

Foreign Affairs Study Guide

Foreign Affairs by Alison Lurie

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Plot Summary

Foreign Affairs follows two professors of English literature at an Ivy League college on study leave in London. Vinnie Miner is a tenured professor, who specializes in children's literature. A Fifty-four year old divorcee, she is convinced that her physical plainness will prevent her from ever experiencing true love. Vinnie's strong libido and Victorian mind-set war within her and she has worked out patterns of behavior that allow her to get through life with minimal problems. An imaginary dog Fido, who appears whenever self-pity strikes Vinnie, sizes himself to fit her mood. Childless and not particularly sympathetic to children as individuals, Vinnie will spend six months in a country she truly loves, trying to prove her thesis that British rhymes are more ancient and more literary than American ones, while both share a common theme of violence.

The second academic is Vinnie's younger colleague, Fred Turner, who is not yet tenured. Good looks have been a curse to him from youth and his impetuous marriage to a radical photographer, Roo, has broken down just before his departure. Alone and desperately broke, Fred cannot focus on his work. Through Vinnie, he unintentionally meets a beautiful British actress, Lady Rosemary Radley and falls madly in love. Rosemary introduces Turner to her social circle, changing his dim views on modern English culture, while distracting him from his research. Mutual friends ask him to intervene with Rosemary to hire a maid to clean her disheveled house. Surprisingly, she complies and it is transformed into a wonderful site for a party. When Fred refuses to break his commitment to teach summer school, Rosemary breaks off their relationship and throws him out of the house. Demolished emotionally, Fred asks Vinnie to intervene and explain to Rosemary the pragmatic demands of academic life.

Vinnie, meanwhile, has run into an unemployed, uneducated, garish Oklahoman, Chuck Mumpson. Seatmates on the transatlantic flight, Chuck helps Vinnie find a taxi to get to her rented flat. Because he appears depressed, Vinnie agrees to have coffee with him. Chuck is in England ostensibly as a tourist but is actually on a quest to find a relative, "Old Mumpson," the "Hermit of South Leigh," about whom his grandfather used to brag. Vinnie encourages the project and is attracted by its folkloric aspects, while retaining her disdain for the loud, overweight searcher. Repeated contacts turn them into friends and eventually into lovers, as Chuck reveals the tragedies of his upbringing and dying marriage. Having just begun to enjoy life, Chuck is struck down by a heart attack and Vinnie learns the details from his daughter Barbie, who resembles him closely.

Vinnie receives a phone call from Fred's estranged wife in America, who wants to reconcile with her husband during the brief time both will be in New York. Roo asks Vinnie to have Fred call her at her father's apartment, giving the number for Vinnie's literary nemesis, L. D. Zimmern. Tempted to get vengeance by keeping this secret, Vinnie is empowered by Chuck's loving spirit to trek across London at night and deliver the message.

On the eve of his departure home, lovelorn Fred lets himself into Rosemary's mansion to retrieve clothing and a book. The house has been sacked. Hearing noise in the



basement, Fred investigates and confronts Rosemary's Cockney charlady, Mrs. Harris, in a drunken rage. Following him upstairs, she repeats phrases Rosemary used with him in private and when he attempts to leave, she tries to block his panicked exit. Pushing her aside, Fred is disgusted by the sight of her naked breasts, but at home realizes they are Rosemary's breasts, down to the tiniest detail. Mrs. Harris and Rosemary are one. The actress has become her role. Edwin, a mutual friend, confides that Rosemary has a history of psychotic episodes and takes control of her care. Fred is told to forget her and leave her alone. Fred races to the airport just in time to catch his flight.

Edwin and Vinnie meet for lunch and she admits out loud that she loved Chuck. Edwin reports that Rosemary is on the way to recovery and Vinnie reveals a note from Fred saying his marriage is being put back together. As she returns to her flat, Vinnie reminds herself that despite the loneliness she will face when she returns to America, she is a successful writer and she invites a miniaturized and hesitant Fido into the flat.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Virginia ("Vinnie") Miner, a small, plain, unmarried fifty-four year-old professor of children's literature at an Ivy League college, who rejects the idea that plain, aging women must be self-effacing and uncomplaining, boards a daytime charter flight to London, where she will spend six months researching "A Comparative Investigation of the Play-Rhymes of British and American Children." Vinnie, who has made the trip before, knows how to cut through the crowds and settles into a window seat in such a way as to minimize any chance for conversation.

Fido, an invisible dog that manifests itself whenever Vinnie feels self-pity, accompanies her because L. D. Zimmern has attacked her in an *Atlantic* article calling her field of study useless scholarship. Vinnie is a New Englander at heart and *Atlantic* is her favorite journal. In most English departments, children's literature is an embarrassing relative, tolerated because it is popular with undergraduates. Colleagues, students, neighbors and friends, present and former, will read Zimmern's article and judge her. Vinnie mentally composes a letter to the editor, while imagining Zimmern slain by the plague memorialized in "Ring around a rosie." It would be as foolish to send such a letter as to point out any flaw in one's appearance, but with no one in her life, Vinnie takes professional reverses badly.

A bulky, balding, Western-attired man seated on the aisle asks to look at a newspaper lying on the seat between him and Vinnie. Constrained by convention, Vinnie gives permission, but buries her nose in *Vogue* to avoid conversation. Vinnie has known since puberty that her face resembles a small, wild rodent and no attempt at improving her appearance by adopting contemporary fashion thereafter helped. At fifty, Vinnie accepted her status as a disadvantaged woman, but at least does not have to endure the looks of pity that follow once-beautiful women as they age. Vinnie's lovers-it is a mistake to believe plain women are celibate-are "palls."

Fido is active by the time Vinnie's seatmate returns the paper, which Vinnie takes up and finds stimulating, contrary to the crude Westerner's opinion. Vinnie always avoids conversations on transatlantic flights, but this man's appearance and speech suggest he should be particularly shunned. Occasionally, he goes to the back of the plane and returns reeking of smoke, which Vinnie detests. Vinnie cannot concentrate on reading because of his chatting with fellow Sun Tourists. Visiting the washroom, Vinnie confiscates toiletry bottles. Although Vinnie lives comfortably and is by no means a miser, she believes life owes her something and "borrows" things from public places whenever things go badly. However, she never shoplifts and none of her friends know about her habit.

The red-faced, rumped man rises to readmit Vinnie to her seat and tries again to strike up a conversation. To gain peace, Vinnie pulls several books from her tote bag and



offers to let him read one. Halfway through the flight, she is buoyed by the thought of stepping again into the picture-book land of England. Vinnie goes there as often as she can afford to and feels she is a nicer person there. Moving there permanently is an impossible dream. Most teachers of English fall in love with the Elizabethan or Edwardian period and find the contemporary country cold, wet, overpriced, unfriendly, worn-out and boring. Vinnie pities such error. Quiet English life is like a warm bath. In England, folklore is still honored. Vinnie's published works have done better in England than America. Fortunately, *Atlantic* is not widely distributed in England.

At mealtime, Vinnie passes on the nondescript food, but requests sherry and tea. Admiring the chicken sandwich she pulls from her bag, Vinnie's seatmate remarks how airline fare is like silage. Picking up *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, he observes that Vinnie must be happy returning home to Britain. Feeling essentially English, Vinnie is pleased her New England accent, academic intonation and preference for tea have fooled him, but as a scholar feels obliged to correct errors. The man resembles Mr. Hobbs in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, which he reads intently for hours.

