouthpiece and assures Miles that she left Timmy home. Miles is still cautious however, because he is partially convinced that the vicious cat has supernatural powers and can materialize at any moment for the sole purpose of maiming him. As he waits for Francine to get off the phone, he gazes with some irony at a three-dimensional model of the town of Empire Falls. So stylized, he hardly recognizes it. The streets are clean and lined with neat trees, the factories are still neat and new, and the river is blue. Miles chuckles at the notion that the only time the Knox River was blue was when the Whiting textile mill was dumping dye into it. In short, the model in the Planning Office represents a circa-1959 Empire Falls, and is idealized beyond even its most pristine reality. Miles reflects that the model obscures the truth: that the town's wealth and vitality has been bled dry by four generations of a single family. Rather than discussing the *State of the Grill* as Miles had feared, Mrs. Whiting launches into a philosophical diatribe about power, will and wealth, concluding that essentially will *is* power.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

Miles is developing not so much as the principal character in Russo's *Empire Falls*, as a metaphor for the town itself. In essence, Miles *is* Empire Falls. Chapter 2 is rich with symbolism, nostalgia, foreshadowing and characters. Father Mark represents the intrusion of modern mores, customs and values into the stayed and rigid format of the town of Empire Falls. After all, a priest who attacks nuclear submarines with a ball peen



hammer and counsels homosexuals to live in loving monogamy is hardly a stereotype of the taciturn Maine rustic. There is a sense of foreboding about Jimmy Minty, suggesting some sort of uncomfortable incident between Miles and him in the past. From Miles' reaction, it is something to do with Minty doing something unsavory, and Miles feeling disgusted about it. It is similar to the way he feels about the Silver Fox. There may be a clue in the revelation that Miles was considering a clerical career even in late high school; it is as if he is observing the characters of Empire Falls from higher moral ground.



Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Meet Janine Roby, Miles' soon-to-be-ex-wife and soon-to-be Mrs. Silver Fox. She is a woman with a robust libido who did not discover it until she started cheating on her husband. The Silver Fox showed her what an orgasm is and found her "secret spot," as she calls it. Janine is now lugging around a huge resentment for Miles who never, in all those years, showed her how to come. Janine is already becoming irritated by some of her future husband's habits-such as guessing her weight in public and stenciling *The Silver Fox* on his SUV-but is resolved to correct those issues as soon as she becomes half owner of the SUV and sole owner of its owner. Janine is convinced that her mother died without ever experiencing the joys of climax-that she "*went before she came*"-and is considering replacing the Silver Fox stencil with one that says, "*I came before I went*" in its stead. Janine comes into the Empire Grill to find Walt Comeau, her Silver Fox, taking a trouncing in a gin game from Horace Weymouth. "To Janine one of life's crueler ironies was that Miles, who could often locate the Queen of Spades two ticks into a game of Hearts, hadn't been able to find her spot in twenty years of marriage." As she was leaving the grill, Janine announced to David Roby in the back that she was going to change a \$50 bill from the till, playing on her status as a former employee and a newly crowned (i.e. since she started doing aerobics at Walt's health club) beauty queen. Charlene intercepts her, however, and makes change for her. Janine notes that "Charl," the waning beauty queen, is beginning to look a bit long in the tooth and that the college boys who come through from time to time don't spend as much time trying to look down her shirt as they used to. Philosophically, however, she realizes that she isn't exactly young herself, and has only a short time until the luster and excitement of her newly aerobicized body, and her newly discovered secret spot, begin to wither.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

Janine Roby represents another shortfall in the life of Miles a good man who seems to have failed to reach for success, primarily for kind reasons. Miles quit college to be with his dying mother, although she opposed the idea. Truncating his academic career led him to the seemingly dead-end job of managing the Empire Grill. Miles' inclination toward the priesthood may explain his lack of sexual ambition with Janine. Janine, for her part, now hates Miles for the neglect-or at least pretends too. Janine is, however, very anxious to marry the Silver Fox, almost as if she is desperate to consummate the relationship before she wakes up from her daze of sexual bliss. Already disenchanted with her choice of a new mate, Janine is confident that she will control him completely once wed.



Part 1, Chapter 4

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

Tick is in art class at Empire Falls High. Mrs. Roderigue, her art teacher, is a very structured woman believing, apparently, that creativity flows from regimented order. Mrs. Roderigue assigns students to various worktables distinguished by the names of colors. There are no actual representative colors at the tables, but students are expected to remember which table has been named Blue, which one Red, etc. Candace Burke, a complete airhead, is Tick's neighbor at the Blue Table. Complete opposites, Tick is a fast-track student who is taking art because she likes art while Candace is a low achiever who takes art because it a class that is impossible to fail. Candace has stolen an Exacto knife occupying her time in class openly carving the name of her current boyfriend, Bobby, in the back of her chair. The theft of the Exacto knife caused something of a one-day crisis in the school, which has become an unsolved mystery. Bobby may be real, or merely a figment of Candace's truncated imagination. Candace suddenly becomes alarmed that Tick is almost finished with her assignment-to paint her most vivid dream-while she hasn't even started. "Oh-my-God, oh-my-God..." exclaims Candace, "...help me. What is my most vivid dream?" Tick, of course, is not privy to any of Candace's dreams, never mind her most vivid one. Tick's most vivid dream involves her holding a snake and she is trying to capture that image in Mrs. Roderigue's art class. The thought of working on her assigned art project leaves Candace's cavernous head as quickly as it seems to arrive there Candace drifts off into a diatribe about Bobby who is suppose to be in jail and whether she should still love him or find somebody else until he gets out.

Candace is far more interested in boys and the social scene than art. Tick endures her never-ending monologue of who is dating whom, who loves whom and which girl just dumped which guy and *visa versa* (or in some cases *versa visa*, since Maine is so close to Canada) with patience and trepidation. Tick knows that Candace eventually will get around to her own romantic (or lack thereof) involvements. Tick broke up with Zack Minty, son of the Jimmy Minty, the policeman with whom her father had a passing encounter last chapter, just before summer break. Since she can no longer hang out with Zack and his football buddies, Tick has been more or less relegated to the *Lepers' table*" in the school cafeteria. The administration at the school did not want to let Tick take art at first, because she's fast-tracked and art would require that she go to lunch when the rest of the fast trackers were in chemistry class. Tick convinces them, however, that she really doesn't mind eating lunch alone in the cafeteria off schedule- and secretly prefers it to the alternative of the *lepers' table*. While reminiscing about Zack, how poorly he treated her, and why she dumped him, Tick recalls a more pleasant encounter during her vacation with her dad, Miles, at Martha's Vineyard during the summer break. Donny was a shy boy, also caught up in the separation and divorce of his parents. Like Tick, no one had bothered to ask with which parent he preferred to live; and, like Tick, he would have preferred to live with his father than his mother. The difference was that Donny's father was moving far away with a new wife. The young



couple had a tender and shy romance, holding hands while watching the sunset, but never venturing as far as a kiss-something Tick now regrets. By comparison, however, she has no desire to reunite with Zack. Zack, however, apparently has other plans, and when Candace brings up the Zack issue, Tick divines that Zack has put her up to it-wanting to reconcile.

While Candace goes on and on about this and that boy, a boy named Justin interrupts her from the other end of the table. "What Candice," he asks, "...you say you want to make out with John?" John Voss, who also sits at the Blue Table never speaks and seldom even looks up. John is an odd ball, dressed in thrift-store clothes, and sporting a homemade haircut. Justin pretends to be able to hear John Voss' thoughts, and acts as interpreter for him. "*John is to Justin as Tick is to Candice.*" Justin says that John wants Candice to come over to his house after school-that he has something he wants to show her, the implication being that it is something naughty. Candice responds with a resounding, "You Asshole!" that got the attention of the entire class, including Mrs. Roderigue. Candice mumbles an apology, and then rolls her eyes when Mrs. Roderigue scolds the Blue Table. Candice finally gets around to her real agenda, telling Tick that Zack really loves her and hinting that he wants to get back together with her. Candace assures Tick that Zack has changed over the summer, to which Tick responds that she has changed too, and doesn't like him anymore. The shock at hearing such astounding news-that a girl like Tick would not jump at a chance to reunite with her former football hero boyfriend-so startles her that she slices her thumb to the bone with the Exacto knife and pierces the serenity and insanity of art class at Empire Falls High with a mega-decibel scream.

Blood splatters everywhere, including some on Tick's snake. Candice drops the Exacto knife, which takes up residence between Tick's feet. In the hubbub of Mrs. Roderigue administering first aid, and calling in the principal to oversee the situation, no one notices that Tick passes out with her head on the Blue Table. As she is losing consciousness, Tick goes through intense waves of empathetic pain, apparently a familiar personal reaction in the presence of injuries to others. When Tick awakens with her head on the table, Mrs. Roderigue and the principal are explaining that she fainted, and she sees the Exacto knife. As they help her up to help her to the nurse's room, Tick picks up the knife and stashes it in her backpack. The last thing she notices as they trundle her away is an expression on Mrs. Roderigue's face that suggests she does not like Tick's snake.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

We gain deep insight into her psychic in this Tick's definitive chapter. Tick, her father, Miles, and Father Mark are emerging as a small cabal of relative normalcy within the colorful milieu of the eccentricities of Empire Falls' other oddball characters. We also gain an insight not only into the absurdity of the Empire Falls High School art program, but also into the general decline of the humanities in public schools. Mrs. Roderigue emerges as the stereotypical insensitive, hidebound, bureaucratic token that is paid to the notion of creativity and free thought in cookie-cutter public schools enamored to



distraction of the technical trades. Tick seems to be almost floating above the circumstances and action in Empire Falls, a naïve observer, as it were, of both the town and of her own life. Tick seems a part of another world peopled by beings that are more sentient. These sentient beings have more control of their own destinies than others do in Empire Falls, yet they have become trapped nonetheless. There is some heavy symbolism in the painting of Tick's snake -her most *vivid* dream-but it is not yet clear what meaning it entails. Often, snakes and serpents in art are phallic symbols, and that might be the case here. Snake symbolism would fit in the context of the discussion and thoughts of boys, but seems incongruent with Tick's personality as thus far developed. The Exacto Knife is foreshadowing of something to come-perhaps as evidence of her complicity in Candice's accident or some crime to come-but that symbolism is not yet clear.



Part 1, Chapter 5

Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

It may be the Whiting family that is most noted for its peculiarities in Empire Falls, but the Roby clan has a few loose tethers to reality as well. Miles' father, Max, is a character of the lowest order; one of those fellows with no obvious redeeming social values, but who manages to entertain nonetheless. Seeing his father sitting on a park bench on his way to work at the Empire Grill, Miles picks him up with an invitation for coffee and a doughnut at the Doughnut Shop. This is Max's favorite establishment, outside of the local taverns, of course, because of the smoking policy. That policy is that anyone can light up any time anywhere in the establishment without regard to those around him; and Max seems to be one of those persons "...who took particular pleasure...in knowing that other people had to breathe his air when he was done with it." This is only one aspect of Max's slovenly indifference to the world and people around him. Max appears to focus completely on his own misery, convinced that he is in his perpetual state of want because he is a victim of everything that happens to him. Even with his clothes and face unshaven, he and everything around him becomes sugar coated when he eats sugarcoated doughnuts. Max collects small pieces of doughnut in his three-day beard, and refuses to remove them at Miles' constant urgings. Max thinks that next to Max, Father Tom looks positively elegant. Max believes that Miles is doing a poor job of supporting him in his old age, and should be bestowing gratuities and professional opportunities on him so that he could hie himself out of Empire Fall, down to Florida where he could sit in the sun all day. Miles does hire him to wash dishes at the Grill from time to time, but the old man wants to work out front where he can mingle with the customers. Max is a lousy, inattentive dishwasher, and Miles feels sure his presence among the paying customers would be the death knell of the Enterprise Grill.

Officer Jimmy Minty pulls up to the doughnut show as Miles and Max talk about why Miles will not give him a bunch of money to go to Florida. Jimmy announces his presence to all by driving into the side of the building with his red Camero. There have been just too many encounters with his old neighbor in the last couple of days to be coincidental and Miles is beginning to feel harassed. Jimmy has had a habit since childhood of pointing out to Miles how superior his toys are to others. Jimmy quickly makes a comparison between the Camero and Miles' rusted old Jetta suggesting that Miles be careful lest someone on the force mistake it for a *drugmobile*. That, apparently, is a car of so little value that a drug dealer would not be upset if it was confiscated. Jimmy takes Miles outside for a confidential talk suggesting he warn his brother that the cops are cracking down on drugs and that he should take care of that marijuana that "everyone knows he's growing" out at his lodge. Miles takes exception to the comment and tells Minty to back off. Cautiously, Minty asks about Tick and his agenda becomes clear to Miles; he is here as an emissary for his son Zack, trying to get Miles to intervene and get her to take Zack back. In no uncertain terms, Miles' impresses upon Jimmy the fact that he is to stop meddling in Tick's business and that his footballish son is to keep his distance. The thing that really sends Miles over the edge, though, is when



Minty makes a gratuitous statement about Miles' mother, who screamed her way to a cancerous death from the top floor room of the house next to the Minty's-screams that nearly everyone in town could hear. It is clear that Miles holds a deep resentment for the townsfolk and other members of his family who abandoned his mother during her torturous death throes, while he surrendered his college career and future on the altar of maternal loyalty against the vigorous protestations of the dying woman. Miles still loves his mother deeply and resents syrupy comments from those who never really knew her.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

Max, Miles' father, may personify the self-focused, somewhat wacky and defiant nature of the community itself-a legacy, no doubt passed down to the whole town through many generations of Whitings. Max seems to be the antithesis of Miles' mother whom Miles remembers as a tolerant, self-sacrificing and saintly woman. Surely, her memory is an active participant in the exclusive Empire Falls Cabal of Sanity, which includes Miles, Father Mark, Tick, and to some extent David, now that he is sober.

The whole Minty clan is taking on a bigger and more significant role in *Empire Falls*. Zack, apparently, is not dealing well with being dumped by Tick. Zack is a small-town football personality, a high-status position in this rural environment, accustomed to preferential treatment and getting what he wants. Already, Zack has enlisted or drafted, the services of Tick's art table partner, and his father, a senior policeman on the Empire force, to try to pressure Tick back into his arms. Tick, however, has this serious puppy love thing going for the shy dweeb she met at Martha's Vineyard; someone who displays the very un-macho characteristics of intelligence, sensitivity, insight and understanding. When this is revealed to Zack, he is unlikely to take it lightly. This chapter may be a serious foreshadowing-or at least a foreboding-of ugly things to come *Vis a Vis*, Zack's future contact with Tick.



Part 1, Chapter 6

Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

It is Thursday night at the Empire Grill where Tick and Miles are having their traditional dinner together, now that Tick's parents are separated. Thursday is International Night at the Empire and, although Miles was skeptical at first, David, in his role of always trying to push Miles forward into new ventures, talked him into it. Notwithstanding his initial skepticism, International Night has proven quite successful, even drawing in repeat trade from the nearby college. Tonight is Chinese Night and David has put together a tasty mess of twice-cooked noodles with scallops in *Hoisin* sauce. Roger, the second fry cook who has been out on a bender since Miles returned from Martha's Vineyard, is cynical about such culinary extravaganzas, insisting you should cook noodles until they were done the first time, and that it made no sense to go off and fight a world war, then come home and start cooking stuff in *Hoisin* sauce. Roger did not make a distinction between the Japanese, whom we fought in the Second World War, and the Chinese, whom we did not. Tick is picking at her food, rearranging it on the plate so it appears as if she has actually eating something. This trick seems to work with her father-more likely he ignores it to prevent confrontation-but does not escape the stern attention of Charlene, the fading beauty-queen waitress whom Miles busted smoking a joint before shift in a previous chapter. Charlene has assumed a mantle of authority in the Grill and does not hesitate to express her opinion in the second person directive voice to customers, bosses and bosses' children alike. She stops by the table to give Tick a lecture on nutrition and let her know she's not pulling any wool over *her* eyes by pushing the food around on her plate. Miles reminisces about his young man's crush on Charlene, who got married just before he went away to college, and remarried by the time he came back.

Tick is convinced that Mrs. Roderigue does not like her snake. The Nazi-like art teacher spans two generations at Empire Falls-she taught Miles as well-and she has not changed a bit over the years. The School District periodically sends her back to college to learn updated modern techniques-presumably in teaching as well as art-but she always returns proudly proclaiming that she remains untainted by college learning. Tick is confused. If Mrs. Roderigue does not like her snake, she will get a poor grade. If she *does* like it, it means her painting is bad. Miles tries to reassure Tick that any animosity Mrs. Roderigue may hold toward Tick is directed at Miles who, as a past member of the School Board, has tried to have her fired several times. He observes, however, that it is impossible to get a teacher fired unless he or she molests a child. As they are involved in a discussion of who can and who cannot keep secrets, Janine enters the grill. Janine dispatches Tick to the car in the parking lot so she can engage Miles in conversation. Miles begins the conversation by commenting that Janine was somewhat rough on Tick, the way she sent her off to the car with a sarcastic remark. The mother defends herself, however, noting that Miles and his brother tend to spoil Tick. The couple goes on for a while, discussing the things married people might discuss. Miles reflects on how they must appear to Tick, sitting out in the car, watching her parents in the booth, leaning



toward one another so others would not hear them. It becomes apparent that Janine is having second thoughts about the Silver Fox. Janine challenges Miles saying he never loved her. Rather than responding defensively, Miles reflects that in a very fundamental way, he had not. The conversation ends with Miles encouraging Janine to quit beating herself up and, if she loves the Silver Fox, and he makes her happy, to go ahead and marry him. She thanks him, saying that she just wanted Miles to tell her she was not a horrible person. When he responds with, "I never said you were a horri...", she interrupts with, "That's just it, Miles, You never said anything."