Over Ireland, Vinnie reveals she is American and learns everything there is to know about Charles (Chuck) Mumpson: Tulsa waste-disposal engineer, University of Oklahoma alumnus, father of two grown children, grandfather of three. Mr. Mumpson had embarked on a two-week Sun Tour of England, unaccompanied by his busy real estate wife. Hobbs/Mumpson introduces Vinnie to his older sister and brother-in-law, visiting Europe for the first time. Vinnie wonders why Americans have no respect for travelers' anonymity like the English. Circling the airport gives Vinnie opportunity to learn more about life in Tulsa and Fort Worth.

Vinnie is among the first off the plane and through immigration. One bag however, filled with warm clothing and vital research papers, delays her for twenty minutes. Having fretted needlessly about replacing these treasures, Vinnie passes through customs and rushes to the bus station, only to see the last red double-decker pull away. It is after midnight, no taxicabs are to be seen and while Fido lets out a foghorn howl, tears sting Vinnie's eyes. Hobbs/Mumpson, looking even more like an American caricature, suggests Vinnie ride the tour bus to their hotel, where taxis are sure to abound. Vinnie finds a taxi there and Mumpson helps her with her luggage. Mumpson hopes to run into her again and they exchange phone numbers. Vinnie's flat on Regent's Park Road is precisely as it has been during her three previous rentals and with tears of joy and relief falling, Vinnie feels safe at home in London.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces a repressed, determined New England academic and an affable, undereducated Oklahoma businessman in the closed confines of a transatlantic flight. Only in the final hour of the flight do they speak, but it is more than enough for Vinnie Miner. As polar opposites, they share nothing more than American citizenship heading toward what Vinnie considers her true spiritual homeland. An imaginary dog, Fido,

appears whenever Vinnie is depressed. Fido is active on the flight but will disappear for much of the novel.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Fred Turner, another American academic in London, who has crossed the ocean to research John Gay's long poem, *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London*, takes the Underground for the first time. Like the poem's hero, Fred is a walker (and a runner), but a dinner invitation in Hampstead demands he take public transportation. Fred studies the garish advertisements, but fellow passengers note his classically sculptured Edwardian features and physique. Fred, now twenty-eight, has been used to attention from childhood. Were he an actor, Fred's looks would be an asset, but as an English teacher they are a liability. Unfairly prejudged as unserious by colleagues, he is the object of crushes by one-third of his students. Fred distances himself from his students, fearing serious professional trouble if he were to break the code of ethics, but he dislikes being considered cold and formal.

Fred has never been this miserable, as his wife Ruth ("Roo") was to accompany him, but they are in a "trial separation." Fred has revisited the neighborhood he lived in briefly as a boy and though radically changed by time, it is the only part of London where he is comfortable. He shares many Americans' inability to use senses beyond "sightseeing"; tasting, hearing and touching are blocked by foreignness. Fred needs someone to distract and warm him. On the train, a pretty woman smiles at him, but Fred does not know how to pick up women as he has had only to choose among the many who find him attractive. Even if he found someone here, she would not be Roo. Fred's childhood playboy friend, Roberto Frank, says all you get from carrying a torch is sore fingers, but Fred cannot help himself. Fred has never accepted Roberto's quantity-over-quality, no-strings-attached approach to sex.

Fred is going to Joe and Debby Vogelers' for dinner. Graduate school companions, they are the only people his age Fred knows in London. The eccentric and touchy Professor Miner he also knows, but he avoids her. Fred's dislike of London would not set well with such an anglophile and she sits on the faculty committee that controls his fate. Fred has, however, accepted Vinnie's invitation to a "drinks party" later in the week.

Fred needs the Vogelers' free meal. For some reason, his salary checks are not clearing and he is broke. The trio discusses their disenchantment with England. Debby, who teaches British literature, is warmly indignant, while Joe, who teaches British philosophy, is ironically resigned. The Vogelers miss Claremont, CA, where they teach in adjacent colleges. British grocery stores, dry cleaners and billboards offend their sensibilities and they feel strongly that tourism has destroyed Britain. The weather has laid up stoic Joe and baby Jakie for a week and their house is nothing like what the agent described. After six weeks, the Vogelers are still jet-lagged.

At 8 PM, the Vogelers turn on BBC to watch an installment of an Edward James novel. Fred envies the couple's sharing the sense of touch and ability to write in the terrible



working conditions at the British Museum, whose name Roo shortened to "BM" (for "Bowel Movement"). The museum's closed stacks and constipated retrieval system frustrate the energetic, easily-distracted Fred, who feels cramped in the ill-ventilated, prison-like hall. Fred's work is going badly.

Fred tries to leave after the program, but the Vogelers want to discuss Roo. Fred's friends neither know Roo nor like her, as in their opinion, she is not right for him-always in overdrive and on a different wavelength. Joe advises Fred not to let it get him down and Debby adds that anyone can make a mistake. With a nod to their shared past, they remind Fred about brilliant, unique Carissa, whom they like and are sorry left Fred's life. Fred recalls Carissa as a conventional, anxious academic and tries to change the subject. Fred then has to take ten minutes to convince Joe and Debby he is not offended by their opinions.

Walking to the Underground, Fred is angry and unconsolated. From their first meeting three years ago, he has known that Roo is not right for him, but everything about her has made him hum like a stereo amplifier. The first time they met, Roo had been photographing a Corinth University reception for a newspaper in an orange T-shirt, jodhpurs and waxed boots, having gone horseback riding earlier that afternoon. Although she considered the uptight professor a pig in disguise who would cause her grief, Roo had impulsively invited Fred to go riding that weekend and he had enthusiastically accepted.

In an apple orchard above the farm owned by Roo's mother and stepfather, Roo denied the thesis that one's childhood fantasies would not come true. Since age seven, the prince she had pictured looked like Fred. Crazy about horses since age seven, she had been riding regularly since thirteen. Fred, a "lucky bastard," had been riding since two or three. Fred had remarked that girls and horses were a funny social phenomenon, but Roo had dismissed the Freudian explanation. In elementary school, girls are divided into goody-two-shoes and the horse-crazy. Roo was the latter type: strong, energetic and free. The couple had embraced in the high grass. Roo had known many attractive men who pretended they could ride and some unattractive dopes who really could, but she had never brought anyone to this orchard before Fred. To prevent Fred from thinking too highly of himself, Roo told him she had waited a long time for her prince. Needing to escape a lousy job and relationship in Boston, Roo had wanted to ride Shara one last time, since horses over 20 no longer ride well. With an uneven laugh, Roo had added that in a couple of weeks it would grow too cold for outdoor sex. "So don't think you're so special," Roo had repeated.

Fred remembers rejoicing in feeling special, while most friends and relatives were clear that Roo was not the kind of girl/woman with whom they expect him to be. Since the breakup, they congratulate him on being rid of her. Fred's father admits Roo is good-looking and warm-hearted, but is put off by her socially provocative photography. The Vogelers find her too emotional, political, arty and Jewish (although Joe is Jewish, but in a laid-back version). Only Fred's elegant mother, Emily, likes Roo and wants them back together. Recalling a conversation with Emily during their first visit, Roo had suggested



his mother has had enough affairs to make life interesting. This makes Fred recall several scenarios that hint of adultery, but he rejects the idea.

This conversation occurred three months into their relationship and Fred found himself not only intoxicated with Roo sexually but able to see the world through her eyes. Fred understands the detail in Gothic art and Francis Bacon's paintings. No longer caring about whether Roo was shocking, he began to use that shock like the ventriloquist, who lets his dummy mouth insult and wisecrack so he can claim innocence. Roo had learned to use Fred to say conventional things she did not want to utter, particularly the announcement of their plan to marry. Emily's reaction had been surprise, thinking marriage in her son's generation is passé: were they expecting?

Roo had planned the Perfect Wedding to fulfill her youthful fantasies. Rejecting Fred's last name, she had not wanted to retain Zimmern either, as it was provided by a father who had walked out when Roo was young. So Roo, had become Ruth March, honoring the month of her birth and Jo March, the heroine in *Little Women*.

Now, Roo's remaining at home in America is causing Fred financial woes, because there is no income from subletting their apartment. Worse, without the adventurous Roo, Fred also lacks the spirit to explore England. Fred reminds himself that there is no point in thinking about her, as she cares nothing about him and he fears she probably never did. Insulted and most likely betrayed, Fred still cannot help but picture Roo, photographing the Lapland and probably fucking (no polite word is applicable). Fred always stops short in considering these details.

Fred remembers the energy with which Roo prepared for her first one-woman exhibition, "Natural Forms," and the London trip. Fred cannot recall her offer to preview the prints nor her warnings to expect surprises. Fred does remember her asking to use some shots of him- while he was preoccupied with work. An hour before the opening, Fred and Roo had exchanged their last warm, untroubled embrace. At the show, photos of natural and manmade objects hung in pairs, to emphasize similarities-humorous or political. Fred had enthused about Roo's lyrical talent, but in the main exhibit, Fred had seen details of himself everywhere and had grown embarrassed. Roo had been anxious, as Fred had identified his erect penis juxtaposed with woodland mushrooms. Roo had had no answer to his objection that everyone would know whose penis it was-who else's could it be? Other photos had shown other penises and Roo had refused to remove any or to identify the other models, ranting about the male hypocrisy that would depict nude females but was shocked when the tables were turned. Roo had denied having had any physical contact with the unknown models and in a rage, had admitted her friends were right about Fred being a pig.

On the train platform, Fred reminds himself to put Roo and their disaster of a marriage behind him. Marrying Roo had been an act of defiance, a rebellion against a privileged but unexciting life. Fred is ashamed that others, like his father, have judged Roo more accurately than he. The photos she takes are vulgar, but she does not realize it. Fred mulls over Debby's cold and condescending remark about anyone being able to make a mistake. Clearly, dumpy, dish-faced Debby, who had been interested in Fred before



meeting Joe without his knowing it, is glad to see Fred depressed. Debby resents his position at an Ivy League school, while she and Joe teach in obscure colleges and she has pointed out that Fred is an example of "Entitlement Psychology" in need of being muddied up a bit. Joe, the superior character, does not resent Fred. Fred also wonders whether Debby might resent his sponging off them and vows to visit less frequently, hoping that Professor Miner's hors d'oeuvres will suffice as a meal.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 introduces a second protagonist, Fred Turner, a junior member in Vinnie's English department, also on a research grant in London. Fred is estranged from his quirky, artistic wife, Ruth ("Roo") March and this has ruined the prospects of five months in Britain. Two friends from graduate school, Joe and Debby Vogeler, are Fred's only company and the three are the antithesis of Vinnie in their attitude toward modern England. Fred is broke and wary of Vinnie, who sits on the faculty committee controlling his academic fate. Roo's decision to invent a new surname when she wed Fred disguises the fact that her estranged father is Vinnie's nemesis, L. D. Zimmern. In this chapter, there is the first of many references to Henry James. Readers unfamiliar with the American novelist may wish to consult http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_James for context.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Vinnie reads in a chic restaurant, waiting for perennially late Edwin Francis, her oldest friend in London, children's book editor, writer and formidable critic. Vinnie appears almost girlish in dress and Edwin resembles an artificially aged child or Hobbit, afflicted by depression and alcoholism. Edwin is acquainted with London's artistic community and opens with delicious, sharp-witted, sharp-tongued gossip. Lady Posy Billings assures him Lady Rosemary Radley has taken up with Vinnie's colleague, Mr. Turner. Vinnie thinks this unlikely, although Fred is sufficiently good-looking for the extremely pretty and charming television and film actress to want to show off to her crowd of admirers. Rosemary has a history of impetuous, disastrous affairs. As an American, boring Fred is exotic.

Edwin insists the coupling is Vinnie's fault, because Fred and Rosemary met at her party. Feeling sorry for her compatriot, Vinnie had invited Fred to meet a friend's daughter, who turned out to be a punk rocker. After bantering about the danger of hosting parties, Vinnie clarifies that she has nothing against Fred, but no more than a fling with Rosemary can occur. Breaking his medical diet by what he orders to eat, Edwin declares Rosemary is tired of flings and like him, seeks undying passion. Edwin's disastrous affairs, less frequent than Rosemary's, have been with unstable young émigré males employed in menial jobs. Rosemary will certainly devour delectable Fred. Fred must return to America in June, Vinnie counters and cannot afford to anger the English Department by not teaching summer school. Rosemary has plenty of money, Edwin suggests, offending Vinnie's professional standards. Vinnie shifts the argument to the ten-year age difference, while Edwin focuses on forbidden pastries. Vinnie is offended by a man as intelligent as Edwin indulging an unhealthy passion for food and demanding friends play along with the charade that he is dieting. With growing irritation, she passes up an apricot tart but has to listen to details of Rosemary's penchant for irresponsibility. Edwin insists Vinnie advise Fred to "cool it" before damage is done and Vinnie agrees, only to end the discussion. Inwardly, she resolves not to use academic seniority for blackmail.

Vinnie prefers working in the quiet London Library Reading Room, surrounded by the ghosts of Henry James and Virginia Woolf and offering prospects for encountering living writers of great stature. Vinnie's scholarly research is nearly complete and, when the weather improves, she will begin visiting schools to observe playground rhymes. There has been no difficulty lining up cooperation from teachers appreciative of folklore. The unpleasant flight and the hateful *Atlantic* article are mostly forgotten, although Vinnie has been misplacing copies of the March issue in the reading room to hinder patrons' finding it as her training prevents her from stealing and destroying the magazine, which, after all, contains an excellent article on vanishing wildlife.



Vinnie is annoyed at Fred Turner, illogically blaming him for making her skip the tart and part with Edwin less amicably than usual. Vinnie barely knows Fred and what he does with a mutual acquaintance is none of her concern. Vinnie is angry at breaking a cardinal rule of keeping American acquaintances and English friends separate. Vinnie had, of course, heard rumors about Fred's marital problems but gives no importance to being spouseless. Running into Fred, hapless and hungry in a grocery store, had brought out the best in Vinnie and she had extended the invitation she instantly regretted. At the party, Fred had fallen into the circle around Rosemary, but Vinnie had thought nothing of it. Rosemary's influence within a small radius was overpowering, but she was one to quickly flit to new admirers. Rosemary's specialty was in portraying highborn women of every historical period, projecting elegance and breeding in whatever mood the script demands. A convincing aristocrat, her father had been a baron. Rosemary had been twice married but was childless and now lived alone in a beautiful but untidy house in Chelsea. Vinnie is sympathetic to Rosemary but does not trust her fluttery, teasing charm. Rosemary effects wonder over minor things, laughing and flipping her pale gold hair. People enjoy her attention and Vinnie feels left out, as she does not receive it. To actors, words are just a means of displaying vocal talent. Vinnie and Rosemary meet often as part of Edwin's social web, but do not like one another.