After Janine leaves, Miles and his brother get into a conversation about their father and the business. They talk about the possibility of Tick moving in with Miles in the apartment above the Empire Grill, but discard the notion due to the practical matter of space. Once the divorce is settled and the house sells, Miles might be able to swing something else. David is always pushing Miles to advance in his life and Miles resents it. With a Red Sox game on the TV in the background, the brothers wander into a conversation of many topics, punctuated by moment's when something hopeful-but ultimately disappointing-happens in the baseball game. They talk about the bookstore in Martha's Vineyard, David proposing, Miles demurring. Miles tells David about his conversation with Jimmy Minty and the pot at David's lodge. David broaches the subject of getting a liquor license-or at least one for beer and wine-to increase restaurant cash flow, but Miles demurs again, claiming Mrs. Whiting would never go for it. David then brings up the idea of partnering with Bea, Janine's mother, who is fond of Miles and already has a liquor license. David points out that Bea owns the building her tavern is in, so that Mrs. Whiting would have no hold over him. Miles is still clinging to the hope that Mrs. Whiting will keep her promise and will the restaurant to Miles, and besides, he feels he owes her for the help she gave him in college. David says that his mother is the one he should be beholdng to-and that she would not want to see Miles managing the Empire Grill at 42. Miles bristles at the suggestion that he is shortchanging Mom in the gratitude department and tells David to more or less take a hike when it comes to his business and personal decisions. David's parting shot is that he made a deathbed promise to Mom that he would look after Miles-whom she used to refer to as "my little scholar."

Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 reveals a good deal of detail and nuance about Miles, Janine, Tick and David, while continuing to weave the intricate tapestry that is Empire Falls. Tick hates her step-father-to-be and refuses to dine with him. She comes to the Grill on Thursday nights when her mother is busy at the Silver Fox's fitness club. Tick would much prefer to live with her father, viewing her mother's relationship with the Fox as rather vacuous. It is also clear that Janine has some lingering feelings, if not for Miles, at least for their relationship. In this and past chapters, much has been made of both Janine's new sexuality, and her former obesity. Janine is critical of Miles' poor sexual performance, but does not seem to have considered the possibility that her own personal appearance and personal habits may have contributed to his lack of desire. David keeps pushing Miles to broaden his professional horizons, and three options come to light in this



chapter: the Martha's Vineyard option; the liquor license option for the Empire Grill; and the partnership option with Bea, Janine's mother, who owns a local tavern. The big mystery remains, however, of what Mrs. Whiting will do with the Empire Grill and the rest of her fortune when she dies, and more intriguing, what strings will be attached to her largess.



Part 1, Chapter 7

Part 1, Chapter 7 Summary

Max Roby is sitting in Bea Majeski's tavern when Horace Weymouth, the local scribe, walks in. Horace doesn't really want to talk to Max but an innate sense of courtesy compels him to go across the bar to sit with him. Max works all sorts of not-subtle games to cadge beers and cigarettes out of both Horace and Bea. Max, true to character, is insulting and gross in personal habit, making grim jokes about the fibroid cyst on Horace's forehead and returning from the john with "evidence of hasty urination" staining the front of his pants. The only reason Bea tolerates Max is because she is deeply fond of Miles, her son in law, and thinks her daughter, Janine, is stupid to throw him over for the likes of Walt Comeau, the Silver Fox. She describes Miles as the sort of man "...you could love without loosing your self respect." The conversation between Max and Horace segues into talk of Florida, where Max longs to go-and blames just about everyone for his not being there. Max claims to be an expert on Key West, because he was there one time, and claims to have been a drinking buddy of Ernest Hemmingway. Horace points out that Hemmingway killed himself before Max was in Florida causing the conversation to turn to suicide. That prompts Max to comment that the richest man in Central Maine-none other than C.B. Whiting-also blew his brains out 23 years ago.

Once Horace leaves the tavern, Bea eighty-sixes Max who goes back in the alley to pee on the building. Feeling refreshed, he walks across town to the cemetery where he stands for a long time at the foot of his wife's grave. Max's wife died while he was in Florida cavorting with a fast woman. By the time he comes out of his meditative trance, he has to pee again, which he intentionally does on C.B. Whiting's grave-something he apparently does often. Walking away he notices a monument on top of Charlie's headstone as if it is guarding him-or making sure he doesn't go anywhere. The monument is what appears to be a stone cat. Max does not look closely enough to see that it is breathing.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Analysis

This chapter gives some more insight into the makeup of the characters Horace and Max, and introduces Bea Majeski, who has been referred to only in the third person up to this point. The hilarious though haunting ending, however, raises all sorts of speculation in the reader's mind. Obviously, the stone cat that is actually alive is Timmy, Francine's attack cat, and raises the question that the cat may actually be the reincarnation of C.B. Whiting-now *totally* under Francine's control. It also leads to speculation that the welfare of this cat after Francine dies-a cat which viciously attacks Miles at every opportunity-might somehow be tied into her bequeath to Miles of the Empire Grill, or even his inheritance of the old lady's fortune.



Part 1, Chapter 8

Part 1, Chapter 8 Summary

Flash back to Miles' childhood. Miles is nine years old and his mother has quickly gathered him up and trundled him off for a week's vacation on Martha's Vineyard. Miles' father is gone, which is not unusual, as he is often shooting off to one place or another-sometimes Florida-to carouse and paint houses. Max is a terrible house painter and particularly likes Florida during the season because, even though he paints peoples' windows shut, they are afraid to fire him because the next painter they hire might be even worse. Max even argued that he was doing Grace and Miles a big favor by going off on the prowl for these extended periods because, although he was not sending any house-painting money home, there was one less mouth for Grace to feed with her salary from the Empire Shirt Factory. Miles has just discovered baseball and, although he is deathly afraid of the ball itself-and runs from it when it comes at him-he managed to make one heroic, game-saving catch the summer before-totally by accident-and has become somewhat drunk with the ambrosia of accolades and praise from his teammates. Thus, Miles is a reluctant sojourner to Martha's Vineyard. Once there, Grace, his mother, and he ensconce themselves in a cottage in the shadow of the big, fancy, and expensive lodge. Miles entertains himself by throwing up pop flies on the beach, then chasing after them. Miles settles into the pleasant condition of being his mother's sole companion-at least during the daytime and evening-and develops a craving for steamer clams at a local, economical diner called the *Thirsty Whale*. Grace is a stunning, beautiful woman of 30 years and attracts considerable attention from the male residents of the Vineyard, which she clearly enjoys, but then deflects with a flash of her wedding ring. When they first arrived at the Vineyard, a suave grey-haired man, who introduced himself as Mr. Mayne, met them at the dock and took them and their baggage to their cottage. Mr. Mayne was kind and friendly taking an interest in Miles' interest in baseball when he spied the boy's mitt. At one point Miles asked his mother, "Are we waiting for someone," and his mother responded simply, "Why do you ask that." Miles had never been on a vacation before without his father, so he suspected they were waiting for Max to join them. Nonetheless, he was not disappointed that Max was not there; enjoying his mother's attention and company in the absence of his reprobate father.

The days pass in a kindly, maternal fashion for Miles until Mr. Mayne-now Charlie-meets Grace and Miles in the dining room of the upscale lodge. Grace has bought a new white dress. The encounter with Charlie Mayne appears to be random but as it turns out, the encounter was clearly staged. Somewhat jealous of his mother's time and attention he now has to share with Mr. Mayne, Miles whines that he wants steamer clams, but they are not on the menu. Charlie orders him Clams Casino with the declaration that Miles is a boy who is going to learn to appreciate fine things. Charlie also tricks him into eating escargot, which he likes but does not learn until later are snails. There has been a rash (pun intended) of poison ivy infections at the Vineyard this summer, and both Miles and his mother have been affected. Admonished not to scratch and squirm, Miles found that



part of dinner is excruciating. After dinner, Charlie piles mom and son into a fast yellow sports car for an exciting ride over curving roads to a hidden beach where a lot of people are making out in cars. Grace releases Miles to go down to the beach without supervision. Miles' main object is to find a place where he can pull down his trousers and scratch his poison ivy until he bleeds with ecstasy. Once over the dune, however, he sees the shore is lined with fishermen casting into the surf. Miles watches one man catch a big silver fish, then returns to the sports car. As he is coming up the beach, Miles sees his mother with her head resting on Mr. Mayne's shoulder.

The next morning, Miles is in a testy, pouty mood, and does not quite know why. Miles is a bit miffed at Mr. Mayne for tricking him into eating snails and, although he likes the man and finds him powerful and interesting, he is mad at him. Miles feels that his mother is tiring of his company, and is replacing him with Mr. Mayne. While contemplating this, he hears his mother retching in the bathroom-something he has heard for several mornings in a row. When they arrive at the beach for their last day in the sun, Charlie Mayne quickly joins them delivering a tube of poison ivy medicine that he explains he had to drive to a neighboring town to get. Grace is ecstatic with the gift and, although it feels really good, Miles determines that he will not allow himself to enjoy it because it came from Mr. Mayne. As Grace is applying the cream, Miles notices that she is putting it on a spot on her upper thigh that he had not noticed before. Charlie invites the mother and son to dinner again, at a different fancy restaurant called the *Cock of the Walk*. Miles' jealousy increases because his mother accepts the invitation without first consulting him. Miles insists that he wants steamer clams at the *Thirsty Whale*. Charlie says, okay then, steamer clams it will be, even though they are not on the menu at the *Cock of the Walk*. Later that afternoon, Grace comes out of the shower in her robe, preparing for their dinner, and Miles unloads on her. Miles does not want to go to dinner with Charlie; he wants it to be an evening with just he and Mom. Miles says they were having fun until *he* showed up, and she retorts that she has been having fun *since* he showed up. Obviously, upset by seeing his mother in the semi-intimate pose with Mr. Mayne the night before, Miles threatens to "tell Dad." Grace responds in anger that he will have to wait until he gets out of jail. Grace reveals to her son that his father has been arrested for being a *public nuisance*. Grace explains that this is not the first time, that occasionally her husband becomes a public nuisance when he grows tired of being a private one. Grace continues doing her makeup in preparation for the night out and tending to her poison ivy rash. During the argument Miles mother "...propped one foot up on the kitchen chair to apply the ointment, and when she put one down and the other one up, her robe gaped and Miles caught a dark glimpse of what he knew he was not supposed to see..."

When Grace went to change into her white dress, Miles decides to punish her by running out onto the beach to catch pop flies. Miles resolves never to be afraid of a hard-hit ball again, to charge right after it. Miles finally understands what his Little-League coach had been telling him, "It doesn't matter if you get hurt." On one particularly vigorous throw, Miles' pop fly goes too far and lands in the waves. Making no attempt to retrieve it from the ocean, he sits down on the sand to pout. Charlie Mayne, who sits down beside him and tries to communicate, interrupts his intentional misery. Miles is having none of it, answering only with pubescent shrugs. In the end, the



boy relents and goes to dinner with Charlie and his mother. Although not on the menu, Miles orders steamed clams and receives a pile suitable for the appetites of three adults. While attempting to devour them all, Grace reminds Miles not to make himself sick. When Miles responds that it will be okay and that he is not the one getting sick in the morning, Charlie Mayne blanches and the table goes real quiet. On one occasion, Miles feels a pang of guilt because he and his mother are sitting in an expensive restaurant with a rich man who drives a yellow sports car and can make steamer clams appear when they aren't even on the menu while his father sits in an Empire Falls jail cell. Then he considers something Charlie said earlier-that everyone deserves a chance to be happy-and decides his dad may be getting what he deserves. Ultimately, Miles takes some comfort that his father is a public nuisance. Miles has always known that he is different from other boys' dads, but he's never had a label for him until now.

The next morning, Charlie drives Miles and Grace to the ferry dock for their trip home. Miles stands at the rail of the boat watching a waving Charlie shrink in stature as the boat pulls away. Charlie paused only in his waving occasionally to scratch his forearm. Miles feels sorry for him left alone on the island, "...with no ointment, with nothing to relieve his suffering." When Miles sees a man on the ferry wearing a Red Sox hat, he realizes that he forgot his treasured mitt. Miles could see it in his mind's eye on the nightstand next to his bed back in the cottage.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Analysis

This final chapter of *Part 1* is rich with love, pathos, subtle metaphor, double *entendre*, and symbolism. Portrayed is the work of a master storyteller who draws upon a deep and classical understanding of the nuances and emotional potential of the English language to express complex yet contemporary thoughts and images.

Mr. Russo has already established Martha's Vineyard as something of a *Xanadu* for his characters from Empire Falls. Russo codifies that notion in Chapter 8 with this blast from Miles' past. The astute reader may suspect that the mysterious Mr. Mayne is none other than C.B. Whiting. Charlie's visage is described as "sad" although he is generally portrayed as cheerful, polite and wise. The manner in which Mr. Russo unveils the affair Grace is having with Mr. Mayne is artful in the extreme; it is never stated, but becomes known through metaphor and symbolism. It is not erotic, yet is somewhat tainted with *taboo* as Miles' accidentally glimpses his mother's pubis-an event that marks the end of innocence for mother and son alike. The poison ivy is a metaphor for misery, leading to at least momentary pleasure and happiness when it is "scratched to an ecstasy" that also draws blood. The appearance of itchy patches on both mother and son represent the discomfort that accompanies a new sense of adventure and freedom and become subtly seductive when they appear on Grace's upper thigh. Grace's affair with Mr. Mayne is confirmed when he scratches his forearm, interrupting his endless waving to the ferry as it-and his hopes of happiness with Grace-sails off into the future. Charlie's pale visage when Miles mentions his mother's morning sickness, pretty much establishes the paternity of the issue she is apparently carrying. *Is this David?* The final symbols of Miles' passage from puberty to whatever it is they are calling what comes



next these days, is symbolized in his changing attitude about baseball. Miles does not mourn the loss of his baseball to the ocean, nor does he react emotionally to the realization that he left his mitt back on Martha's Vineyard. This is neatly summarized in his mind with the previously unacceptable message from his coach about hard-hit balls: *"It doesn't matter if it hurts."*



Part 2, Chapter 9

Part 2, Chapter 9 Summary

Mrs. Whiting summons Miles with the promise of a surprise which immediately raises his suspicions. Mrs. Whiting is not wont to providing surprises without annoying conditions or consequences. Immediately upon arriving at the house on the river that C.B. built, he sees a beige Lincoln in the garage with handicapped license plates. Miles knows the car belongs to Mrs. Whiting's crippled daughter, Cindy. Cindy was born on the same day in the same hospital as Miles and has been in love with him all of her life. At the age of five, she was run over by a mysterious green Pontiac which fled the scene and was never found. The accident not only crippled her for life, but also scrambled her brain a bit, and she has spent most of her life in the state mental hospital in Augusta. Miles has a curious relationship with his wealthy birth mate. Miles' mother has impressed on him since childhood that he must be kind to Mrs. Whiting's daughter because of her misfortune. Grace she does not require that Miles *love* her in an erotic sense, yet she did finagle him into taking her to the prom because no one else would. For his pubescent and adolescent part, Miles was hotly in love with Charlene who even then was slinging hash at the Empire Grill. His love for Charlene was indeed erotic, however, but Grace had explained in an obtuse manner that Charlene was an inappropriate match for her son because, although she was only a few years older than he, she was already a *woman*, while he was still a boy. Miles did not dissuade Grace of her maternal notion by telling her that he was oh-so-keenly aware that Charlene was a woman and spent many hours in masturbatory fantasies of how she might make him a man.

After an uncomfortable reunion with Cindy, in which she expresses her undying love, extorts the promise of a call, and pointedly reveals that she knows he is soon to be divorced, Miles goes to the Gazebo in answer to the tolling of Mrs. Whiting's *attend-to-me* bell. As he enters the Gazebo, Timmy the cat leaps from the screen door where she had been hanging and purring a moment before to viscosly attack Miles and carve out a piece of flesh from the back of his hand. Timmy was the sole survivor of a weighted gunnysack someone had thrown into the river. Apparently, she was so pissed off by that trauma that she feels her mission in life is to shred everything that is not named Whiting. When she was a kitten, everyone believed she was a male because of her aggressive nature but when they took her to the vet to be neutered, they discovered their error. Thus uninhibited by castration, she continues to shred the non-Whiting world. Some in Empire Falls believe she is Old Mrs. Whiting's familiar, a notion even Miles occasionally entertains, in part because of the feline's curious ability to simply appear in a place she was not in before without any evidence of actually *going* there—at least not by any known method of *mortal* locomotion.