At closing time, Vinnie goes to Fortnum & Mason's for a bite to eat. An American voice hails her. Chuck Mumpson reminds her how they met and asks "how's going?" Chuck seems unenthusiastic and nervous. Vinnie accepts an invitation to coffee and a flattering request for advice about England. Chuck's crass remarks about employees clad in Regency dress being an "advertising gimmick" irritate Vinnie, but she is too polite to back out of the date. Vinnie had not realized Chuck intended to remain so long in England. Chuck, a cowboy perfectly out of place in an Edwardian tearoom, figures you should spend at least a month in order to get your money's worth. Chuck says time is no problem, as he retired early and involuntarily, at fifty-seven. Vinnie reflects inwardly on the security tenure gives. Stumbling into a first-name basis. Chuck orders coffee while Vinnie prefers tea and an apricot tart. Vinnie convinces him to try a trifle, which he is amazed is bigger than a banana split.

Chuck's wife Myrna is a powerhouse in the booming Tulsa real estate market, who is happy not to have him hanging around the house. Seeing Chuck determined to unburden himself, Vinnie steers the conversation to tourism. Chuck likes the variable weather and greenery but is opposed to the lumpy beds, inadequate hot water and food that tastes like boiled hay. Traffic is crazy and the natives incomprehensible. Vinnie compares Chuck's grazing on his trifle with Edwin's elegant style. Chuck says the Tower of London is just an abandoned prison where many innocent people have been killed. A huffy guide could not answer his questions and charged extra for him to see fake copies of the crowned jewels. Most Englishmen, however, make fun of themselves, which Chuck appreciates-better than the boasters at Oral Roberts University-Jesus-freaks who are on your side while you are getting ahead in life, but turn on you when you fail.

The diatribe ends when Chuck says *Little Lord Fauntleroy* has reminded him of his grandfather's tales about an English ancestor named Charles Mumpson. Supposedly,



this lord abandoned his castle and gained fame as the "Hermit of South Leigh." Chuck wants to look into this but does not know where to start and he comments Vinnie must have made a mistake in writing the number she gave him. Chastened by her willful (but unacknowledged) deception, Vinnie lists standard places to begin his tiresome, middlebrow quest, but the folkloric aspect does pique Vinnie's interest. Perhaps there is a publishable article here. The thought of Chuck as the debased southwest American descendent of some southwest English lord is amusing.

A squabble over the check ensues, but Vinnie prevails and they split it. Vinnie declines an invitation to lunch, reminding Chuck he will have to visit his ancestral village. Take a train, she advises, because renting cars is expensive in England. Money is no problem, Chuck responds, as his severance was generous. Vinnie contemplates abundant time and money on the bus ride home. A commonality of misfortune unites the two: loneliness, boredom, loss of self-esteem and perhaps sexual frustration (given the way Chuck held her arm above the elbow). Chuck might not even look bad in bed, but she figures he is the kind of man who just purchases an "outlet" for sex, probably some "cute babe" under thirty. However, he needs to talk and whores are probably not much good for that. Vinnie is the only woman Chuck knows in Britain and she is both reassured and irritated that she will probably not have to fight off his advances.

In the three years since her break-up, where a friend carried off her ex, Vinnie has protected herself against emotional attachments, never wanting to "make trouble" for another woman. Vinnie's lovers are merely fond of her outside of bed, where she is great. Imaginary relationships suffice, recently with intellectual older men of distinction. Vinnie has never had a lover in England. At fifty-four, this would be pathetic, comic, or both and she ought to be on sabbatical from sex. The thought of Chuck naked in her bed is irritating. The lights and throbbing sounds of Piccadilly Circus are a Scylla and Charybdis of temptation to elderly sexual farce and tragedy.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter 3 introduces three of Vinnie's socialite friends, showing her as the unwitting catalyst for a tryst between Fred and a prominent film and television actress. This and a chance meeting with Chuck, her boorish traveling companion, force Vinnie to confront sexual passions that refuse to be repressed by age and station. Scylla and Charybdis are a reference to the mythological sirens that try to seduce Odysseus in Homer's epic. Notable men of letters populate Vinnie's sexual fantasies and her inability to sublimate her feelings is intensely frustrating. Chuck will undoubtedly appear naked in Vinnie's bed, by or against her will, because she has taken a professional interest in his quest for his ancestral roots.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Rosemary is typically late meeting Fred at the theater. Life has become a circus of light for Fred since Professor Miner's party a month ago. Fred recalls how, as he was leaving, Rosemary made her grand entrance, looking like she had just stepped out of an 18th-century painting. Having never met a member of the aristocracy, Fred had observed her more closely and had not had a chance to reply to her exclamation of love for Americans before she had flitted to another ear. Back in his empty flat, Fred had not been able to find her in the phone book and he had doubted that Vinnie would provide a number. However, he had recalled that Rosemary had mentioned a new play and he had broken his budget to surprise her there. At intermission, he had seen Rosemary in the lobby, looking radiantly sexual and desirable. A circle of admirers had made Fred's chances of talking with her slim, but he had been bold. The pursuit of notoriously undependable Rosemary had required stubbornness and money he could not afford. Roberto Frank would have roared to learn that it took Fred two weeks to get to first base with Rosemary and after a month had still not yet scored. Frank is frustrated but not discouraged. Rosemary is entrancing, quite the opposite of Roo. Tonight, Fred hopes to satisfy his desire.

In light of Rosemary, Fred remembers Roo under the apple trees, surrendering sexually too quickly, almost uncouthly. That should have been a warning to Fred. Within weeks, Roo had been wandering their apartment naked, performing private activities in front of him and detailing her past. Fred had denounced himself as an uptight preppie and had adopted Roo's freedom as natural. Rosemary, by contrast, knows instinctively that mystery preserves romance. Fred has not seen her completely naked and knows nothing of her past. Fred admits he would like to penetrate her mind, but will not intrude uninvited.

Rosemary arrives at the theater as Fred is ready to give up and she brushes past him, announcing they will eat with Erin after the play. Fred does not want to waste precious time with some actor and knows he cannot afford the restaurants they frequent. Rosemary has bought him too many expensive meals lately. Busily scanning faces, Rosemary is too distracted to discuss Fred's feelings and dismisses his monetary concerns, as theater people always treat others when they are working. Fred, who is not a theater type, knows he will again order something cheap and fill up on another's leftovers.

Fred is uncomfortable for the rest of the evening and Rosemary confronts this in the taxi. Fred always forgives her and he tells her that he loves her. Rosemary is dismissive of love. While she believes him and loves him in return, she says factors like age complicate matters. Rosemary insists she is too tired for Fred to visit tonight, that she must go straight to bed. For the next eighteen hours, Fred's state of mind is dark, as he



repeatedly rings her but cannot get past the answering service. Around 6 PM, Rosemary, as affectionate as ever, invites him to come over.

Fred and Posy are invited to spend a weekend at the country home of Sir James ("Jimbo") and Lady Penelope ("Posy") Billings. The house has a campy late-Victorian feel, but Posy's decorator friend, Nadia Phillips, has nearly convinced her to redecorate the library in a 1930s art-deco fashion. Fred stands there alone, lamenting the décor is doomed and reflecting on life since meeting Rosemary. Fred now rejects the Vogelers' secondhand and incomplete BBC-derived view of English life and art. Celebrities now talk with him about his research and more intimate matters, although they sometimes forget his name. Two things about Rosemary concern him. Although her starring role as Lady Emma Tally on *Tallyho Castle* has made her familiar to millions, she yearns to play Hedda Gabler, Blanche DuBois, or Lady Macbeth before she grows too old and she is certain she can handle these roles. Edwin has explained, however, that Rosemary is too stereotyped for any director to take a chance and her face and delivery fail to project a tragedy queen's dark energy and like Rosemary's other friends, Fred is puzzled by how she can allow her elegant, if faded, house in Chelsea to become a wretched mess inside. Doubtless, she has no time for housework, but she could hire someone. Posy has asked Fred to raise the question of hiring a sturdy "daily" to clean, shop, launder and cook. Fred reluctantly agrees to perform this good deed, knowing it will not be easy. Rosemary hates talking about "boring practical things."

Posy's other guests are Edwin, accompanied by current "particular friend," Nico, a well-educated, Greek Cypriot who wants to get into film and discuss benefits for his island nation; and cousin William Just, often called "Just William," a middle-aged, rumped, knowledgeable and self-effacing BBC functionary. Fred and Nico are both disappointed that Jimbo, a high-risk investor, is away on business in the Middle East. After drinks and a five-course dinner at which Fred struggles to keep up with the conversation, Posy calls for playing her version of charades, in which teams dress up elaborately and act out the syllables of individual words. Rosemary, Edwin and Just William go first, provocatively parsing "Horticulture" as "whore," "tit," and "culture." After laughter and another round of drinks, Rosy, Nico and Fred get no further than the first syllable in "Catastrophe" before Jimbo's car drives up.

Posy hustles Just William off to the boathouse and drives the rest of the company upstairs to change out of their costumes and assume a variety of tasks: Rosemary and Edwin will keep Jimbo busy in the drawing room, Fred and Nico will gather up William's belongings. Posy dismisses her husband's claim to have telegraphed his early return from Ankara, pours him a drink and flits away. Nico refuses to touch another man's laundry but, as Fred sets to work, explains Just William and Posy are lovers. When Fred is loath to believe this, Nico points out William's utility to Posy's desire to gain media exposure and the convenient proximity of his room to Posy's—William occupies the husband's customary abode. Jimbo knows about the affair and accepts it, provided he never has to see the lover's face and his family life is not disrupted. Nico suggests that Jimbo has his own expensive and "not very nice" amusements.



Posy interrupts, inspecting their progress and asks Fred to carry William's bag to the boathouse before returning to meet her husband. Both men are asked to avoid grumpy Jimbo until after he has had his breakfast. Posy asks Fred to go walking or jogging with her husband. Fred's view on Posy's beauty and charm decline as he carries Williams's bag to the boathouse. The path is dark and sinister and William looks guilty and disreputable, accepting his belongings. Fred is tempted to flee to London, but cannot abandon Rosemary. Returning to the house, which now appears somehow misshapen, Fred thinks about how this situation has all the elements of a Jamesian novel and is exhilarated to play the role of the sterling young American champion.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 adds detail about Rosemary's personality and sloppy home life and examines British norms for an "open marriage," as Fred and Edward's gay friend Nico, gather up Just William's belongings when Posy's husband arrives home early from a trip abroad. Returning from his mission of delivering William's suitcase to the bathhouse, Fred contemplates finding himself in the middle of a novel by Henry James (see suggestion above).



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Having collected a stock of rhymes, Vinnie turns to observing their cultural setting, manner of delivery and social function as primary school girls jump rope. Finding the ten to eleven-year olds to be the best informants, as they are knowledgeable but not yet jaded, Vinnie's working hypothesis is that British game rhymes are more ancient and literary than American versions. Vinnie, who has never thought of children as sweet or gentle, posits violence as a common theme. Watching the girls' concentration, skill and joy, Vinnie is envious, longing to recover the best part of her life, when she was self-confident, thrilled by explorations, books, movies, radio programs and Christmas and New Years celebrations. This agreeable life ended when Vinnie's parents moved to the city and she found herself a disadvantaged adolescent, undersized, pimply, flat-chested and plain. Not originally, but consistently, Vinnie emphasizes in lectures and writings the need to cherish the "child within."

As the girls prepare to leave, Vinnie thanks them and collects their names and ages. A girl of twelve or thirteen-skinny, unattractive and punk-dressed-hails Vinnie and for a fee, offers her rhymes that children will not reveal to teachers. Vinnie, who has never paid for material (and recalls a Marxist friends' manifesto that folklore is not a capitalist commodity), cannot resist the opportunity and produces 50 pence. The furtive girl identifies herself as Mary Maloney- certainly fictitious-before delivering a racist rhyme that Vinnie has never heard. Mary offers more, for additional remuneration, arguing that she, like Vinnie, should profit from the material. For 10 pence, Mary delivers a vulgar rhyme that threatens Vinnie's thesis.

In her apartment, Vinnie considers excluding prematurely-adult Mary's texts from her study, on the technicality that she failed to record Mary's age. Mary's greed and need nag at Vinnie, who realizes she will indeed, profit from the children's rhymes when her study is published. Scholars cannot afford to be prudish and she has stooped to use collected bathroom humor in her lectures. Vinnie is embarrassed, however, by stories that dwell on reproductive organs, which she has always found disgusting. Vinnie enjoys the feel of sex but not its look. God, in whom she does not particularly believe, can hardly be venerated for having arranged such things.

Before leaving America, Vinnie had dreaded the prospect of six months without sex, but finds age has lessened the need for fantasy affairs. Most of these are now vertical rather than horizontal and focus on receiving academic honors. London's diverse entertainment helps drive away the desire for affection and romance Vinnie has never known. Tonight, she will attend the English National Opera with Jane, one of the nicest people she knows and one of Britain's best children's fiction writers.

During intermission, Vinnie goes in search of coffee but is thwarted by large, British males selfishly shoving ahead of her. Unsurprised to see Rosemary and Fred together



on a bench, Vinnie and everyone else knows about their romance and how Rosemary gave up a lucrative role in Italy. Fred's seriousness and Rosemary's playfulness cancel the age difference and both appear to be improved by the relationship. Normally unable to concentrate on anyone or anything for more than a few moments, Rosemary gazes unwaveringly and tranquilly at Fred and Vinnie has to speak twice before they notice her.

Fred asks Vinnie to confirm Rosemary ought to hire a cleaning lady. Rosemary, who recalls with revulsion her spinster aunts' obsession with cleanliness, is content with calling the Help Yourself agency now and then. The aunts' warning that "No man'll stay in a house that looks the way your room does now" has proven untrue and charladies, immigrants or stupid, ill-tempered sluts, always involve their employers in their pathetic lives. Rosemary's stage Cockney imitation of such a woman is amusing. Fred says Posy has recommended an agency where this will not be the case and Help Yourself mostly employs out-of-work performers who know nothing about cleaning a house.

Vinnie notes Fred has already been invited to Posy's home. As he has quite a grasp of housekeeping details and Rosemary's circumstances, she wonders if he plans to move in. Vinnie also recalls that many men have stayed in her house but few for long. Vinnie is spared having to offer an opinion when a bell announces the second act. Vinnie guesses Rosemary will win the argument, but Fred does not give in easily, his principled stubbornness had been shown on the Library Committee, a trait that might also explain why he is newly single.