Miles' intends to bring up the topic of a liquor license with Mrs. Whiting, something he promised his brother David he would do, but she hijacks the conversation and holds him hostage while he nurses the damage Timmy did to his hand and she treats him to an



uninvited analysis of his character. Mrs. Whiting tells him that all of the catechism classes he attended and his mother's compulsive niceness have corrupted him. Mrs. Whiting warns him that her daughter has returned to Empire Falls because her torch for him burns as brightly as ever and that her return to Empire Falls was prompted by news of Miles' impending divorce. Mrs. Whiting also tells him that Cindy's report that her psyche has undergone a miraculous cure is indeed a figment of her demented imagination. Miles' guilt *vis a vis* Cindy is amplified by the fact that she twice attempted suicide ostensibly because her love for him remained unrequited. Mrs. Whiting informs Miles that the reason he married Janine was out of fear. While he really wanted to marry "...that girl with the knockers that still works for you at the restaurant..." but that since she wasn't available he married Janine to avoid having to marry "...a poor crippled young woman who was suicidally in love with you and whose pitiful devotion would've made your life one long, hellish exercise in moral virtue." Before Miles leaves, Mrs. Whiting outlines the matrimonial options available to him, including Charlene of the knockers and the pitifully devoted poor crippled young woman whose mother's fortune would attend such a union.

After he leaves, Miles heads to St. Catharine's where he finds Max and the senile old priest in conversation out on the porch of the Rectum. Max comes over to the car to talk with his son and notices bits of foam covering the dash and seats and floating in the air. When he asks Miles about it, Miles says it is none of his business. Miles did not want to reveal that he'd left the window open and Timmy had shredded his upholstery while he was talking to her mistress. Max, who tells anyone who will listen that he can still climb like a monkey, says he has been waiting for two hours to help Miles paint the steeple of St. Cat's, but that he won't charge him for the time he waited. Miles chastises the old man for calling Mrs. Whiting late the night before to convince him that they were related through the Robideaux family and that he needed to borrow money to get down to Key West. Mrs. Whiting told Miles that if he called again she would have him arrested. Miles tells his father to forget helping him paint the church then ponders his abiding fear of climbing the steeple to paint it. Miles then fantasizes about climbing to the top of the steeple and just jumping off as a means of getting out of an invitation he made to Cindy, for reasons he does not understand, to accompany him to the Empire Falls homecoming football game.

Part 2, Chapter 9 Analysis

Part 2, laid a pretty extensive foundation for the present based on memories and flashbacks. Readers have a good feel now of who the central characters are this far, but it seems that Russo takes delight in delighting his readers with new, intriguing characters that somehow manage to find and place themselves in the proper places in the mosaic-like story line. Even though Part 2 seems to be segueing more into the present, we expect this intriguing practice to continue. In *Chapter 9* we meet Cindy in greater depth than the elusive mentions of her in chapters past. Timmy the attack cat is exposed as something from hell that escaped the same river that C.B. Whiting rerouted because of a decaying moose. The river, by the way, is back to its old course and habits-that is, depositing trash on the Whiting's carefully manicured lawn and smelling



up the place with the aroma of rotting critter flesh. Mrs. Whiting uses this fact as a metaphor to illustrate to Miles that, like the river, we cannot escape our destined natures no matter how we tamper with divine handiwork. The river is the same river it has always been and poor confused Miles is the same poor confused Miles he has always been. Now, the reluctant *paramour* of the poor crippled rich girl, a new element enters the mix, which is sure to excite his ambivalence to a new and excited state. Could it be that both Miles *and* David are the paternal sons of C.B. Whiting? That Max was a husband of convenience when Catholic Grace became pregnant with Miles?



Part 2, Chapter 10

Part 2, Chapter 10 Summary

While Tick is having her isolated lunch in the empty cafeteria, Mr. Meyer, her principal, interrupts her bringing John Voss in to dine with her. John Voss is the boy from her art class who never speaks, dresses funny and is in the basement of the social pecking order. John has absolutely no friends and is known only for his brilliance with things digital. In a hallway conference, Mr. Meyer tells Tick that he has found someone for her to have lunch with, as if the plan were to assure her of the socializing benefits of communal eating. She knows he is lying—that John Voss is the butt of brutal teasing in the lunchroom and the gesture is simply to remove him conveniently from that untenable situation. Tick has made a study of watching and managing adults who lie to her which is almost all the time. Tick is amazed at how gullible adults seem to think teenagers are, as if simply by being older the kids will accept whatever they say as fact. Tick's tactic is to simply not respond to the lies then watch the adults squirm when they remain un-validated. Ultimately, Mr. Meyer swallows his lie and implores Tick to help ease the suffering of the poor, shunned John Voss, who has seated himself on the other side of the cafeteria with his back to her.

Tick approaches the forlorn kid and tries to make conversation. At first he is rude, saying, "You don't have to talk to me," but eventually warms to Tick a bit. John and Tick find a common intellectual ground each recognizing rational thought processes in the other that are uncommon among modern teenagers—and, for that matter, adults. As their conversation moves onto more familiar ground, Tick learns that her new acquaintance was first abandoned by his father and later by his mother. John lives now with his grandmother who, judging from the boys' appearance, isn't entirely delighted with the situation. While conversing, John is eating something stringy from a plastic container that smells strongly of fish. Tick speculates about how repulsive it would be to kiss a boy after he had been eating something like that.

Tick and John's conversation is interrupted by Zack Minty who saunters in through the cafeteria door that Mr. Meyer forgot to lock on his way out. Tick's jilted boyfriend first assaults and breaks a soda machine looking for a free drink. Frustrated in that unsuccessful enterprise, he then comes over to sit with Tick and John Voss. Tick puts three quarters on the table for Zack to get a soda, but he explains—while rolling one of the quarters across the knuckles of one hand—that he only wanted a *free* soda. When the quarter comes to rest between his thumb and forefinger, he flips it violently across the table to strike a painful blow to the boy eyebrow. As Zack reaches for another quarter to continue the torment, Tick scoops the quarters up and deposits them in a side pocket of her backpack, "...where she hears them click against the Exacto knife she keeps meaning to slip back into the supply cupboard in art class the next chance she gets."



Zack asks Tick if John Voss is her new boyfriend and continues to tease the boy eventually sending him across the cafeteria to sit in isolation so he can "find out why my girlfriend doesn't like me any more." Once in private, Zack asks Tick to go to the football game with him where he will be starting as outside linebacker. In spite of the degrading experiences she suffered at Zack's hands last school year, Tick misses the companionship of hanging with the *in* crowd at school. Rick summarizes in her mind the increasingly degrading experience of being his girlfriend before and speculates that it might happen again. Tick says she *might* go with him though. Tick does not even like to think about the "worst thing" Zack did to her last Spring that perpetrated the breakup, but Zack promised he would never do that again. Tick also notes that he has grown during the summer and has beefed up. Tick speculates that he may have been taking steroids although he had promised her that he never would. While she is contemplating whether she should go to the game or not, Zack yells across to John Voss inviting him to go to the game with him and the guys and to hang out with them later. At first, John does not answer, but finally Zack forces an acceptance out of him. Tick then says she will go if Zack promises not to harass John. The chapter ends with Zack hurling a vicious remark at John Voss about his smelly "pre-chewed" food and leaves the cafeteria with Tick in tow, breathless in paroxysms of laughter. Tick knows that in the "manic phase" he is in now that she can ask him, "Why are you always such an asshole?" to which he responds, amidst peals of uncontrolled laughter, "I have no idea."

Part 2, Chapter 10 Analysis

There is lots of foreshadowing and storyline development in this chapter. Coupled with developments in Chapter 9 some sort of climax is building for the night of the big game: Miles will be there with Cindy, whom he doesn't want to be with; Tick will be there with Zack, who may be on *roids*; and John Voss is thrown in as the joker in the deck. That is a dynamic mix. It will be interesting to see if Russo puts Max and David in the stew as well. Perhaps the most ominous foreshadowing-or rather, the reminder of a previous foreshadow-is the Exacto knife in Tick's backpack. This element dovetails nicely with the ominous mention of the "*worst thing*" that Zack has ever done to Tick.

One other consideration: If it turns out that Miles is the paternal son of old C.B., might he then be doomed to marry Cindy? After all, Whiting men are destined to marry women who will make them miserable. That circumstance, however, would make Roby Cindy's half sister-unless, of course, Francine was playing around too before Cindy was born. It will be interesting to see how Mr. Russo handles this. Of course, it may be all totally false speculation too, but the fact that Mr. Russo's writing makes at least one reader wonder is testimony to his mastery of the craft.



Part 2, Chapter 11

Part 2, Chapter 11 Summary

Janine Roby is sitting in Callahan's practicing her soon-to-be signature, *Janine Louise Comeau*, and thinking ill thoughts about Miles. Her mother, Bea, is changing a keg behind the bar. Janine wants to make sure that she signs her new signature smoothly and in a practiced fashion when the divorce from Miles is final and she can marry the Silver Fox. Janine keeps correcting her thought chain whenever she thinks of Miles as her husband, modifying it to "My soon to be ex-husband." Janine is practicing her signature on a tall stack of cocktail napkins, each of which will hold five versions of her soon-to-be name-three on the back, but only two on the front because of the green Callahan's shamrock logo. Janine is arguing with her mother, who clearly likes Miles a lot, and doesn't think much at all of the Silver Fox. Janine also waxes effusive about her "new life" since she lost 50 pounds and discovered orgasms. Bea tempts her with a bowl of beer nuts, but Janine resists the urge and sends them sliding down to the other end of the bar. Janine intensifies the argument with her mother to take her mind off of food. If she can hold out until her morning high-impact aerobic class and her afternoon low-impact version of the same torture, then with the help of the sex to come later that night she will be able to get through the night without binging on food. Janine's mother says that her daughter has nothing resembling *a new life*, that she is the same old Janine who has just lost some weight. Janine opines that she recognizes only three primal urges: to eat, to fuck, and to kill your pain-in-the-ass mother.

Jeanine argues that Miles is the *Human Rut*; that every thing he does is by rote. Janine recalls an incident shortly after they were separated when she awoke in what had been her and Miles' bed with Walt and Miles is standing in something of a daze at the end of the bed. Janine's first thought was that he had come to kill them but when Miles pulled off his shirt and tossed it toward the hamper, she realized that he had just forgotten the new arrangement and was returning home from the restaurant after a hard night's work. When Janine turned on her light, Miles popped out of his daze, grabbed his shirt and bolted in panic. Janine opines that if the Human Rut had been armed with a knife, the only throat he might have slit was his own. The argument intensifies in volume and pace, as does Janine's frantic scribbling on the cocktail napkins. As Janine insists that she is becoming a new person, her mother says she is full of shit and she can prove it. Just before her daughter jets off to work at the fitness club, she puts her hand over the napkin Janine had been scribbling on and says, "Who's going to work? The woman whose name is on this napkin?" Her daughter responds, "That's right Ma!" Bea then raises her hand to reveal, *Janine Roby, Janine Roby, Janine Roby*.

Part 2, Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter brings out three dynamics that are at play within the character of Janine Roby. Although in denial about it, she is not entirely sure that she wants to leave Miles.



Janinee is not entirely sure there is much below the surface of her soon-to-be husband Walt Comeau. Janine is now driven by a conflict between her newly discovered sexuality and her passion for food. Left unsaid is what might happen when the newness of sex with Walt—who has discovered her secret place—wears off and what life with Miles might be like, now that she has discovered her sexuality, lost weight and become a hottie. The other interesting theme here is Bea's insistence that Janine is still Janine and will not change, which is exactly what Mrs. Whiting was saying to Miles with her metaphor of the river her husband failed to tame.



Part 2, Chapter 12

Part 2, Chapter 12 Summary

"How did the world come to be run by power-mad old women," Miles wonders amidst a discussion with Father Mark in the Rectum's breakfast nook. The conversation begins with comments about the plight of John Voss, whom Miles has just hired as a busboy at Tick's urging. John was abandoned by his parents, one after another, to be raised by a grandmother who was either mean-spirited or desperately poor, or both. Miles has confessed to the Padre that he has come to doubt the goodness of God when Tick told him about the boy's background. Father Mark confesses in turn that he once thought god was like his maternal grandmother. The old lady used to rate her grandchildren on the basis of who loved her the most, then reward them with cash at Christmas depending on her evaluation. The most loving, according to her metrics, received a crisp \$50 bill, while the least loved received a crumpled one-dollar bill. Father Mark always got the crisp fifty, but always felt sorry for the poor child who received only a buck. On one occasion his cousin, devastated by receiving only a dollar, lapsed into frantic tears. It wasn't about the money, but because Grandma didn't think she loved her. To ease her pain, Father Mark confessed to his cousin that, even though he received the crisp fifty, he actually hated the old broad, so her love-weighted system didn't work.

From the breakfast nook, the pair can observe Max and senile old Father Tom engaged in conversation on the porch. Max is not allowed in the Rectum because of his reputation for light-fingeredness. Father Mark does not want the church's artifacts showing up at the local pawnshop. Father Mark and Miles cannot hear what is being said, but Miles thinks he sees the word *peckerhead* forming on Father Tom's lips. Max has finally talked Miles into letting him help paint St. Cat's and in the week he has been on the job he has struck up a close friendship with Father Tom. At first, Miles thought the senile priest had forgotten that he "...held Max in the lowest possible esteem as a blasphemer, a shiftless charmer, a drinker and general ne'er-do-well." In fact, the priest remembers exactly how he felt about Max, but is unclear why he ever objected to those particular attributes. Miles has decided for sure that he is not going to paint St. Cat's steeple. Mild climbed up a few days previously, and was paralyzed by fear-even on the inside. On the other hand, Max-who, Miles has discovered, really does still climb like a monkey-is all for it.

When Miles and Max leave the Rectum and are climbing into the car, Father Mark hands Max some money, to which Max responds with, "Cheap bastard," as soon as they are out of earshot. Miles points out that they are doing the work on a volunteer basis but the information does not faze the self-righteous Max. Miles decides to help Tick who is working the back of the Empire Grill on a busy "Mexican Night" and to give Max a few hours of work bussing tables. Besides, Miles has zero confidence in John Voss and has to promise himself that he will not fire the boy on his first night no matter how big of a mess he makes. Max tries to open the glove box in Miles' car but finds it



locked. Miles says he locked it because he didn't want people who had no business there rifling through its contents. Max decides not to internalize the pointed remark, reaches up behind the dash and does something that makes the door drop open. Miles quickly retrieves a 20-dollar bill he had stashed there and puts it in the breast pocket of his shirt where Max can't get it. Max takes a Martha's Vineyard real estate book out of the box, though, and spies the ad for the bookstore/café that David wants Miles to buy. When he sees the price, Max says, "If I were you...I'd start courting that crippled Whiting girl." After informing his father that this is the reason he never comes to the old man for advice, he makes a point of *not* telling his father that he has a date with Cindy to take her to the homecoming game. Max also says that, "If your mother was still with us, she'd tell you to marry that crippled girl same as me." Miles notes that Mrs. Whiting had used precisely the same tactic-saying what Miles' mother would have wanted-when he'd had a similar conversation with her earlier. At the end of their conversation, Max begins to whistle a tune that Miles eventually identifies as: *Get along home Cindy, Cindy, I'll marry you some day.*"

When they arrive at the Empire Grill, the parking lot is full and they have to park on the street. People are waiting in line for tables. It is the best night the Empire Grill has ever had. Miles expected his father to duck out to a nearby watering hole since he had some money in his pocket but Max chooses to stay and work. Miles' first task at the grill is to start a waiting list for customers wanting to get in-a new experience for him at his struggling eatery. A group of teenagers are occupying the big corner booth. It is Zack Minty and his crowd waiting for Tick to get off work so they can go to a movie. Miles offers them free soda refills if they will free up the booth and move to the counter. Zack responds very politely which really irritates Miles who despises the lad. Miles has chat with Tick in the back. Miles is concerned that she may be getting back with Zack but does not ask outright, figuring she will volunteer the information when she's ready. In the midst of their chat, they notice John Voss standing just inside the door with a tub full of dirty dishes staring at them without sound. Miles overcomes an impulse to scold him. Miles speculates to himself that the boy looks like an android out of a science fiction movie-"...something whose battery had about run out." Miles lets Tick off early so she can catch up with Zack's crowd. Max has also left taking his paid cigarette break the last ten minutes of his shift. Miles takes off his apron and retrieves his shirt from where it was hanging, only to discover that the twenty-dollar bill is missing and that Max has foxed him once again. He reasons that the twenty was really only a little more than he's actually earned on his rush-hour shift.

Part 2, Chapter 12 Analysis

This is a building chapter where the stage is set with foreshadowing for upcoming events. John Voss is emerging from the shadows as a major character-and as a major mystery. Tick is falling back in with Zack and the crowd (remember the Exacto knife is still in her backpack) and Max is hell bent to paint Saint Cat's steeple, still climbing like a monkey at the age of seventy. And, of course, the spectacular revelation of Miles' date for the big game is yet to be revealed to the other characters. No doubt some of these intriguing themes will come to fruition at the game.