Lying in bed after 11 PM, listening to Mozart, Vinnie is startled by her doorbell. Fearing derelicts and teenage punks, she takes courage that London is not like New York and she knows her neighbors, so a scream will bring help. Opening the door, Vinnie sees Chuck, who has something he needs to tell her. Having spoken once by phone about his genealogical project, she fears sending him away will cut her off from learning about the folk ancestor. Vinnie admits a grey-faced, unkempt, staggering man. Chuck admits he is not feeling well. Out walking, he had seen her light on and figured she was awake. Fetching whiskey for Chuck and tea for herself, Vinnie coaxes from him that he has not heard from his family in a while but has found his hermit ancestor. Chuck's lethargy snaps as he denounces his grandfather's bullshitting and outlines his own findings: frustrating research in South Leigh led Chuck to Colonel and Lady Jenkins and to an archeologist, Professor Gilson, whose dig benefited from Chuck's hydraulics expertise. Colonel and Lady Jenkins showed Chuck an abandoned grotto where some old guy—hardly a lord—once lived. Old Mumpson, whose photograph Chuck saw, was just a dirty old bum. The Jenkinsees listened politely to Chuck's family stories before he fled, humiliated, back to London, where he finds he cannot sleep, eat or sit still.

Chuck's whininess awakens Fido from hibernation and he positions himself first at Chuck's feet, before jumping into his lap. Distracted by her invisible dog and thinking about an early morning appointment, Vinnie talks blandly of the perils of research and natural disappointment in one's ancestors, which only gives Chuck an opening to lament his wife Myrna's Daughters of the American Revolution lineage, which she lauds over him. His Stanford psychologist sister-in-law says Chuck's mind is stuck at the age of



three, which is why he was fired. Vinnie finds herself indignant at Chuck's relatives and suggests he ignore them. Chuck explains how he has tried to find another job but no one will hire someone his age, which led him to drink and drive late at night. A smash-up and arrest finished things off with Myrna. Sick and tired of London, Chuck still prefers it to Tulsa and cannot leave. Myrna has a crush on a rich developer with political ambitions and fundamentalist backing that will allow him to marry a widow but not a divorcee. Several times, Chuck has considered killing himself.

Vinnie is tempted to emulate Fido and embrace and comfort Chuck, who cannot return home without proof that he is not the worthless bum Myrna believes him to be. Confident he had found proof of aristocratic ancestry, Chuck mailed a bragging postcard that he now knows will only make him the butt of more jokes. Chuck's defeatism enrages Vinnie-as it always does Myrna-and she rails about all the things he could be doing in London instead of brooding. Vinnie's outburst hurts Chuck and he leaves. Vinnie cannot bring herself to apologize, but lying in bed, she is furious at herself for losing her temper and at Chuck for awakening all she despises about Americans and Britons. In her mind, Fido pants down the street at Chuck's side.

Vinnie wonders about being somehow like Chuck, as people are as scornful of her pretensions as she is of Chuck's and she worries about her responsibility for Chuck's illusion and disillusion. Vinnie knows aristocratic Rosemary would not have treated Chuck as she has. Chuck will no longer think Vinnie a lady but, then again, he is unlikely to contact her again. After twenty minutes of twisting and untwisting in her blankets and thoughts, Vinnie is startled by the phone. Chuck in on the line, inviting her to dinner and an opera and knowing she will not otherwise be able to afford a night at Covent Garden, Vinnie accepts.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 shows Vinnie performing field research in a school yard, which offers an opportunity for the author to relate several off-color rhymes, contemplate Vinnie's childhood and adolescence and show how these helped form her longing to return to childhood without instilling any affection for children. Vinnie's part in Fred and Rosemary's relationship and particularly the matter of cleaning up Rosemary's messy house is set up, as is a deepening relationship with Chuck, whose story of marital woe touches her. Vinnie will endure him in order to attend an opera she cannot, by her own means, afford.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Pausing in Kensington Gardens in order not to be early to Rosemary's party, Fred is happy to have won the cleaning lady argument. Mrs. Harris, whom he has not yet met, sounds great: a hard worker who does not talk Rosemary's ear off about her long-divorced alcoholic husband. Fred is his normal confident self again, no longer feeling like an ectoplasmal tourist and fully recovered from his homophobia and shock over the Billings' domestic arrangement. Through Rosemary, he has come to see how civilized the British system is, avoiding the open scandal, self-righteous jealousy, frantic defensiveness and public displays common in American "open marriages." A loan from the Corinth University Credit Union has eased Fred's budget, so he has only two concerns: the slowness of his writing and a letter from Roo. Euphoria over Rosemary is as disruptive as depression was and the BM's oppressive procedures continue to repel him. Fred feels he will learn more about British theater through Rosemary than he could through books.

Fred has written Roo several times and hoped for the kind of letter she has sent—love and an apology for lacking the guts to show him the photos for fear he would forbid their use—but in light of his deepening relationship with Rosemary, it is ill-timed. Fred knows Roo would tell him if she were having an affair; her only fault being bad taste. In Rosemary's world, bad taste is nothing but the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual flaw. Roo deserves to know the truth about his beautiful English love, but he cannot find the words to write. Fred does not want to think about what lies ahead in Corinth for only his passion for Rosemary matters.

Possessing Rosemary has not decreased Fred's desire, but he knows his triumph will be brief. The Vogelers feel his getting involved is a mistake. From Fred's first description of the party, they suspect the British are merely being polite to him and they recount a disastrous lunch with an English writer and his aunt, who were put off by Jakie and never again talked to them. Fred wants them to meet Rosemary (without Jakie) to help them understand the English. Fred rejects their argument that the closer he draws to Rosemary, the more he will miss her later. Rosemary's circle understands one cannot pass up chances. Recalling how Rosemary enthused about a fellow actor's passion for the stage, Fred strides toward Chelsea.

While Rosemary's bedroom is still a shambles, Mrs. Harris has the downstairs magnificently transformed and elegant. Dowdy, quaint Vinnie stands out among the stylish guests. Fred lies to Vinnie about his writing going well before a large, middle-aged cowboy interrupts them. Vinnie introduces Chuck and Fred. Fred suspects he may be an actor and wonders what Chuck might have heard about him and Rosemary. Noticing the similarity between Chuck's accent and his own, despite the British intonation and vocabulary he has affected, Fred is relieved to be distracted from the uncomfortable conversation. Everyone is talking about Mrs. Harris' work, some



considering it a bit too perfect and worrying Rosemary might be found murdered in bed some day. In the past, Rosemary's friends have envied her beauty, fame, charm and income and have nearly commiserated with her living conditions and history of romantic disaster, but her now-perfect house and handsome young lover are too much for them.