Part 2, Chapter 13

Part 2, Chapter 13 Summary

After the hectic and hugely successful night at the Empire Grill, Miles joins Charlene and David at the Lamplighter, one of the few bars that stays open this late and where they are unlikely to encounter Max. Horace Weymouth is there also, probably for the same reason. The trio is celebrating the best night in the history of the grill and its apparently promising future, a rarity in Empire Falls these days. Miles is a bit late because he dropped John Voss off after work. Charlene's first comment to him is "Why on earth did you want to go and hire that comatose boy?" Discussing the boy a bit, Miles reveals the background he has heard from Tick about abandonment, an old, poor grandmother, and smelly food. Miles notes that he dropped Voss off at a ramshackle old house with no signs of habitation. The grandmother apparently forgot to leave a light on for him. Charlene says the only person who had ever been that quiet with her was the guy who tried to rape her in the parking lot behind the grill one night more than 20 years before. Miles recalls the incident and how he fantasized about playing the hero and saving Charlene. As Miles continued to replay the fantasy, however, he kept coming upon the scene later and later, with Charlene in progressive states of undress until he finally found himself feeling jealous of the would-be rapist. Miles abandoned the fantasy when he realized that he and the rapist had in common the knowledge that no woman that beautiful would ever willingly allow them into their bed or person.

David, who has been momentarily absent, returns to the booth just as Charlene is saying that she ought to get John Voss high on one of her joints to loosen him up. David comments that she should be careful about corrupting the local youth because Officer Jimmy Minty had his eye on her. Apparently, Zack's policeman father believes that David is a Marijuana kingpin in Central Maine, and that Charlene is his distributor. Miles presses David about pot at his place in the woods and David tells him to mind his own business. Miles points out that it is his business because of what would happen to the grill if David went to jail. David finally fesses up to a single plant in the basement under a grow light and claims even Jimmy Minty would not get uptight over a single plant. The brothers then get into it over Mrs. Whiting and how she beats up on and manipulates Miles. David rags on Miles about not asking about a liquor license and points out that the Lamplighter, which isn't doing near the business they did that night, will have a healthier gross because they are able to sell wine and liquor as well as meals. David leaves somewhat miffed and Horace Weymouth comforts Miles in the parking lot before he goes home to the Empire Grill.

Part 2, Chapter 13 Analysis

Mr. Russo advances three subplots in Chapter 13: The mystery increases around John Voss, the boy who never speaks. Did his grandmother really forget to leave a light on for him, or is there, perhaps, no grandmother at all? Could it be that the boy has been



totally abandoned; that he is simply squatting in an old abandoned house? And what's up with Jimmy Minty and the big pot obsession he has? Is he trying to groom himself for the Chief-of-Police slot; perhaps willing to sacrifice David and Charlene on an altar of fabricated-or at least grossly exaggerated-charges? But perhaps the most significant theme is what's going on with the Empire Grill. In a town that has been decimated by technology and a world labor market, Miles and David are bringing new money-*outside* money-into the moribund economy of Empire Falls. As this town, which once relied on a strong industrial economy, begins to rely on its secondary economic force, i.e. tourism, businesses that attract out of town money-such as the Empire Grill-will thrive. Those that rely solely on simply passing around local money-such as membership-based fitness clubs and spas-will not. Without the industrial base of well-paying blue and white collar jobs, there simply isn't enough to go around any more. Tourist jobs typically are lower paying service jobs performed by a population with less money to spend on luxury goods and services. Miles is looking good for the future-economically speaking. The Silver Fox is not.



Part 2, Chapter 14

Part 2, Chapter 14 Summary

As with the final chapter in Part 1, this concluding chapter of Part 2 is a flashback to Miles' childhood. In this chapter, Miles is in Empire Falls six years after his Martha's Vineyard adventure, trying to learn to drive from his father. Max is such an irresponsible driver, however, that the court suspends his drivers' license after a bunch of traffic violations and running over the Mayor's daughter's cat. Thus, when he signs up for drivers' ed at 16, he has no idea how to navigate a car. The other kids already knew how to drive, of course, so the drivers' education class was simply no place for someone who didn't know how to drive—at least according to the instructor, who was also the school's baseball coach. During his first lesson, Miles managed to jump a curb and end up in a resident's garage injuring Mr. Brown and several of his key players in the process. Mr. Brown was unable to offer proper instruction to prevent the mishap because he was twisted around with his hand caught between the seats of the car, where he was frantically searching for the seatbelt he had never used until he had Miles for a student. Mr. Brown complained to the then principal Clarence Boneface, who broke into uncontrollable laughter when Mr. Brown described the incident and insisted that Miles be kicked out of drivers' education until he learned how to drive. Mr. Boneface, however, backed Miles, who remained in the class but got a failing grade from Mr. Brown at the end of the term. Mr. Boneface stood up once again for Miles and, for the only time in his career, changed one of his teacher's grades. Apparently, Miles had lost interest in baseball when the Atlantic ate his ball and he forgot his mitt in the cottage. This was, perhaps, not such a bad thing, given his ultimate bonding experience with Mr. Brown, the baseball coach.

Now having passed the class, Miles finds himself with no car to practice with. Mile's mother, who is now working as a personal assistant to Mrs. Whiting, tells Miles that her employer has offered to give him further driving lessons in her new Lincoln. This, of course, means that Miles will be having more contact with Cindy—perhaps more than he wants. Mile's and Cindy's schedules mesh in such a way that they must wait outside the school at the end of the day—fully exposed to the jeers of their classmates—while they wait for Cindy's mother to pick them up in the Lincoln. One day a group of boys drives by mooning the couple. This is unfortunate for the boys, as that was the precise moment the principal stepped out of the school and assumed the manifold moon was directed at him. Miles noticed a strange look come over Cindy's face as the boys' butts and genitals were exposed. On a later occasion, Miles is helping Cindy try to understand the notion of the metaphor; she is particularly bad in English and he is her tutor. Frustrated, Cindy gets miffed and runs off into the woods, leaving her open backpack with Miles. Miles snoops and finds a racy book Cindy is reading about girls at summer camp who are spying on some skinny-dipping boys. One of the boys, Jules, "...was particularly worthy of their attention." "The thing between his legs makes my pussy pucker," says one of the girls. The incident makes Cindy a somewhat more interesting figure in Miles' eyes.



In one of his driving lessons, Mrs. Whiting instructs Miles to drive the Lincoln down on the running track at the school and floor it. With much trepidation, he complies. Ultimately, he loses control and bounces over a berm where they encounter Mr. Brown, the baseball coach who was Miles' original driving instructor. When he sees who Miles is with, however, the seething Mr. Brown is courteous and polite. After the incident, Mrs. Whiting explains that the lesson Miles should learn from the incident was that he took on something he was afraid to do-driving the car fast-and overcame his fear.

Part 2, Chapter 14 Analysis

We get a further glance into what appears to be Miles' father's utterly contemptible character-buying a car so Miles can drive it, then selling it after getting so many speeding tickets that he loses his license before Miles is old enough to use it. His father's rationale: *there are plenty of taverns within walking distance*. Still, Max is painted as such a totally unsympathetic yet pathetic person that one might almost suspect that he will culminate in some great act of self-sacrifice. A betting man might think this will have something to do with his ability to "climb like a monkey," Miles phobia of heights, and the ominous, unpainted steeple at St. Cat's.

Mr. Brown offers some comic relief, while Mr. Boniface appears as another rational person in Empire Falls, similar in some ways to Father Mark, what with his broader view of the world; a view imported from outside Empire Falls. The lesson Mrs. Whiting teaches Miles about facing his fears gives some further insight into her unusual concern for both him and his mother. Is this possibly a displaced maternal concern because C.B. might be his natural father? The arrangement with Mrs. Whiting, of course, places him in the proximity of Cindy who Miles discovers from her reaction to being mooned and her soft-porn literature, has an active and fanciful libido for a young girl. Is Mrs. Whiting playing matchmaker as she appears to be in the episodes from the present? That would put a curious spin on the possible C.B. Whiting paternity, making Cindy Miles' half-brother. This is, however, Empire Falls, and more curious things than incest seem to happen here.



Part 3, Chapter 15

Part 3, Chapter 15 Summary

It is the day of the big homecoming game with Fairhaven High, a *bragging rights* game that Empire Falls has never won. Miles has been having nightmares about escorting Cindy Whiting to this public forum and having to parade with her and her cane up to the top of the bleachers in plain sight of everyone in town. He plans to close the grill early so he can get seats down low, thus minimizing the spectacle. Events predictably intervene, however, and he is late picking up Cindy which of course means that Miles must act out his nightmare in real life. Not only were they at the top of the bleachers, the only seats left when they got there were on the Fairhaven side. Once seated, Cindy declares that she feels just like a schoolgirl and kisses Miles wetly and lingeringly on the cheek. In the midst of this passion, Cindy drops her cane. Gentleman that he is, Miles is obliged to retrieve it for her from ground level. When Cindy exclaims that such carelessness-i.e. dropping her cane-is what comes of passion. Miles retorts that, no, the bite he received from killer-cat Timmy half an hour earlier was what comes of passion. The wound is itching like crazy and reminds Miles of the poison ivy reaction he had at Martha's Vineyard. Cindy tells Miles that she found the cat last week sitting on old C.B.'s headstone in the cemetery.

While retrieving Cindy's cane from beneath the bleachers, Miles runs into Otto Meyer Jr., Tick's principal and a childhood friend of Miles. Miles learns that Tick's snake painting is one of two selected for the state art fair, and that John Voss' egg is the other one that was chosen. Miles expresses surprise that Tick could ever receive positive feedback from Mrs. Roderigue. Mr. Myers tells him that he brought in an objective judge from the university. When Miles returns to the top of the bleachers with Cindy's cane, he finds his date deep into conversation with Officer Jimmy Minty, who commences to brag about his son Zack. Jimmy says Zack is playing a hell of a game in spite of the fact that Fairhaven is kicking Empire Falls' butt. The prolonged three-way conversation-which consists of Jimmy Minty bragging, Miles putting him down with subtle sarcasm, which Jimmy doesn't quite get, and Cindy playing the school girl she has declared herself to be for the day-is interrupted periodically with game updates, each of which puts Empire Falls further behind. Near the end of the half, the Fairhaven quarterback throws a perfect spiral pass way downfield for a score. While the crowd's attention is focused on the beautifully thrown ball, Miles sees Zack Minty-a linebacker-viciously spear the Fairhaven quarterback several seconds after he has thrown the ball. The boy is injured and remains on the turf. One of the officials saw the hit and penalizes Zack. Zack then helps the quarterback over to his bench returning to the field to a standing ovation from the fans for his great sportsmanship. The chapter ends with Miles putting Jimmy Minty down when he brags about his boy's "sportsmanship," and Jimmy complaining that he wants to be friends. The chapter comes full circle when, in the last line, Cindy drops her cane again.



Part 3, Chapter 15 Analysis

Three significant things occur in this chapter, all of which seem to be foreshadowing some events to come. It is not readily apparent, however, just what those events might be.

The angst between Jimmy Minty and Miles bubbles up to the surface barely remaining civil. Miles is sickened by Minty's self-serving ego games, and his defense of his son—possibly on steroids—for the vicious and illegal assault on the Fairhaven quarterback. Ostensibly, Jimmy came up the bleachers to tell Miles that everything was now okay with his brother regarding the rumors of a pot farm, but it is clear his motives are truly elsewhere. Jimmy appears to be sucking up to Miles, perhaps because of his son's infatuation with Tick.

The relationship between Cindy and Miles grows. At one point, Miles admits to a moment of sensuous thought regarding Cindy, but chalks it up to having gone so long without sex. Miles does not hide from the fact, however, that he still lusts after Charlene.

Miles' conversation with Mr. Myers seems to foretell future involvement with the school board. Miles reveals that Mr. Myers is one of the nicest people he has ever known and that they have been allies in their efforts to fire Mrs. Roderigue. There is more to come with Miles and these other two Empire Falls characters.



Part 3, Chapter 16

Part 3, Chapter 16 Summary

Still at the ball game, Janine is fixated on the number *sixty*. It's about all she can think of except how her mother Bea screwed up her planned grand entrance at the new middle-aged beauty queen of Empire Falls. Janine is wearing her new white jeans and halter-top, which showed her miserable hours on the Stairmaster to best advantage. Since she had to come late to the game, she wanted Bea to get seats all the way at the top of the bleachers on the 50-yard line so she could prolong her entrance as long as possible. The best Bea was willing to do, however, after wrestling kegs all morning was one-third of the way up. It is a blustery day and chilly. Bea's first comment is that Janine should put on a sweatshirt because it is cold. Janine denies that she is cold but Bea informs her that her nipples tell a different story.

The reason Janine is fixated on *sixty* is because she has just discovered, by accident, that that is Walt's true age. She thought he was in his forties. The source of her distress is that she was looking forward to at least 20 years of spirited, vigorous sex; but by the time she was sixty, she'd be "humping an octogenarian. Or trying to." While sitting in the stands, she spots the Silver Fox schmuzing with the boys down at field level and, for the first time, notices, "...that thing on his neck. What the hell was that-a wattle." Janine drifts off into a reverie, comparing her soon-to-be-ex-husband Miles to the Silver Fox and, although she has nothing good to say about Miles, she spots a few character flaws in her betrothed as well.

Part 3, Chapter 16 Analysis

This may be the straw that breaks the camel's back. It has been obvious from the onset that Janine is motivated entirely by lust and image in her relationship with the Silver Fox,. Janine is not entirely sure she's making a wise choice trading in steady Miles for exciting-though smarmy-Walt. Will she now be struck by a bold moment of clarity in her estrogen-induced fog? Or, will she go ahead and marry the old fart? Should she try and reclaim Miles? Will she have to compete with the historic beauty Charlene or with Cindy and all of her money?



Part 3, Chapter 17

Part 3, Chapter 17 Summary

Jimmy Minty has a dark and tawdry past and he relives some of it in his mind while parked across from the Empire Grill, fantasizing about beating Miles Roby to a pulp. Over the course of his recollections, Jimmy reveals himself as a manically insecure and bitter product of a twisted and dysfunctional childhood. Jimmy's father was a petty grubber who taught Jimmy that all things are determined by an elite group of human beings who "have the whole thing figured out." This conspiracy of the knowledgeable determines what job one holds, whom one marries, how much money everybody makes, who will die in their wars, and how much rent you will pay. These are the same people who "can't figure out how to get your unemployment checks to you on time." Walter Cronkite was one of *them* back then and it was from watching that newscaster that Mr. Minty Sr. had formed his opinions. "You think you got a say? Think again," the old man said on numerous occasions to his impressionable son. These twisted lessons were complimented by an equally twisted libido. All of his life he had harbored a lustful, masturbatory fantasy for Miles' mother-an image that still arouses him sitting out in front of the Empire Grill in his squad car. He did not hide his fantasy from Miles and once asked if he had ever seen her naked-hoping for a description. Jimmy fantasized frequently about Max meeting an untimely demise so he could take his place in bed next to the object of his ardor. These things did not endear Jimmy to Miles, but Jimmy was too dense to realize it.

While entertaining thoughts of beating Miles Roby to a pulp, Jimmy Minty's loosely tethered mind is distracted by thoughts of his old friend, Billy Barns. Billy was the hockey hopeful of Empire Falls; someone whom every one thought would go to the NHL, but Billy fell short. Billy did go to the University of Maine, however, and invited Jimmy to a wild frat party. The party was a crucial milestone in Jimmy's life, for that is where and when he decided to dedicate his life to law enforcement. Or, more accurately, it was the following morning in the misery of what may qualify as the worst hangover in recorded history. Jimmy, already suffering from severe inferiority, had to drink a six-pack to build the courage up to knock on the frat house door. When he did, a burly brother answered the door with a bare-assed, passed-out girl slung over his shoulder. The girl's panties and pants were pulled down around her ankles and the frat guy was selling sniffs of her genitalia for a dollar a whiff. Jimmy passed on the scratch-and-sniff, but readily accepted a free beer-and apparently many more. He awoke in the morning nude in a bed covered in blood. His first thought was that he had killed someone-probably a girl-and was going to go to prison. After quaking in the corner for a while, however, he discovered that the blood was coming from him; his body was crisscrossed with tiny little cuts. After a while he looked up at the ceiling light fixtures, saw that it is broken and that there were fine pieces of glass all over the bloody sheet. He surmises that only a man with a steel-trap mind-a natural detective-could have figured this out and thus dedicated his life to law enforcement. On the way out of the frat house, Jimmy noted that it was only one of many along Frat Row, all of which looked



pretty much the same. He couldn't remember the name of Billy's Fraternity, but *did* remember that it had three Greek symbols. Seeing the English letters, *Sigma Nu*, and reasoned that that must be three letters *Sig Ma Nu*, in Greek. The natural-born detective failed to deduce that he had gone to the wrong frat party.

Jimmy's son and some other teenagers in Zack's very own Camero are on their way to Fairhaven to celebrate tying the football game-viewed locally as an Empire Falls victory, thanks to Zack's season-ending hit on the opposing quarterback. They plan to get pizza and, no doubt, to gloat a bit. The group interrupt Jimmy's reverie in mid-reminisce. Zack tells his dad that the others in his car include Tick and John Voss. When Jimmy inquires of his son, "How are you and that Roby girl getting along," Zack responds, "Oh, she's being a cunt as usual, pretending she doesn't like me." Jimmy considers correcting his son's language, but decides against it because, "He'd used that word himself, in reference to the boy's mother, who *was* one, and deserved it like most of them did when you came right down to it. He replied instead with, "Well, she wouldn't be her father's daughter if she didn't need to come down a peg or two. Don't take any shit is my advice." Later, Miles shows up at the grill and sits with Jimmy Minty for a moment, apologizing for putting him down at the game earlier. Miles learns that Tick has gone off to Fairhaven with Zack and John Voss, and is not particularly comfortable with that development. Before Miles leaves the squad car, Jimmy Minty goes on a tirade against Miles, the frat boys he met, and all the people whom he (probably correctly) perceives have been looking down on him all of his life. Jimmy tells Miles in no uncertain terms that he includes people like him too. Jimmy says that he-Jimmy Minty-*is* Empire Falls, and that the people who like him are the people who like Empire Falls-not the people who think they're better and want to go somewhere else. Miles does not disagree with him.

Part 3, Chapter 17 Analysis

Virtually dripping with foreshadowing of dark things to come, this chapter shifts the storyline into high gear accelerating toward a climax that promises to be both tragic and comic. The storyline must be comic because Russo seems incapable of writing without wit and tragic because we've got a steroid-hyped meathead, coupled with Tick, whom he calls a *cunt*, with marching orders from his seemingly sociopathic father to not take any shit from her and to take her down a peg or two. The scenario is complicated by the fact that the kids are headed for Fairhaven, which was trouncing Empire Falls until the steroidic meathead took out their quarterback with a mean, intentional late hit. Further, they are accompanied by the mysterious John Voss, who perhaps is being groomed as either a fatality or a hero-or both.



Part 3, Chapter 18

Part 3, Chapter 18 Summary

On Sunday morning after the big game, Miles comes down from his apartment above the Empire Grill to find Buster, the AWOL fry cook asleep with his head on the counter. The man is in the parlance of those who tend to over-imbibe—*tore up from the floor up*. He is filthy, reeking, wounded with various abrasions and with pus leaking out of one swollen-shut eye. Miles was just getting ready to call the newspaper to place an ad for a replacement for Buster, but feels sorry for him, and decides to keep him on. While talking to Buster, Miles is glancing at the front page of the *Empire Gazette*, most of which is consumed with reportage on the big game. Sharing the game—apparently below the fold—is a feature entitled, "*The Way Things Were*," featuring an old photograph of all the workers at the Empire Shirt Factory a year before it closed in 1967. Miles is startled somewhat when he sees his mother in the group along with some other folks he recognizes. The sudden appearance of his mother's visage unsettles Miles and creates a sensation of something powerful impending. It was as if he was standing on a railroad track and could hear the distant rumblings of a locomotive speeding his way. It is not fear, he decides, because he is not stuck on the tracks but something very powerful nonetheless. Miles reasons that the feeling might have been triggered by the fact that his mother is looking off at a slightly different angle than the rest of the people in the picture. It seems to Miles that she may be glimpsing her own mortality. At the end of the line of people is a bearded C.B. Whiting, dressed in a neat three-piece suit. Miles reflects on the coincidence that just yesterday, after the game, Cindy had dragged him on a walk to the cemetery to visit C.B.'s grav, and he had also experienced a similar sensation. While at the cemetery, Miles had also noticed that the marigolds in the urn by C.B.'s grave were wilted and smelled of cat piss while those at his mother's grave—that had been placed there at the same time—were fresh and more pleasantly aromatic. Jimmy Minty cruised by while they were at the gravesite and Cindy mentioned that sometimes "James" brings her to the cemetery to visit her Father's grave.

After his trip to the cemetery with Cindy, Miles goes home but is unable to sleep. He kept having a nightmare about Tick curled up in a fetal position under the bleachers where Miles had gone to retrieve Cindy's cane. At first she appeared to be asleep, but then he realizes she is hurt. The dream upsets him, so he calls Janine to see if she had returned. Janine is sarcastic about the call but also about her sixty-year-old husband-to-be. Before the call is over, Janine sees Tick dropped off outside the house putting Miles' mind at rest. Miles also perceives that Janine is silently sobbing on the phone. Buster asking if he can have a week off to get straightened up before he returns to work pulls Miles from his recollections. Miles tells him not to come back to the grill until his eye has healed. Buster mentions there is "...a strange boy standing outside who says he works here." Miles goes out and calls in John Voss. John is as non-communicative as usual. When Buster leaves, Miles notices that he had set his wet coffee cup down on the *Gazette* and the moisture had ruined his mother's face in the picture. Now that his mother was no longer recognizable, Miles notices a detail in the old photo that he had



missed before and realized that indeed something powerful was approaching. Miles placed the tip of his index finger over the lower half of C.B.'s bearded face and realized from the uncovered part that C.B. was in fact the exciting and irritating Charlie Mayne from Martha's Vineyard.

Part 3, Chapter 18 Analysis

Big revelation here, some more tragic foreshadowing, and some hinky stuff about cat piss in the cemetery. Although astute readers may have already surmised that C.B. Whiting and Charlie Mayne are one in the same, Russo does a good deal of dispelling that notion in the first part of the chapter. After all, the suspicious reader might think, *C.B. is right there in the photograph and, of course, he was the most important man in Empire Falls. Certainly a nine-year-old Miles would have recognized him on Martha's Vineyard. How silly of me to even consider such an idea.* The reader's suspicions are fulfilled, however, when Miles covers the bearded chin with his finger. The dream about Tick is heavy with foreboding. We know she got home just after midnight but we do not know that she is okay. We also know that she has become extremely non-communicative, even with Miles, but especially-defiantly so-with her mother. What happened in Fairhaven after the game? Did Zack rape her? Did John Voss witness it? More will be revealed.



Part 3, Chapter 19

Part 3, Chapter 19 Summary

Flash back to Miles in the summer of the Martha's Vineyard vacation. Miles and Grace are arriving at the Fairhaven Greyhound depot. Grace makes several calls to find someone in Empire Falls to come fetch them. Grace spends her last coins on a hot dog for Miles and a cup of coffee for herself. Miles reflects on the difference between his real existence and the fantasy life with Mr. Mayne on Martha's Vineyard. C.B. Whiting, *aka Charlie Mayne*, was managing Empire Manufacturing at that time but had not returned to Empire Falls yet. Miles watched his mother fall into a deep depression waiting anxiously for someone to call. A couple of weeks after their return from the Vineyard, C.B.'s father, Honus Whiting, called all of the workers of the factory together to quell rumors that the Whitings were getting ready to sell the factory. In fact, he said, C.B. was being sent to Mexico to build a new Whiting plant there.

One morning, after missing church for several weeks, Grace dresses Miles and herself up to trudge to confession at St Cat's. Miles knows this is about Martha's Vineyard and decides to make up some sins equal to the sin he feels he has committed by keeping his mother's affair secret, rather than actually tell Father Tom the truth. Miles and Grace were hoping that the young Father Mark would be hearing confessions that day, but alas they drew Father Tom, who was the head priest in those days. Miles went first into the confessional; then sat and watched as his mother went into the booth. Grace emerged shortly and Father Tom led her into the sacristy for a longer chat. Grace mother emerges from the sacristy looking pale and defeated. Miles and Grace walk home, where she tells Miles to stay. Concerned, however, Miles follows her. Grace walks out over the iron bridge that leads to the Whiting estate. At first Miles fears that his mother, in her depression, is going to jump off the bridge into the river but she continues across to meet a woman on the other side. Miles cannot actually identify the other woman, but surmises that it is Mrs. Whiting. Grace stands and talks to the seated woman for a few minutes, then walks back across the bridge. It seems clear that she is doing penance at Father Tom's direction. A few days later, Max returns home and informs Miles that he is going to have a baby brother. Miles argues that it could be a girl, but Max insists that the bloodline always gives up boys. As Miles files away the Martha's Vineyard vacation to the recesses of memory, his only regret is that he will never see his beautiful mother again in that lovely white dress which she had given to Goodwill earlier in the week.

Part 3, Chapter 19 Analysis

This chapter serves to put current events into a clearer focus. Now that it has been determined that Charlie Mayne is in fact C.B. Whiting, Russo can begin to develop in more detail the story of the affair between C.B. and Grace; and perhaps deal with the nagging question of Miles' paternal heritage. If he is C.B.'s child, that would make him



the eldest direct male descendant in line for the Whiting fortune. His brother would be second in the male line, and Cindy of course would be equal to Miles in seniority-but a female.



Part 3, Chapter 20

Part 3, Chapter 20 Summary

Meet Irene Walsh, crusty old housekeeper at St Cat's, and a long-standing old catholic relic of Empire Falls. Daughter of a military father, she sees religion in black and white terms defined primarily by discipline and hardship. It is important that everyone know his place and his role and does not strive to be something else. Life is about action and results, according to Irene, and she has no tolerance for contemplation. In her mind, .."*there is no end to contemplation, no fixed time period after which thought had to be turned into action. Contemplation was like sitting on a committee that seldom made recommendations and was ignored when it did, a committee that lacked even the authority to disband.*" Irene recognizes that old Tom is batty-he showed up at dinner one time with no trousers-but he doesn't get in her way by trying to help her as Father Mark does. Father Tom, nutty as he is, knows he is a priest and doesn't pretend to be a housekeeper. No prude, however, Irene was not offended by the priest's shriveled genitals when he showed up in the raw. "At fifty-three she was through with the foolishness of men's genitals. In fact, it had been many years since she had *cared* what hairy things dangled between their pale scrawny legs. Irene now considered the fact that she had ever cared a sort of lunacy and was thankful that her madness had been short -lived, not terribly virulent, and ultimately cured by marriage, as God intended." On this particular morning, Irene is scurrying about looking for Father Tom, who seems to have vanished, while Father Mark contemplates his new sermon, *When God Retreats*.

Father Mark joins Irene in a concerted search for Father Tom with no results. When they find a brochure from the Florida Keys, along with pilfered envelopes from the collection plate, however, they begin to put things together. When they discover the church's purple Crown Victoria missing, however, they knew for certain that the budding relationship between Max and Father Tom has now blossomed into a full-blown adventure.

Father Mark got the idea for his sermon, *When God Retreats*, from Miles shared memories on his vacation to Martha's Vineyard. The thesis of the talk was that there may be times when God chooses to step back and allow his sheep to follow their longings into sin without too much payback-just so they might experience a little happiness without waiting for the eternal blessing. The sermon was a big hit at the morning Mass but fell flat in the evening service. The padre is having misgivings about the idea because a gay artist he knows in Fairhaven seems to have developed a crush on this particular man of God. Still contemplating the travel brochure, *Your New Life in the Florida Keys* that he'd found amidst the ravaged donation envelopes in Father Tom's wastebasket, Father Mark sets off across St Cat's lawn toward Miles who is standing, contemplating the steeple.



Part 3, Chapter 20 Analysis

Max teaming up with the batty old priest promises some fine comedic reading in future chapters, but the significance of the homosexual painter is unclear. There was previous mention of Father Mark's activities with the gay community in Boston—one of the things that got him busted out of a cushy Boston academic job and sent to Empire Falls—but that thread has lain dormant until now. Could it be that Father Mark is coming out?



Part 3, Chapter 21

Part 3, Chapter 21 Summary

Sunday afternoon in Bea's bar is NFL day. Bea's customers are forever bitching about the little black and white TV she provides for them to watch the game on. As Bea sees it, the patrons actually liked the game they played: jostling each other, holding their urine as long as possible, then asking somebody to save their barstool until they got back from the john. Of course no one actually saved a barstool after promising to and that was part of the entertainment too. There was another color TV for patrons not setting at the bar, but she reasoned that if she bought a new wide-screen she would still have one good TV and one shitty one. The only difference would be that good one she had now would become the shitty one, and her patrons would still bitch. So where was the percentage in that Walt, The Silver Fox, Comeau suggested Bea was a damn fool for not buying a gigantic TV like the one he had in his health club, which prompted Bea to suggest he go watch the game on it. As far as Bea was concerned, "Walt Comeau had all to many suggestions for a man who drank seltzer and never left a tip. Miles comes in to the bar feeling as if he'd been hit by the train he'd sensed bearing down on him when he saw his mother's picture in the newspaper." Bea enquires if he is letting the divorce get him down and Miles responds that he thinks Janine is having second thoughts. He tells Bea about Max, the priest and the Crown Victoria, and she breaks out into paroxysms of laughter. Miles excuses himself to go to the men's room to examine the blisters he created earlier in the day while intently scraping old paint off of St Cat's as he ruminated all of the implications of his discovery about C.B. and his mom earlier. When he returns to his suspended conversation with Bea, Miles is seeing double. Miles comments that he hopes his father and the old priest don't come back to Empire Falls with obscene tattoos all over their butts. Bea sees that he is ill, feels his forehead, and comments that he is burning up. " "Never mind that," he said, suddenly feeling the same strong sense of purpose that had come to him earlier on the ladder (*at St. Cat's*). "I have a proposal for you.""

Part 3, Chapter 21 Analysis

If this reviewer were a betting man, he would lay odds that Miles is coming down with cat-scratch fever and is getting ready to pop the question to Bea about combining the Empire Grill and her tavern. During his ruminations about C.B., his mother and Mrs. Whiting, Miles begins entertaining the notion that her kindness and fondness for his mother-and by extension for him-might be some sort of convoluted revenge for the Martha's Vineyard affair, that surely didn't *begin* on Martha's Vineyard that summer when Miles was nine years old. During his frantic scraping on the church, and his troubled ruminations triggered by the picture in the newspaper, Miles asked himself if it were possible to genuinely care for someone and still not forgive him. Miles concluded that, at least in Mrs. Whiting's case, such a thing was indeed possible.



Part 3, Chapter 22

Part 3, Chapter 22 Summary

Flash back again in this final chapter of Part 3 to Miles' sophomore year at Empire Falls High. This is the year that Empire Textile closed and his mother lost her job. Several years before the mill had been sold to foreign investors who negotiated away many of the benefits the employees had enjoyed under Whiting rule. The inevitable bankruptcy was probably planned so the machinery could be repossessed and moved offshore. Some people left Empire Falls to take their chances elsewhere but many stayed simply because it was less scary to stay than to go. While considering her future-whether to stay in Empire Falls or seek employment elsewhere-Grace received a call from a man named William Vandermark, offering her a position as a care giver, gardener, and housekeeper for an older woman who'd just gotten out of surgery. The older woman was Mrs. Whiting. Even after she' healed from the surgery, Mrs. Whiting kept Grace on stating bluntly that she had grown fond of her. This situation led Miles to the belief that it was possible to be fond of someone and still not forgive him. Only once did Grace and Francine speak of C.B. and that only to say they would never speak of him again. During her tenure with Mrs. Whiting, Grace also grew fond of, and rather devoted to, Cindy. Mrs. Whiting was also outspoken about her own dislike for her daughter because she was weak. After every surgery to help her condition, Cindy refused to do physical therapy and instead chose to lay abed watching TV and ingesting painkillers. Cindy was an essential opposite of her strong-willed mother-a person who chose to yield to the first obstacle rather than bulldozing her way through it. This characteristic generated contempt in her mother and pathos in Grace.

Part 3, Chapter 22 Analysis

This final chapter of Part 3 offers some insight into Mrs. Whiting, who emerges as a curious collage of unrelenting vengeance, deep understanding of human dynamics, disdain for weakness, but respect and compassion for creatures of solid character-even if those creatures have wronged her and earned her vengeance. Miles' passion for responsibility and caring emerges in a sub-theme in this chapter as he recalls his time as an alter boy, working for Father Tom, who tends to blame him for the failings of others. Fleeting thoughts may enter some readers' minds-especially considering his behavior now that Father Tom is in his dotage-about exactly what went on between him and Grace after he led her from the confessional to the sacristy.



Part 4, Chapter 23

Part 4, Chapter 23 Summary

Three weeks after Miles mentioned his proposal to Bea, Walt Comeau comes bounding into the Empire Grill. Walt is bragging about his honeymoon with Janine and trying to rub salt in Miles' wound—a wound that doesn't exist. Miles is actually sort of enjoying the sense of freedom. Much has happened in the past three weeks. Janine got her divorce, had a bargain basement wedding, having had to bribe Tick with an internet hookup to get her participation, and has been on her honeymoon. Miles, in the meantime, has been in and out of the hospital with a mysterious disease that he dared not suggest to his doctors was the direct result of having been visited by the ghosts of his mother and C.B. Whiting. Horace is beating Walt at gin, as usual, and Miles discusses with David in hushed tones their plan to close the Empire Grill and go partners with Bea and her liquor license at Callahan's Tavern as soon as Mrs. Whiting leaves town for her annual vacation. Miles calls Bill Daws, the chief of police, to complain about Jimmy Minty's constant surveillance of the Empire Grill. Miles learns that Daws has cancer and that unless Miles intervenes with Mrs. Whiting, Minty will likely be named interim police chief. Minty has been sucking up to the old lady and he seems to be in her good graces. Tick is carrying on a cyber romance with the Donnie boy she met at Martha's Vineyard, and complains that the demands of all of her friends are cutting into her time. A few weeks ago, she complained that she had no friends at all. Tick and Miles are planning a trip to Boston next Sunday to see a Van Gough exhibit. Her father surmises, and she admits, that the boy from Indiana, whom she met on Martha's Vineyard, will also be in Boston on Sunday. John Voss is turning out to be a stable and reliable—albeit uninspired—employee. Miles gets a call from his father in Florida, the first contact since he left. Max says he is doing fine and that he and Father Tom crewed their way down to Florida on a schooner, rather than driving the church's purple Crown Victoria. When asked where Father Tom is, Max replies that he is down at the other end of the bar hearing confessions. Miles ends the conversation with his father by asking why he had never said anything about C.B. Whiting and his mother. His father responds, "Why didn't you?" Apparently what appeared to be foreshadowing of some tragedy the night of the game turned out to be a red herring.