Guests pump Fred for information about Mrs. Harris, but Rosemary has pledged him to silence, lest someone lure her away. Fred can say truthfully he does not know how much Mrs. Harris charges or when she might be free. Daphne Vane, Rosemary's elderly former costar, is persistent and makes Fred feel like the village idiot. Fred knows Mrs. Harris works Tuesdays and Fridays, because he is forbidden during those times to visit and Rosemary refuses to visit him, finding his place freezing and unromantic. Mrs. Harris cannot bear having anyone "underfoot" while she works and refuses to take phone messages-her answering alone suggesting illiteracy and battiness, which explain why she is not in a better-paying job. Last Tuesday, Mrs. Harris refused to answer the door when Fred knocked. Through the letter slot, as he dropped a note for Rosemary, Fred saw a shapeless woman on her knees scrubbing the floor at the far end of the darkened hall, but she would not respond to his calls. However, Mrs. Harris appears to converse at length with her employer, for Rosemary regales friends with her superstitions and gnostic pronouncements on current events and famous persons. Rosemary mimics the charlady's rough, boozy Cockney accent. Through Rosemary, Fred views Mrs. Harris as an eccentric character from 18th-century literature and takes pride in being the reason she was hired.

Fred answers Rosemary's door to find the Vogelers-including Jakie, looking like characters from *Prairie Home Companion*, as they deliberately, even aggressively, dressed down for the occasion. Shocked at Fred's suggestion that Jakie sleep upstairs, Fred sees his hopes of a good meeting with Rosemary sink. Rosemary, however, charms the couple. Fred is taken aside by Edwin, whom he does not care for to discuss Edwin's concern about Mrs. Harris' dominant personality and suspicious behavior. Apparently, her ignorant reactionary opinions are affecting impressionable Rosemary. Edwin confides he is lecturing in Japan next week and asks Fred to "look out after our Rosemary." Fred dislikes the idea of sharing Rosemary with anyone and disagrees with Edwin's analysis, believing Mrs. Harris to have opened Rosemary to things she normally would disdain.

Returning to the party, Fred sees the Vogelers in a corner soothing Jakie, rather than mixing. Introducing Debby to a female novelist and Joe to Oswald, a boring drama critic and TV personality, twenty minutes later, Fred sees Joe gesturing for salvation. Jakie has awakened in his chest carrier and is restless. As Fred approaches, the baby pulls a vase from the mantle, sending water and foliage over Oswald, who curses loudly, making the baby howl.

After the guests leave, Fred apologizes to Rosemary for the Vogeler baby and is surprised her effusive apologies to the guests had been an act. Oswald's dousing delights her because he has written terrible things about her friends. Jakie is a wonderful baby in Rosemary eyes but should not be invited again. Rosemary mimics Fred's intonation as she accepts protestations he did not invite Jakie. Trying to prevent



the romantic mood from being broken, Fred kisses Rosemary rather than react to her jab at American hippies. Rosemary reports disputing Joe's contention that Fred will return to the U.S. next month.

Reluctantly, Fred admits he must, as he has told her before, be at Corinth by June 24th. Rosemary believes such statements to be nonsense as there are so many lovely things they must do together in July, dismissing any thought that staying could affect his tenure. Fred says there is a large difference between British acting and American academia. When Fred holds to his position, Rosemary grows threatening, claiming he has been planning all along to leave. Fred manages to kiss her and hold her naked breasts, but when he refuses to change his plans, Rosemary wrenches away, declaring she is not a pushover. Fred promises to return next summer, but this is not enough. In her "Lady Emma voice," Rosemary asks Fred to leave her house. Fred obeys and the door slams in his face. All of his protestations of love and happiness go unanswered.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 depicts Rosemary's fashionable party, made perfect rather than ruined by the Vogelers' baby spilling a vase over the head of an obnoxious guest. Rosemary's downstairs is immaculate, thanks to Mrs. Harris, for whom Fred takes proud credit. Others, however, are concerned that the opinionated old woman is influencing naïve Rosemary. Already worried about what will happen with estranged wife Roo when he returns to America, Fred is forced to tell Rosemary he cannot avoid going home on time. Edwin's request that Fred watch over "our Rosemary" while he and other friends are unavailable, gain immediacy as Rosemary casts Fred out of her house and possibly, from her life.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Vinnie takes to bed with a bad cold, weary, depressed and suspicious of it having a psychological rather than viral origin. Vinnie's request for an extension of her grant has been rejected through the efforts of Zimmern. Vinnie has shared her paranoia about Zimmern with Chuck, whom she figures is unlikely to gossip, judge, or pity her. Vinnie recalls agreeing offhandedly to Chuck's story about ruining a man's life by accident, demanding that Zimmern be judged, condemned and punished for costing her time in London. Vinnie imagines him ill in her stead, languishing with pneumonia in a shabby New York hospital.

No one has visited Vinnie during her illness either, largely because she conceals illness, not wanting to tempt the sincerity of people's friendship and hating to be pitied by others. Whenever there is a danger of this happening, Vinnie looks for others to pity. So she has settled on Chuck, unemployed, uneducated, depressed, lonely and robbed of noble ancestry. At their first dinner, Chuck described his "folks" as uneducated, dirt-poor and not too law abiding. From puberty, Chuck was in trouble and by ninth grade cut school to joy ride. A stint in a home for bad boys kept him from being shot or hurting anyone but failed to reform him. However, War did provide the needed reform and the G.I. bill let him attend engineering college. Chuck tells this story against the posh backdrop of restaurant and opera house and the contrast makes Vinnie think about how they have been thrown together.

Chuck grows less pitiable as he proves willing to go anywhere, do anything and always pay. He is annoying only when he declares Vinnie a nice person. Vinnie buys Chuck children's classics and introduces him to the best plays, films, concerts and exhibitions, which raises the risk of meeting London acquaintances, but it occurs only once and seems deftly handled until Rosemary remembers the "amusing cowboy friend" and invites them to lunch. Vinnie again breaks her rule about mixing friends and is amazed Chuck's outfit and drawl are an instantaneous hit.

Encouraged by Edwin to continue his quest Chuck leaves his belongings with Vinnie and returns to Wilshire. Vinnie is irritated that her acquaintances assume they are lovers. Never during her short trips to England, has Vinnie made love, although this time she had hoped for adventure. Traveling to London for sex with an ill dressed, unemployed sanitary engineer from the Sunbelt was never in her plans and she is uncomfortable that people suspect they are intimate. Still, she wonders why Chuck has not yet made a move. Does he fear being turned down? Does he find her unattractive? After initial relief at having Chuck out of London, Vinnie begins missing him and looks forward to his frequent phone calls.

With Chuck no longer a useful object of pity, Vinnie considers Fred Turner, who appears miserable again, as she sees him not at parties, but at the BM, melancholy and poorly



fed. Fred confirms rumors about a split with Rosemary, who considers his return to America a betrayal and refuses to understand the situation at Corinth—a situation that is self-evident to Vinnie. Fred loves Rosemary and London and would stay if he could and now, Rosemary is wasting a month they could be together. Mousing consolation without caring about Fred, Vinnie is shocked when her colleague begs she explain American academia to Rosemary in hopes of rescuing the remaining weeks. Vinnie demurs, but after reflecting on her role on the department committee and her invitation to Fred that began the whole affair, she agrees should the opportunity present itself. Falling ill the next day has spared Vinnie this task. Lying in bed, Vinnie cannot feel sorry for Fred, who is regarded in the English Department and will recover from Rosemary to enjoy an irritatingly fortunate life and career. Vinnie, by contrast, will always be alone as she ages. Fido lies beside Vinnie, but she refuses to indulge him; doing so will cause him to grow from beagle-size to St. Bernard and beyond and she will be for all time a Pitiable Person. Vinnie mentally shoos Fido to Chuck and Fido sets off without looking back. Encouraged, Vinnie doses herself with Vitamin C and falls asleep.