Part 4, Chapter 23 Analysis

This chapter summarizes the main storyline and its sub-plots, bringing readers up to date and preparing them for the developments of this final Part 4 and the conclusion of the novel.



Part 4, Chapter 24

Part 4, Chapter 24 Summary

Zack and his buddy, Justin Dibble, aka *Double Dibble*, are in Jimmy Minty's Camero parked outside the spooky-looking house where John Voss lives, allegedly with his grandmother. Justin is expressing qualms about being there, claiming Zack is only trying to get back at John Voss because he beat him at his own game; he didn't flinch, but Zack did. Zack claims it is only because John is too stupid to flinch. It is later revealed that the game is Russian roulette, only with no bullets. Even though the gun is empty, people still flinch when they pull the trigger, but John Voss did not. Zack-pretty obviously under the influence of steroids now-concludes that the only solution is to take the next step and play the game with a bullet in the cylinder. The boys are at the Voss house because Zack intends to break in. Double Dibble, on the other hand, stands lookout at a safe distance, where he ends up masturbating to images of Candice's breasts and other body parts. Justin is secretly in love with Candice and his constant taunting of her in the presence of Tick and John Voss at their art table is just his convoluted form of courtship. Zack reflects that he seems to be losing all of his friends. Some have moved out of town; others have snubbed him moving up to the country club set. Everyone seems uncomfortable in his presence ever since his cheap shot took the Fairhaven quarterback out of the game and out of the season. The kid is still in the news because of persistent headaches, and everyone seems to know now that it was a late shot Zack laid on him. While sneaking up to the house, Zack stumbles over a metal spike in the ground. Attached to the spike is a chain, such as one with which someone might tether a dog, but no dog barks as he follows the chain up over the porch and into the house. Zack has a key ring that his father either gave him or that Zack "borrowed," which his father brags will open every door in Empire Falls. The keys on the ring-or the knowledge of how to make them-are no doubt a legacy from Jimmy's father, William, who once bought a used key grinder and opened shop in the basement of the Minty home. After a few minutes in the darkened house, Zack returns exclaiming, "this is *SO FUCKING GREAT!*"

Part 4, Chapter 24 Analysis

So, Mr. Russo has revealed to one of his characters what John Voss' secret is, but hasn't yet shared it with his readers. The business about Russian roulette is too obvious to qualify as foreshadowing, but clearly something is going to happen involving Zack, probably John Voss, a bullet and a gun.



Part 4, Chapter 25

Part 4, Chapter 25 Summary

Tick is learning a lot about Mrs. Roderigue. For instance, she believes that her art teacher is in love with Bill Taylor instead of her husband, who Tick thinks looks like a bowling ball. Taylor is a well coiffed TV artist who hosts a show every Sunday. In every episode, he starts with a blank canvas and always finishes a marvelous painting of some inane subject matter by the end of hour. Bill always works with watercolors, he says, because they dry faster. Bill even has a battery-powered hair dryer to lend nature a hand when necessary. One thing Tick always marvels at is that every time Mr. Taylor makes a mistake, he chuckles, dismissing the error and noting that he will fix it before his hour is up. Tick has trouble reconciling his 'fix it' philosophy with life in which mistakes seem to linger in their consequences. Mrs. Roderigue has assigned her class to watch Taylor's show, *Painting for Relaxation*, over the weekend and come to class ready to discuss it. As it turns out, Tick is the only one who actually watched the show—something she would have done anyway. Tick recognizes that Mr. Taylor knows many tricks she would like to learn; and she likes the suspense, rooting for something to go wrong so he doesn't finish the painting—so Mrs. Roderigue is reduced to having to discuss her *par amore* with her least favorite student. At the end of the discussion she asks Tick to describe the great Bill Taylor's style. Tick knows she expects her to respond with some grandiose adjective, such as *sublime*. But she chooses instead to say *fast*.

The assignment for the week in art class is to paint a still life of a flower arrangement that Mrs. Roderigue brought in. She had her students arrange the tables in a U shape so everyone can see the flowers. All week Tick and John Voss have been coming in early to claim a different table and proclaim it the Blue Table for that day. Since the tables aren't actually color coded, but are determined only by who sits at them, Mrs. Roderigue doesn't seem to notice that they choose a different *Blue* table each day. The center of the flower arrangement is a large peony, which was fresh, perfect and magnificent at the beginning of the week, but has aged faster than the other flowers and is now drooping, and smelling of "faint but unmistakably sweet odor of corruption and imminent death." Tick chooses to paint the peony in its current condition rather than its original brilliance. She also paints the other tables in the U in the background—painting them the actual colors they are supposed represent—as well as the other students and the hulking figure of Mrs. Roderigue. She suspects that she will be accused of painting a *smart aleck picture*.

Tick has also discovered that Mrs. Roderigue is related to the Minty's by marriage, which may explain why Zack always has a pass that allows him to wander the halls more or less at will. Lately the steroid jock has been harassing her and John Voss during their private lunch period. Zack also comes into the art class at will, making fun of her Indiana boyfriend and playing up to Candice now that Tick has made it clear that she will not be his girlfriend. Of late, he has been making pointed comments and asking



probing questions about John Voss's Grandmother, as if he knows something that other people don't-which, of course, he does.

Part 4, Chapter 25 Analysis

Mrs. Roderigue seems to be playing a larger and larger role in the lives not only of Tick, but of Miles and Mr. Meyer as well. The revelations that she is related to Jimmy and Zack will no doubt complicate that particular subplot as the story develops. The secret of John Voss's house and grandmother loom-and whatever was on the other end of that chain Zack followed into the house remains a mystery.



Part 4, Chapter 26

Part 4, Chapter 26 Summary

Flash back to Miles' final year in St. Luke's College. He is on Martha's Vineyard with his friends Peter and Dawn, enjoying a Columbus Day weekend getaway. Zack hadn't heard her voice since he'd left Empire Falls but suddenly there it was, "*My dear boy.*" Mrs. Whiting had tracked him down to let him know his mother was dying of cancer. Since starting college, Miles had avoided Empire Falls like a plague city. Miles spent his summers working a seafood restaurant in Rhode Island which was owned by Peter's parents. Secretly Miles resents the fact that his mother spends more time with the Whiting family than with her own and has grown so fond of Cindy that she tends to neglect David. As a result, David is growing up as an angry young man experimenting with drugs and alcohol, and getting into trouble at school and with the law. Miles' mother had told him nothing of her cancer and was likely to be angry with Mrs. Whiting for telling him. Miles took a leave of absence from St. Luke's and went to work managing the Empire Grill in exchange for Mrs. Whiting paying for his mother's medical expenses. Miles moved his mother to the ground floor of the mansion where she would be easier to care for. In recent years Grace had become obsessed with two things: making sure Miles got an education and taking care of Cindy, with whom she had bonded like a mother. These were instrumental factors in David feeling that he had received short shrift in the allocation of maternal love and attention. It wasn't that Grace didn't love David, it was more that she loved him as an aunt might love a favorite nephew rather than a mother loving a son.

Part 4, Chapter 26 Analysis

This chapter serves mainly to fill in a few blurry areas of the past while Miles was away at college. The specter of Mrs. Whiting seems never to leave him free, even when he moves away from Empire Falls. The insights into David's upbringing are interesting, in that they seem out of context for Grace and help explain his wild and drunken past. The chapter also revisits Miles' youthful love for Charlene and likens Charlene's attitude toward him with his toward Cindy-kind and loving, but not erotic.



Part 4, Chapter 27

Part 4, Chapter 27 Summary

Otto Meyer Jr. is having a bad day as principal of Empire Falls High. One of his teachers beat his wife so badly that she was in the hospital and Otto went to visit her. Later Otto went to visit the teacher, finding him sitting at his kitchen table with a revolver in front of him, contemplating his mortality. Nothing compared to the series of events set in motion by his decision to go out to Landfill Road and visit with John Voss' grandmother. Several anonymous notes—that he knows are from Zack Minty—asking him, "where is John Voss' Grandmother?," prompted the series of events. The malicious missives have shown up both in his mailbox and on his desk at times that were only accusable to someone with the proper key. Before going on his adventure, Otto pulls the Voss boy's file to discover that he has had a horrid childhood. Voss' parents, petty drug dealers, used to put him in a laundry sack and hang him in a closet where he would cry himself to sleep while his parents partied. Sometimes they forgot about him and left him hanging there all night. Voss was now a ward of the state and had been released to his grandmother's custody, then pretty much forgotten by the system. Otto interviewed John and told him he was going out to visit his grandmother. John said that his grandmother was hard of hearing and he might have to ring the doorbell several times. Otto then interviewed Zack Minty, scolding him about being in the cafeteria while Tick and John were there. Otto recalls that Zack is an apple that fell close to the tree. A contemporary of Miles and of Jimmy Minty, Otto recalls that Jimmy's father was a pretty bad apple. Jimmy's father did strong-arm work for the Whittings during labor disputes and apparently Jimmy continues the tradition in a somewhat less violent fashion by being on call to do Mrs. Whiting's bidding.

When Otto visits Grandma Voss' place, he finds the stake and chain that Zack found. After receiving no response to his numerous hails, he breaks into the house under the pretext of thinking the old lady might need help and discovers that indeed there is no grandmother. Otto calls Bill Daws, Empire Falls Chief of Police. Otto goes to the Empire Grill to find that the generally reliable John Voss did not show up for work. Otto tells Miles about the boy's childhood and being trussed up to spend the nights in a laundry bag. It is after midnight when Otto gets home and he warns his wife that in the morning their lawn is likely to be crawling with reporters.



Part 4, Chapter 27

Part 4, Chapter 27 Summary

The mystery is finally solved—at least part of it. There is no Grandma Voss and John Voss has a past from hell. Zack and evidence of his magic key ring have been found out, although there is no proof. The reader is left to ponder, however, what is on the end of the mysterious dog chain and what happened to Grandma Voss—the is, if there ever was a Grandma Voss.



Part 4, Chapter 28

Part 4, Chapter 28 Summary

Janine is not happy. Not only has she discovered that Walt's true age is 60, she has now learned that he is broke as well. When Janine went to the bank to cash a check on their joint account there were not enough funds to cash it. Janine also learns that the cheap house Walt owns is twice mortgaged and the land he claims to own is a fiction. Janine gets someone to cover her shift at the health club, barks at a few customers, including one fat old lady who comments that when she dies her nephew will probably just sling her over his shoulder and carry her off to the landfill like that Voss boy did with his grandmother. Janine says under his breath that he could only do that if he rented a forklift, then heads for the one place she knows she can receive nurturing, Miles. Janine notes the irony of the fact that she divorced a man she could talk to so she could get good sex and married a fading sex machine she couldn't talk to. Janine heads to the Empire Grill instead of Callahan's, reasoning that it is better to talk to a man with no answers than to a woman (her mother) with all the wrong ones.

On the way to the grill, Janine sees Tick trudging along in the opposite direction with her backpack. Janine makes an illegal U turn to pick her up. Tick is her usual taciturn self with her mother, not responding to attempts at idle chitchat. Janine realizes that she is losing contact with her daughter and that Tick is shouldering a huge burden other than her backpack. Janine envisions her daughter trudging off to the dump with Janine slung over her shoulder. Threatened by her daughter's recalcitrance, Janine loses control and starts a fight that ends in Janine telling Tick to get out of the car, then screeching away while her daughter is still getting her backpack out of the backseat. Tick gets hung up in the backpack, which is stuck in the car, and screams for her mother to stop. Although not seriously hurt, Tick is clearly in pain and very angry. Janine tries to help her, but Tick frees herself and walks away screaming at her mother to leave her alone.

Part 4, Chapter 28 Analysis

Though significant things occurred in this short chapter, nothing is really a surprise. The Janine/Tick relationship develops along predictable lines, as does Janine's growing discontent with the Silver Fox. Janine realizes that she is now trapped in a marriage with an aging buffoon who refuses to grow old gracefully, is becoming impotent, and is very nearly a pauper. From a literary perspective, however, the high point of the chapter is Russo's brilliant use of metaphor: the image of John Voss lugging his grandmother's body off to the dump in the dead of night has become an icon for the dysfunctional gap that grows between parents and children as the children approach adulthood.



Part 4, Chapter 29

Part 4, Chapter 29 Summary

For several days, the town has been rife with rumor-although this time there appears to be something to them-that someone might be interested in buying the old shirt factory. Miles and David saw Mrs. Whiting with some men in a white limo with Massachusetts plates out at the factory. The brothers are still trying to keep secret their plans to merge the Empire Grill with Callahan's, but Miles seriously doubts that Mrs. Whiting doesn't know-partly because she seems to know everything, and partly because they have been spending all of their spare time there.

As it turns out, there was indeed a Grandma Voss and searchers found her body in the landfill near her house. After the story of John Voss and his grandmother broke, Horace Weymouth unveils a secret to Miles about what he witnessed on an earlier occasion. Horace saw John Voss tormenting a dog on the end of the chain that was tied to the stake outside his grandmother's house. The boy would beat the dog with a stick, chasing it around the stake with the chain getting shorter with every revolution. When the dog's head was bound up tight against the stake, he continued to beat and torment it. When it was totally subdued, John Voss would get down on his hands and knees and begin cooing to the dog, assuring the animal that he was going to be okay, coaxing him until he stopped snapping at the boy and began to lick his face. Horace also told Miles that when they found the grandmother's body in the landfill, they also found the bodies of several dogs that exhibited evidence of the same sort of abuse. It is a period of discovery for Miles as he also learns that his brother David and Charlene-the woman he has loved all of his life-are lovers and have been for some time. While Miles is sitting talking to Horace and trying to get rid of Walt, the phone rings. It is some anonymous voice informing him that his wife is up on Empire Avenue kicking the shit out of his Jeep. Miles hands the receiver to Walt and says, "Here, it's for you."

While up in his apartment taking a shower, Miles gets a call from his father. Max wants to know if Miles has finished painting the church, and when he replies in the negative, he tells his son not to work for those people, meaning the Catholic Church. Max says that Vatican goons came into the bar and lifted Tom, the crazy old priest, right off the barstool and took him away. Miles allows as how it was probably Max who called the Vatican goons when old Tom's money ran out. After Miles hangs up, Charlene comes up to the apartment and tells Miles that he'd better come downstairs where he learns that two state inspectors showed up at Callahan's and closed the place down for health code violations. The repairs they are demanding for her to resume operations are prohibitively expensive. Quietly enraged, Miles starts off to see Mrs. Whiting, against the urgings of everyone in the Empire Grill. The Silver Fox, who seems to be living on a different planet, however, begins his familiar taunt to get Miles to arm-wrestle him. For the first time, Miles actually obliges him, which ends with the Silver fox semi-conscious on the floor with a broken arm. Miles is mad.



At Mrs. Whiting's place, Miles comes face-to-face with Jimmy Minty, who is acting as her security guard. Minty tells Miles to come back tomorrow. After a brief argument, Miles nails the policeman with a roundhouse that breaks his nose. A real donnybrook follows, which ends up putting both men in the hospital. Miles got the worse of the deal, however, and is kept there under guard while Jimmy Minty is sent home. The closest Miles got to a confrontation with Mrs. Whiting was to watch her walk by with her big-deal business guys of the white limo. Mrs. Whiting inquired of him, "What could possibly have been so important that it wouldn't wait for tomorrow?" Miles responded, "He preferred her to you, didn't he. That's what this is all about, isn't it."

Part 4, Chapter 29 Analysis

In this fast-paced chapter, everything seems to be coming together quite rapidly. Miles gets revenge on the Silver Fox in a currency the smarmy health-club guy can understand; Jimmy Minty and Miles square off; Janine loses it; Miles garners the courage to confront Mrs. Whiting, with mixed results; and the secrets of John Voss—at least some of them—are revealed. The pace is quickening, but there is still more to come.



Part 4, Chapter 30

Part 4, Chapter 30 Summary

"The Blue Table has the blues." Tick speculates that the low mood of the students at the Blue Table is a result of John Voss' absence. John has still not been heard from since the night they discovered his grandmother's body. Ticke is speculating whether or not things happen quickly or slowly. Tick concludes that they happen slowly, but that they may climax suddenly. After the incident with her mother in the Jeep, Tick sought out Candice and became her friend. Candice confided in Tick that she is now in love with Justin Dibble and that they have had sex. Candice and Tick discuss Zack's sick game, which he has named "Polish Roulette." Zack told Candice that Tick used to play it with him all of the time-a lie. Tick did a tally in her head: In one day her mother had nearly dragged her down Empire Avenue; she became best friends with Candice; Her father had broken the Silver Fox's arm, then got into a brawl with Zack's dad, which landed him in the hospital, from which he would be taken directly to jail; and the Empire Grill had been "closed until further notice." And that wasn't counting all of the horrible events that occurred earlier in the week. Sitting and ruminating in art class, Tick notices something outside moving toward the school. As the aberration grows closer she sees that it is John Voss.

John Voss comes into art class carrying a brown paper bag. John smells bad, is wet and disheveled. John reaches into the bag and withdraws a revolver. John points it at Justin and pulls the trigger. Justin is thrown back by the impact of the bullet. There are two more shots, and Mrs. Roderigue, who was frozen in fear, falls to the floor mortally wounded. Tick reaches out to the boy just as the fourth shot echoes through the classroom. Just before he fires the fifth shot, John Voss says to Tick, "This is what I dream," in answer to the question she asked him when they first lunched together. As the last shot rings out, Tick feels herself thrust backward into blackness.

Part 4, Chapter 30 Analysis

There is not a great deal to analyze in Chapter 30. The action and dialogue pretty much speak for themselves. John Voss' answer to the question Tick asked him back in one of the first chapters, ties the story of the troubled boy up into a nice, neat package. Symbolically, it seems, he has clawed his way out of the laundry bag and fulfilled his dream of vengeance.



Part 4, Chapter 31

Part 4, Chapter 31 Summary

Miles is sitting on his hospital bed, contemplating all of the people to whom he owes amends, nursing a bruised kidney and a cracked rib, two broken teeth and bloody urine. Charlene and David have been to visit him. Father Mark brought the news that, as expected, St. Cat's has been merged with *Sacre Couer*. The steeple remains unpainted and Father Mark is awaiting reassignment. Even Janine has stopped by to tell Miles that it was just like him to wait until they were divorced to go do something interesting. Bea popped in as well to congratulate him on what he did to the Silver Fox. Miles recalls that Cindy came to see him too. Cindy and Miles talked about a time when they had kissed and Miles had fondled her breast. As Miles is reminiscing, Bill Daws comes into his room saying gravely that Miles should come with him. Bill was in the radiology department getting treatment when he got the call about the incident at the high school.

Although Miles would recall many of the details only later, what Miles saw at the school was enough to terrify him: A stone-faced John Voss sat in the back of a police cruiser staring off into space. In the classroom, Doris Roderigue lay on the floor in a pool of blood. Miles saw the body of a boy he recognized from Zack Minty's crowd and the body of his friend, the principal Otto Meyer Jr. Miles saw Jimmy Minty in an argument with his son, who finally pushed him away with both hands. One of Zack's hands was wrapped in a bandage. Tick was huddled in a dark corner making animal sounds in her throat and defending herself with an Exacto knife she kept flipping back and forth. She was sobbing, "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy." Ignoring his injuries, Miles gathers up his daughter in his arms and leaves the school, Jimmy Minty turns to Bill Daws and says, "We gonna let him just walk out of here?" to which Bill Daws replied, "You tend to your own kid, Jimmy. Let's all just tend to our own kids, okay?"

Part 4, Chapter 31 Analysis

This is the climax of the novel. Many of the mysteries are resolved here in tragic fashion. While John Voss' actions are heinous and monstrous, they seem perfectly predictable, given the intricate manner in which Mr. Russo has drawn this character and etched in his background and environment. Clearly, John Voss is a symbol, but of what? Does he represent the rage of the down of Empire Falls if it should someday rebel against the dictatorial Whiting family? Or, is Empire Falls the symbol of a greater human condition that might express itself in the primal manner of John Voss when pushed beyond its limits?



Part 4, Chapter 32

Part 4, Chapter 32 Summary

It is April now. Miles and Tick have spent the winter on Martha's Vineyard recuperating on the nearly deserted summer resort island. Tick is getting back to normal after being nearly catatonic. Miles and Tick have the use of Peter and Dawn's beach house, which is remote from what little activity there is on the Vineyard. Tick is enrolled in the local high school where she remains pretty uncommunicative. Slowly, however, she is recovering. Miles gets a call from David, who brings him up to date on events in Empire Falls: It has been one of the worst winters in a long history of horrendous Maine winters. Mrs. Whiting has drowned in the flood of the spring runoff. The flood destroyed much of the development work she had begun—a gentrification project that included expensive homes, condos and business parks. Candice is still in the hospital—paralyzed from a bullet wound to the neck. John Voss was found to be unfit to stand trial and has been committed to the mental hospital in Augusta. For her part, Tick is eager to return to Empire Falls to tend to Candice, her new best friend. Tick recalls the broad outline of what happened that day in art class. Tick knows that John Voss had killed Doris Roderigue and Justin Dibble, and that he had shot Candice. Tick was aware that John Otto Jr., her principal, had thrown himself between John Voss and her, giving his own life to save hers. Tick did not recall but Miles had informed her that she sliced open John Voss' face with an Exacto knife before he shot Mr. Meyer; and that she had sliced Zack Minty's palm when she regained consciousness and he was hovering over her. Bea chose to fight Mrs. Whiting's attempt to close her down for daring to partner with Miles. Jimmy Minty's wife came to Empire Falls from her new life in Seattle to divorce him and threatened to make certain secrets public if he contested any part of the provisions she and her attorney put forth—including custody of Zack. Zack is now living in Seattle. Jimmy has lost his job on the police force and is facing criminal charges for stolen goods found in his house and the key-making machine his grandfather lugged home one day. Jimmy sold his house to pay attorney fees and mostly stays drunk at the Lamplighter.

Without notice, Max shows up on Martha's Vineyard and reveals some more details about Grace's affair with C.B. Whiting. It seems C.B.'s plan that summer Miles spent on the Vineyard was to spirit away both Grace and Miles to a new life in parts unknown—perhaps Mexico. The plan fell apart when Grace realized that C.B. had not included his daughter Cindy in his plans. C.B. quickly acquiesced and agreed to take her, but the very fact that she had slipped his mind—that he was ready to abandon a child—was enough to cause Grace to reconsider. Ergo, it was not his mother pining away for Mr. Mayne all those years, but him wanting her and she making herself unavailable. Max also reveals that he won some money in the lottery in Florida, but most of that is gone now. Tick has always been fond of her grandfather and he not only cheers her up, but Miles as well. Janine calls to inform Miles that she has split up with the Silver Fox and that he has moved back to his own house, so there is plenty of room for Miles, Tick and Max in *their* house. Janine also warns him that she has gained back most of the weight



she lost on the Stairmaster. Miles, Tick and Max pack up their belongings, lock up the beach house, and head back to Empire Falls.

Part 4, Chapter 32 Analysis

This is the anticlimax of the novel, in which most of the loose ends left dangling in the climax are tied up. Some, the author leaves for the reader to ponder; and he fleshes in a few more afterthoughts and details in the *Epilogue*.



Epilogue and Analysis

Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Russo's *Epilogue* is essentially a summary and analysis of the character C.B. Whiting and in it he reveals something that may not have occurred even to the most astute reader. When C.B. was summoned back to Empire Falls after serving his penance in Mexico following his affair with Grace, he did not return with the intent of killing himself. Indeed, he did bring a revolver with him for a specific purpose, but it was to murder his wife, not take his own life. C.B. was attempting to fulfill the intent of his *paternal* ancestor, who tried to kill C.B.'s *maternal* ancestor with a shovel. When C.B. arrived on his mission of mayhem, however, he encountered his wife Francine in the company of both Grace Roby-who was now his wife's handmaiden, and not at all as pretty as she had been on Martha's Vineyard-and his daughter Cindy, the fly in his amorous ointment. Realizing that he'd failed in his mission-that his wife had won again-he retired to the river and shot himself. Russo also waited until the *Epilogue* to reveal that the speeding green Pontiac that had allegedly crippled Cindy was a myth; C.B. himself was responsible, backing over his daughter while exiting the garage in a fit of frustration and anger following a fight with Francine. It was that she had been holding over his head all these years. The author also clears up the origin of C.B.'s affair with Grace: It began with looks and comments while she was working at the shirt factory he managed, but it was on the day both Cindy and Miles were born that he codified his intent to escape with her.

Mr. Russo also fills in some detail about Mrs. Whiting's death. Apparently, she was down at the gazebo on the Hacienda property when the flood washed her away-gazebo and all. Mrs. Whiting was last seen as a corpse, momentarily hung up on the spillway of a downstream dam, face down in the river with an angry cat-which had come to her from that very river years before-perched and squalling on her back between her shoulder blades.



Characters

C.B. Whiting

Fourth generation male heir to the Whiting fortune, C.B. is ill suited to assume a leadership role in the essential ownership of the inland Maine town of Empire Falls. C.B. makes his first appearance in the *Prologue*, then becomes a shadowy ghost playing a major part in the lives of contemporary residents of the town. At heart, C.B. is a poet and artist-albeit a poor one-who longs for the slower, simpler life in Mexico where he spent several years as a young man. C.B. carries on the tradition of Whiting males by marrying Francine, whom he is destined to grow to hate. Both his grandfather and great-grandfather thought about killing their wives, and his great-grandfather actually tried to beat his wife to death with a shovel. C.B. knows even before he marries Francine that he can't stand her, but lets lust do his thinking for him. Always something of a rebel, C.B. shuns the family mansion in downtown Empire Falls and builds instead a lavish *hacienda* on the river's shore to remind himself of the good times he had being irresponsible south of the border. After breaking ground for his new domicile, he discovers that the river creates an eddy, which acts as a garbage collector, right where he wants his lawn. C.B. spends the better part of a day contemplating a dead moose that washes up there and decides that God is the enemy and that he should improve His divine work. C.B. buys a blighted area, which belongs to Francine's family, and pulls all sorts of strings to get the Corps of Engineers to dynamite the blighted area out of existence, thus changing the river's course. The Corps of Engineers warns him that he will increase the likelihood and severity of flooding with his plan, but he ignores that and proceeds to edit God's handiwork. C.B. also inherits Francine who, ironically, dies in a flood at the very spot where C.B. had contemplated the dead moose.

Francine Whiting

Francine's maiden name was Robideaux, and the blighted area that C.B. purchased and blasted into non-existence belonged to her family and was known by the locals as *The Robideaux blight*. Francine's family was convinced they pulled a fast one on C.B. by getting the foolish rich man to buy their worthless land for a healthy sum, while C.B. felt like he was pulling one over on them because they should have realized that he would have paid more. In the contemporary Empire Falls-the days of Miles Roby's adulthood-Francine is the feared empress of the town who pulls all the strings and calls all the shots. Everyone fears her, some respect her, few actually know her, and even fewer would say in private that they like her. Francine's unpopularity doesn't faze her in the least, preferring power to praise. The Whitings have one daughter, Cindy, who was run over by a mysterious green Pontiac as a child, crippling her for life. Mrs. Whiting keeps Miles under her thumb because she knows that Grace, his mother, had an affair with C.B. After the affair came to light, she exiled C.B. to Mexico, holding over his head the knowledge that it was him-not a green Pontiac-who ran over their daughter while fleeing from an argument with her. After the affair, Mrs. Whiting ingratiated herself with



both Grace and Miles by providing employment, money for college for Miles, and money for medical bills as Grace was dying a prolonged, hideous and painful death from cancer. Mrs. Whiting's contributions are not largess but a twisted, convoluted form of vengeance, although she becomes genuinely fond of both Grace and Miles. Sort of.

Miles Roby

Miles Roby is the central contemporary character and, for the most part, a naive observer of the demise of Empire Falls from its position as a hearty industrial town with a vibrant workforce, to a worn out shell of its former self, to the first stages of gentrified urban blight. In many ways, Miles is an icon of the town, his own history and secrets mirroring the soul of the community. Miles is essentially indentured to Mrs. Whiting, who paid for his three years in college, then extorted him to stay on as manager of the Empire Grill-which she owns-in exchange for the money to pay mounting medical bills as his mother is dying. At first, Miles appears to be relatively uncomplicated, but with a bent to introspection and an ability to generalize both poetically and prophetically from specific events and experiences. As the novel progresses, however, Russo artfully peels back the onion-like layers of Miles' personality in strategically placed flash backs to reveal his secrets, traumas, loves, and hatreds. Miles is totally devoted to his daughter, Tick, a bright, talented and fragile teenager who attends Empire Falls High School. Miles is ambivalent toward Janine, his wife, who has begun divorce proceedings that he does not particularly want to participate in. Even though he is estranged from Janine, he still serves as her counselor and sounding board, sensing her dissatisfaction with her decision to divorce him and marry Walt, The Silver Fox, Comeau, the smarmy, know-it-all owner of Empire Falls' only health club. Miles is a loving and forgiving individual-an intellectual Catholic and confidant of Father Mark at St. Catherine's-and knowing this allows others to take advantage of him without vengeance or retribution. That is, up until the end of the novel, when he finally explodes and breaks Walt Comeau's arm and gives him a concussion in a very quick arm-wrestling match in the Empire Grill. On the same day, Miles gets into a fist fight with Jimmy Minty, his childhood nemesis, who is now an Empire Falls policeman, and ends up under arrest in the hospital for his efforts. A defining moment in Miles' life was a vacation when he was nine-years-old, during which he and his mother went to Martha's Vineyard-without his father Max, who was in jail-and his mother had an affair with a man named Charlie Mayne. Later, Miles discovers, Charlie Mayne was really C.B. Whiting.

Tick

Tick is a smart, talented teenager who has trouble fitting in to the strict social hierarchy of Empire Falls High School, which is a composite of small-town high schools throughout the United States. Tick is far more intellectually inclined, more observant, wiser, and more mature than her peers. Tick loves her father deeply and shares witticisms with him that go over the heads of all of her peers and most of the adults in Empire Falls. Tick resents her mother for divorcing Miles and hates Walt, her soon to be stepfather. Tick is a talented artist, trapped in an art class taught by Mrs. Roderigue,



who has a rigid, almost military, paint-by-number approach to artistic expression. Tick, who is on the fast track at Empire Falls, is something of an anomaly in Mrs. Roderigue's class, since it is generally considered a bonehead-class for dullards because it is almost impossible to fail. Mrs. Roderigue does not like Tick because her father used to serve on the school board and tried to get her fired. Tick is also a shirttail relative of the Minty clan. Unlike the other students, Tick is taking art because she likes art, not because the class is easy to pass. Tick was once girlfriend to Zack Minty, football player and a chip off his blockhead father, Jimmy Minty. Tick has dumped Zack however, because of his rude and dangerous behavior, and has been ostracized as a result. Most of Tick's character development occurs in art class or the Empire Grill where she works with her father. Tick shares her father's sensitive nature and ends up befriendng John Voss, the silent, brooding boy everyone-especially Zack Minty-picks on. John Voss shares the Blue Table with Tick in her art class. By the end of the novel, Tick's tormented new friend blossoms into a mass murderer. Candice also shares the Blue Table, as does Justin Dibble. Although Justin originally teases Candice about a fantasy affair with John Voss, he and Candice become lovers, just before they fall victim to John Voss.

John Voss

John Voss is a mystery child, but as the novel progresses some very dark and horrible secrets about his past come to light. Unfortunately, understanding is too late and too little to prevent the explosion of rage that ends in the deaths of a teacher, a principal, one student, and another student paralyzed for life. John Voss lives out of town near the city landfill, ostensibly with his grandmother. Nothing is known, at least at first, about his parents. Later, it is revealed in his *Special Needs* folder that his parents were small-time drug dealers that used to stuff their child in a laundry sack and hang him in a dark closet until he cried himself to sleep so they could get high without interruptions. Often they would pass out, forgetting about their son, and leave him in the laundry bag overnight. As he becomes the focus of more attention-a result of Zack Minty breaking into the Voss house on Landfill Road-it is discovered that John Voss is living alone, that his grandmother died some time ago, and that John Voss lugged her body out to the dump and left it there. Searchers also find the bodies of several dogs that John Voss abused, tortured and killed. After the killings, John Voss is found incapable to stand trial and committed to the mental hospital in Augusta.

Cindy Whiting

Cindy is C.B.'s and Francine's only child who was born on the same day in the same hospital as Miles, and who has been in love with him all of her life. Cindy was crippled when her father backed over her with a car while in a fit of rage, although the town believes it was a mysterious green Pontiac. Mark's mother, Grace, ends up taking care of Cindy and bonds with her as if she was her real mother. Grace is constantly trying to push Cindy and Miles together.



Grace Roby

Miles' mother is beautiful and loving in her youth. She is an empath who sympathizes with unfortunates, a stark contrast to her near-do-well husband, Max. Grace takes Miles to Martha's Vineyard for a vacation when he is nine, and has an affair there with a mysterious Mr. Mayne, who turns out to be C.B. Whiting.

Horace Weymouth

Horace Weymouth is the reporter for the *Empire Falls Gazette* and a regular at the Empire Grill. Horace is Miles' intellectual confidant and Walt Comeau's nemesis. Horace is forever beating Walt at cards. Horace has a large, ugly growth on his forehead, which Walt freely and rudely comments on in attempts to embarrass Horace. Horace treats Walt like the village idiot.

Max Roby

Miles' father is an old, feisty, totally self-centered old man who is forever trying to put together enough money to get down to the Florida Keys where people like old farts and the liquor is cheap.

Janine

Miles' estranged wife, who used to be fat, but discovered Walt Comeau's health-club Stairmaster and her own wild sexual identity in the same fell swoop. Janine loves to deride Miles as a sexual failure for the 20 years of their marriage without taking into account that she was not nearly as thin and pretty in those days.

Jimmy Minty

Both childhood and adulthood nemesis of Miles' Roby, and an Empire Falls policeman who aspires to become Chief, Jimmy Minty finally provokes mild-mannered Miles into a fistfight.

David Roby

Miles' younger brother is unofficial partner in managing the Empire Grill. David, a recovering alcoholic who lost the use of an arm in a traffic accident is always trying to push Miles into ventures that will take him out of Empire Falls. This was a deathbed promise he made to their mother.



Father Mark

The progressive young priest at St. Catherine's is Miles' friend, spiritual and intellectual companion. Father Mark, who is highly educated, used to have a cushy academic post in Boston, but was exiled to Empire Falls for his involvement in peace demonstrations and his support of the homosexual community.

Timmy

Timmy, Francine Whiting's attack cat, who seems to come out of nowhere to take viscous swipes of epidermis out of Miles' hide whenever he visits the owner of the Empire Grill. Timmy was fished out of the river after someone had tried to drown him as a kitten and ends up back in the river floating downstream during flood on Francine Whiting's corpse.

Walt Comeau

The Silver Fox is the personification of smarmy and just about everyone's fool. He assumes an air of great knowledge, claims an expansive network of influential contacts, struts around as if he has millions, but seldom spends a nickel. Walt is always taunting Miles about stealing his wife until Miles finally decks him in an arm-wrestling contest.

Peter and Dawn

Peter and Dawn are old college friends of Miles who went on to a lucrative life writing sitcoms. The three students discovered Martha's Vineyard while in college and the couple eventually bought a beach house there. Miles' family traditionally vacations there each summer, and Miles and Tick have just returned from the annual sojourn-this time without Janine, who remained with Walt in Empire Falls.

Mrs. Roderigue

Tick's art teacher dislikes Tick and thinks the most important skill of an artist is cleaning up after class.

Bea Majeski

Bea is Janine's mother and owner of Callahan's, a tavern. Bea owns the building her business is in, one of the few buildings in Empire Falls not owned by the Whitings. Bea thinks her daughter is nuts for dumping Miles in favor of Walt. Eventually, Miles and Bea go into business together.

Father Tom

The padre is a senile old priest who lives with Father Mark. Father Tom's favorite word is *peckerhead*. Father Tom's favorite pastime is hearing confessions-then telling everyone what he heard. Father Tom teams up with Max Roby to steal the church's money and old Crown Victoria for an adventure to the Florida Keys, where he ends of hearing confessions at the end of the bar in a drinking establishment that was once frequented by Ernest Hemmingway.



Objects/Places

A Dead Moose

The carcass washes ashore and is trapped in an eddy at the building site of the Hacienda. The eddy becomes a metaphor for Empire falls, and the moose for the characters and their secrets.

The Rectory at St. Catherine's

Miles and Father Mark call this *The Rectum*, a nickname growing out of youthful Miles' inability to distinguish between the two words.

St. Catherine's Steeple

Miles never manages to build up enough courage to paint the steeple, a symbol of a fear he has developed in adulthood to risk new ventures.

The Thirsty Whale

An inexpensive restaurant on Martha's Vineyard where Grace takes Miles and introduces him to steamed clams-to which he quickly becomes addicted.

The Cock of the Walk

This is an expensive restaurant on Martha's Vineyard, where Mr. Mayne makes steamed clams appear, even though they are not on the menu.

The Gazebo at the Hacienda Site

This is the site where the dead moose washed ashore and the place where Mrs. Whiting and Timmy were when washed away by the flooding Knox River.

Two Revolvers

Jimmy Minty owns one revolver and he uses it to play Polish Roulette. The other gun belonged to John Voss' grandfather and John Voss uses it to commit multiple murders.



Tick's painting of a snake

Tick's painting is chosen for the State Art Fair. The symbolism of the snake is discussed, but never explained.

An Exacto Knife

Tick uses this purloined weapon to defend herself during a mass murder.

Tick's Heavy Backpack

Tick's backpack is a metaphor for the baggage teenagers must lug around, foisted on them by parents, peers, and the system.

Empire Falls

The vast majority of the events in the novel occur in various locations in this small inland Maine town.

The Empire Grill

This is the central location from which events are viewed and at which much of the story takes place.

Callahan's Tavern

Miles' mother-in law owns this establishment.

Empire Falls High School

Significant events occur here, especially in the art studio and the cafeteria.

St. Catherine's Catholic Church

This is Miles' family's church and is the site for many pensive conversations between Miles and Father Mark.

The Hacienda

The Hacienda is lavish Spanish-style residence built by C.B. Whiting as gesture of rebellion and an alternative to the family mansion.



Martha's Vineyard

This posh vacation site is visited numerous times in memory and flashback as a symbol of the *better life* beyond Empire Falls.

The Florida Keys

The Keys are Max's version of Martha's Vineyard and the location for some humorous adventures for him and Father Tom.

Mexico

The country is often mentioned, but always in the past tense, and always in reference to C.B. Whiting.

The Robideaux Blight

This terrain feature is what causes the Knox River to dump dead moose and other trash on the Hacienda building site. C.B. blasts it out of existence before the first chapter, but it remains a significant symbolic location throughout the book.



Themes

Contradictory Parenting

On the surface, Grace and Max appear to be diametrical opposites, but Richard Russo's characters are seldom that one-dimensional. Grace seems to have all of the attributes of a perfect parent, devoted to the point of sacrificing her own happiness for the sake, not only of her own child, but for Cindy Whiting as well. Grace is driven by high moral standards as defined by Roman Catholicism-in spite of her affair with C.B. Whiting. Max, on the other hand, seems to think only of himself, frequently abandoning his family to go paint houses in the Florida Keys under the impression that he is contributing to the family because, in his absence, there is one less mouth to feed. In the final analysis, Grace's selfless sacrifices trap Miles into the deteriorating Empire Falls and a life of toil and servitude, quashing her own passionate obsession that her son should escape the deadly trap and become a professor. Max may be a man of low character, but he is also a free spirit-a dynamic that is constantly battling with Miles' steadfast and proper nature. When the Max in Miles finally finds its way to the surface, it liberates him, albeit at the cost of a bloody donnybrook with cop, and breaking the Silver Fox's arm and head.

Denial

Empire Falls is on the ropes. The factories are closed. Journeymen craftsmen are forced into low-paying service jobs or their families are on welfare. What commerce there is in Empire Falls is both sparse and tawdry reflecting economic conditions. Yet, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, the people sitting in the Empire Grill habitually look down Empire Avenue toward the moribund mill and factories-toward the past-rather than up the street toward a future somewhere else. Each Autumn they invent a fantasy of rich investors buying up and reopening the factories and mill to succor them through the cold Maine winters. The human psychological phenomenon called *denial* allows drunks and addicts to justify their dependencies, lets the crippled accept their conditions before the truth has had time to settle, and permits fat women to view themselves as *Rubinesque*. While denial is an all-to-common human characteristic, it appears in *Empire Falls* that an entire community might fall victim to this psychological escape mechanism. On a community level, denial seems to have three essential components: comfort with the past, fear of the future, and corporate stasis.

Compassionate Vengeance

Francine Whiting has a reputation of being a mean-spirited, stingy, cunning, vengeful, and manipulative woman with a stone heart. For the most part, her reputation seems to nicely fit the character. There is another side to this capitalist icon-or is there. Francine and her fellow female Whitings have emasculated their men, abused their employees,



ignored their children, and generally created havoc and loosed the dogs of war on Empire Falls. Yet, when Francine learns that her husband has been boinking Grace, she predictably sends C.B. packing with a green Pontiac hanging over his head. On the other hand, she takes Grace in when there is no other work for her, provides money for Miles tuition at a college he couldn't afford, and pays Grace's medical bills in exchange for Miles managing the Empire Grill. Francine even promises to will the business to Miles when she dies, giving him a compelling reason to remain in what is quickly becoming a ghost town when he might do much better elsewhere. Is this compassion; or is this vengeance for Grace's bedding her hubby-a vengeance that spans Grace's own generation to torture her son.

Cruelty to Children

John Voss is a stark and clinical manifestation of child abuse. John is a boy so tortured by the overt cruelty and neglect of his irresponsible drug-addicted parents that he has essentially become a smoldering feral animal who ultimately explodes in an orgy of mass murder. Perhaps John is just an extreme benchmark from which lesser cruelties to other children might be measured? Jimmy Minty, who was raised by his father to be a small-time criminal, grows to be a small-time criminal that just happens to be a cop. Jimmy puts expectations on his son, Zack, that turn him into a steroid-using bully. Is that abuse? Candice's mother is a zapped out, bed-hopping ex-hippie, who seems to consider her daughter as a worthless nuisance. Until she bonds with Tick, Candice seems to think of herself in much the same way her mother does. Otto Meyer, who clearly loves children and ends up giving his life to save one, fails to dig deeply into John Voss' background preferring to delegate counseling responsibilities to Tick. A more personal participation by Otto might have prevented a mass murder. Mrs. Whiting openly admits that she does not even like her daughter Cindy, while Grace bonds deeply with Cindy, but places her own child, Miles, in embarrassing and compromising situations for Cindy's sake. Grace even neglected her younger son, David, for Cindy's sake.

Adaptation

While the rest of the town basks dumbly in denial and subservience, three characters-Miles, albeit at David's urging, David and Bea-manage to muster the courage and intelligence to take on Mrs. Whiting and her four-generation tradition of lording over Empire Falls. Bea has always been somewhat defiant of the Whitings daring to buy a building and run her business, Callahan's Tavern, without having to kowtow to the ruling landlord. Bea she learns that even that condition is not Whiting proof when she partners with Miles and David. Bea had never done anything before that would show up as a threat on Mrs. Whiting's radar. When Bea decides to take Miles on as a partner, the regulatory wolves descend on Callahan's in the form of the Health Department and shut the operation down. Miles and David demonstrate their adaptive skills-again at David's urging-by instituting international foods nights at the grill and actually increasing revenue by drawing the shi-shi crowd from the neighboring college town into a decaying



Empire Falls. United, these three brave characters stand up to Mrs. Whiting, notwithstanding her influence over the Board of Health and other regulatory bodies, and actually win. Bea even turns down a generous offer from Whiting agents to sell her building. Not one to accept defeat gracefully, Mrs. Whiting expresses her defiance by dying and floating down the river like the dead moose that once washed ashore in the same spot as the gazebo where Mrs. Whiting was sitting when the flood took her.

Style

Point of View

Empire Falls is written largely from an omniscient point of view but frequently segues into Miles' Roby's naive observer voice or the dialogue of the characters.

Setting

Empire Falls, Maine is the setting for almost all of the action in the novel of the same name with frequent flashbacks to Martha's Vineyard and occasional vignettes in the Florida Keys. A few events also occur in Boston, St. Luke's College, and the Sigma Nu frat house at the University of Maine.

Language and Meaning

Richard Russo is a master of the English language and slips seamlessly from one voice to another. It seems Mr. Russo is incapable of coining a sentence that does not contain some measure of wit and even his vernacular is penned with a warm eloquence.

Structure

Empire Falls is a novel of moderate length of 32 contiguous chapters in four parts. The novel is preceded by a *Prologue* which lays out the history of the town of Empire Falls and the history of the most powerful family-the Whittings-in the town and sets the mood for the action to follow. The *Epilogue* at the end ties up the loose ends.

Quotes

"Hey it's clear to me. They came to invest millions. For a while they were thinking about tech stocks, but then they thought, Hell no, Let's get into textiles. That's where the real profits are. Then, you know what they did? They decided not to build a factory in Mexico or Thailand where people work for about ten bucks a week. Let's drive up to Empire Falls, Maine, they said, and look at that gutted old shell of a factory that the river damned near washed away last Spring and buy all new equipment and create hundreds of jobs, nothing under 20 dollars an hour."

"...he knew her (*Mrs. Roderigue's*) mind had fused shut sometime during Catholic grade school. Nothing had happened since she was twelve that did anything except reinforce the convictions she already held. As a condition for keeping her job, the school district insisted that she attend summer school in Farmington, but these classes did little to shake the woman's defiant convictions, which she proudly maintained were uncorrupted by the university.

"In Bill Roderigue, a local insurance man, she'd found her ideal mate, an infinitely patient fellow who never seemed to weary of her sense of thwarted superiority. Miles, after serving several terms on the school board, knew most of Tick's teachers and made it a matter of policy not to speak ill of them, regardless of how ignorant and narrow-minded they were, but with Doris Roderigue he was often tempted to make an exception. During the last five years he'd run up against her on numerous occasions-about curriculum, about books held in the library, about staffing-but since the day he'd invited her, in public meeting, to explain a single difference between the work of Andrew Wyeth and Jackson Pollock and then used her startled confusion to suggest an explanation for why art history was not included in her courses, she'd steered clear of him. According to Tick, the woman was steering clear of her as well, by putting her at the table composed of the least motivated students in the class and then pretending the table didn't exist."

""Want to know what your real problem is?" said Charlene, who had passed their booth several times during this conversation and apparently overheard enough to feel qualified to contribute. Charlene hadn't been a small-town waitress all her life for nothing. She entered into the conversations of diners with both confidence and a sense of entitlement. Last spring David and Miles had each suggested this might not be a good idea with their new evening clientele, especially with the professors, who probably weren't accustomed to having their thinking clarified by waitresses. Nor were they likely to tip anyone who'd belittled their logic. Charlene had briefly considered the wisdom of this advice, but in the end rejected it. For one thing, she said, having listened to their conversations, many of the professors badly needed a little clarification. For another, she was confident that despite their carefully trimmed beards, their pressed chinos and tweed jackets, college professors tipped in the same fashion as other men-according to cup size. She was doing very well by them, thanks all the same."



"You willingly entered a bad marriage to save yourself from a worse one. You feared that if you didn't marry soon, you'd find yourself at the altar with my daughter, because you were certain those were your mother's wishes. You had enough of your father in you to cut yourself the best deal you could that didn't involve the more elegant solution of simply running away. The Greyhound terminal was still operating in Empire Falls twenty years ago, but that would never have been an option for Grace Roby's son. All those catechism classes convinced you that no one gets away scot-free. So you attained that safe middle ground. Maybe you couldn't have what you wanted most, which was that girl with the knockers who still works for you at the restaurant-am I right? -but you were clever enough to avoid what you feared most, which was a poor crippled young woman, who was suicidally in love with you and whose pitiful devotion would've made your life one long, hellish exercise in moral virtue. "

""...they (*women*) get under your skin," was how his father had explained it, back when he was trying to make Zack understand about his mother and all the trouble and why she left. "They never come at you straight," his father went on, "like a man would. They just nick away at you, a little nick here, a little nick there. At first you don't even think you're bleeding, then the next thing you know you're a quart low, maybe two. But they had you over a barrel too, his father always added. What could you do, turn into a fag?""

"Zack thought as he moved out across the weedy lawn toward the back of the house. For twenty yards he'd be in the open, visible in the moonlight from both the road and the house. Maybe girls were a mystery, like his father said, but to Zack fear was an even bigger puzzle. The way it came and went. The way it made no sense. That's what the game was all about, really, and the reason he'd invented it in the first place. If the gun was empty and you knew it, if you'd taken the bullets out yourself and you'd double-checked to make sure you hadn't missed any, then the fucking thing couldn't shoot you. If you knew anything in the world at the instant you pulled the trigger, you knew that. Why, then, was it so hard to do? Why, if you weren't this fucking Voss kid, did you flinch?"

"He wished now that he'd never introduced him to the game. Almost wished he'd never invented it. In the beginning it was fun, watching people freak out when they saw you do it. Tick had been the worst. He'd known better, even at-the time, than to play the game with her, but he'd gone ahead and done it anyway-though he never expected her to go completely ballistic. Afterward, showing her all over again that the gun was empty, that there hadn't been any danger at all, only seemed to make her madder, and she'd refused to speak to him until he promised never to play again."

"Now he wished he'd kept the promise. In breaking it, he'd hoped the news would get back to her and she'd realize it was because of how she was treating him. Except the whole thing had backfired. He knew it made no sense, but seeing this Voss kid not flinch had fucked him up somehow. Two nights in a row he'd lain awake thinking about it, knowing this fucking kid had upped the ante to the point where the next step was to spin a real bullet in the chamber, and then they'd see what they were really made of."



Topics for Discussion

Mrs. Whiting uses her power to manipulate the entire town of Empire Falls. Often her tactics have been ruthless. It often seems that she cares for no one but herself and her obnoxious cat Timmy. Mrs. Whiting freely admits that she doesn't like her daughter and never respected her husband. Weakness is her excuse for both reactions. When Miles and Bea dare to challenge her control, she tries first to squash them then to buy them. Yet, when Grace Roby has an affair with her husband, she takes his mistress under her wing, providing lavishly—at least in terms of tuition and hospital bills—for both her and her son. Was that genuine largess or did she have an ulterior motive? Was she really punishing Grace by trapping Miles in Empire Falls and the Empire Grill when she knew that Grace desperately wanted him to graduate from college and move on to something better? Miles left college in his senior year, short of graduation, to come and be with his mother as she was dying—something Grace passionately did *not* want. Was this Mrs. Whiting's revenge for the affair? Did she purposely design it so that Grace would watch from her deathbed as her son, in whom she'd placed so much hope, toiled away in a dead end life in a dead in town?