Chuck phones to invite Vinnie to supper that afternoon and at 8 PM, fearless of germs, appears with take-out and beer. Warming and serving supper with skill and dispatch, Chuck tells Vinnie about his productive trip, learning about people who lived and died while buffalo and Indians ranged over Tulsa and are like them, forgotten. "Old Mumpson" also a Charles (1731-1801), after a long working life had become a hermit when his wife died and his sons moved—perhaps to America—as a way of avoiding public assistance. Vinnie agrees with Mike Gilson's comforting assurance that most people were illiterate back then and Old Mumpson was doubtless a wise man to have done the work he did. Vinnie must also agree that professionally, there is a lot of learning that is not in books. Chuck has helped Mike interpret aerial photos and is invited to join his crew for the summer. Liking the area, project and company, Chuck is inclined to accept.

Chuck accidentally spills three quarts of avocado-and-watercress soup prepared for tomorrow's luncheon onto himself, Vinnie and the floor. They mop each other until Vinnie encounters an unmistakable and impressive bulge in Chuck's trousers. Realizing he is effectively stroking her breasts with the towel, she backs away and tells Chuck to soak his clothes in the tub before the stains set. In her bedroom, Vinnie changes clothes, filled with nervous confusion. What will she do about lunch tomorrow? What is going on in Chuck's mind and body? What will he wear now as his transparent raincoat would be useless? All she can find that will fit him is a bedspread. Throwing her clothes into the tub, Vinnie contemplates how awful, old and unattractive she is but still aroused by the sloshing together of their clothing.

Back in the kitchen, Vinnie is surprised to find Chuck has mopped up. After a brief smile and longer stare, Chuck grabs her by the shoulders and kisses her on the mouth. Vinnie protests as he confesses his desire that began the day they had tea. Chuck hugs her again, but warmly, rather than hotly. "Let's take it easy," Vinnie suggests, but Chuck continues his advances and Vinnie thinks she may not be hopelessly plain, relaxing while saying they are making a mistake. Chuck however, pulls back, saying he has something to confess. Vinnie assumes he still loves his wife, but Chuck laughs that his marriage is as dead as a skunk. Chuck's confession concerns the car accident and



Vinnie fears he is sexually damaged. Instead, Chuck confesses he killed a drugged 16-year-old kid in a VW that jumped into traffic in front of his Pontiac; he could do nothing to help the boy and was incoherent when the police arrived and he resisted them. The parents sued for damages and Chuck was too guilty to resist, but Myrna hired an expensive lawyer who won the case. Chuck cannot get this out of his mind and often feels, that even though it is crazy, his death might even the score. Vinnie agrees it is crazy and will accomplish nothing for the boy or his parents. Chuck has given Vinnie a chance to draw back, but she nervously urges him on. Chuck lunges at her, leaving his bedspread behind, declaring she has saved his life, kept him from giving up, maybe killing himself or someone else. Vinnie begins participating in his kisses and her greedy body surrenders. After all, no one will have to know.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The revelation that her academic nemesis has blocked hopes of her extending her London stay coincides with (or causes) Vinnie's succumbing to a cold. In bed, fighting not to feel sorry for herself, she transfers her pity to Chuck, whose quest has been ruined and to Fred, whose relationship with Rosemary has ended. Taking to bed keeps Vinnie from having to honor her promised participation in Fred and Rosemary's affairs, but it thrusts her into Chuck's embrace in the context of two collisions: one in the kitchen and one in Chuck's searing confession of an accident that happened on an Oklahoma road. Lust, which we have seen filling Vinnie's mind, now overcomes her sense of propriety, although she has no intention of letting anyone know about her new sexual relationship with Chuck.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

After a forty-eight hour silence, Fred loses hope that Rosemary will drop her unreasonability and learning from her agent where she is filming, Fred heads to Holland Park. Fred watches the crew bustle around when a group of Edwardian-clad actors appear. Rosemary is overwhelmingly beautiful and charming. The actors repeat the same action many times with minor variations. Fred, who has never been allowed to watch *Tallyho Castle* on videotape, realizes for the first time that Rosemary's seeming natural, impulsive, private gestures are all stage mannerisms.

Shooting halts and Fred hurries to Rosemary, whose face lights with pleasure—just like on camera—but she forbids him to touch her make-up plastered face. Rosemary laughs off his inability to reach her as the jealousy of operators wishing to ruin her love life. In her dressing room, Rosemary talks about a wonderful acting opportunity at the end of June and the argument over Fred's plans resumes. Rosemary can provide for him, but Fred insists he cannot accept. Rosemary may be able to get Fred a paying bit part, but Fred feels insulted, as it cannot be a speaking role because of his accent. Rosemary condemns Fred's Victorian views and as a tear escapes, she pouts he is ruining her make-up. When Fred confirms he can love her for only four more weeks, Rosemary says she should have listened to Mrs. Harris' warnings, calls a policeman and has Fred escorted off the set. Still, Fred refuses to be discouraged, taking the tears as authentic. As days pass, however, Fred grows tense, desperate and angry, wanting to see her, to tell her off, to force himself on her, to plead with her. Fred feels it is perverse to waste this time and while he considers giving into Rosemary's demands, he knows he cannot.

Fred also cannot find the spare key to Rosemary's house. Knowing Mrs. Harris will not admit him or take a message, with Rosemary's agent now cooled to him, their acquaintances unhelpful and Rosemary's closest friends out of town, Fred still cannot bring himself to approach Vinnie, who probably does not understand romantic love. Fred cannot concentrate on writing and wanders streets that shimmer with the ghost of their love affair.

Walking along the Regent's Canal with the Vogelers, Fred doubts he will run into Rosemary. Joe and Debby are preoccupied with Jakie's failure to talk at sixteen months. Fred has no experience with babies. Their circle of friends, including two Canadians and two Australians are afflicted with a typical colonial attitude toward Britain, like successful children who have outgrown their parents. Rosemary's party left the Vogelers contemptuous of "phony-baloneys." Fred's admission that he and Rosemary have quarreled confirms their prejudice. Fred wonders why married couples feel free to analyze the affairs of unmarried friends but would be angry to hear comments about their own relationship. Jakie wants free of his stroller and they slow to the toddler's pace. Jakie tries to pick up a squash ball, but Debby throws it away. The frustrated baby turns into a screaming gargoyle, but the verbal barrage on Fred's emotional and



intellectual needs continues. Fred realizes that the Vogelers understand his passion for Rosemary no better than they do their son's desire for that ball. When they bring up Carissa again, Fred can take no more, but when the coveted ball floats by in the flotsam and Jakie says, "ball," the parents' joy leaves Fred forgotten.

From the papers, Fred knows Rosemary is helping Daphne Vane publicize her memoirs and presents himself confidently to the studio receptionist. Told his name is not on the guest list, Fred must wait in the lobby. Knowing Rosemary mocks the book, it is hard for Fred to hear her praise its charm and wit on air. The closing theme plays, Rosemary does not emerge and the receptionist informs Fred that the talent exit from the rear of the building (flirtatiously asking what he wants with an old bag like Rosemary). Fred loses no time arguing, but still misses Rosemary. Cursing her cruelty and theatrics, Fred wonders if perhaps he should have pretended he would remain, although that would be calculation and exploitation rather than love. What if Rosemary staged the quarrel just to move on to someone else? Fred feels he is in another Jamesian novel and reviles his role as lovelorn groupie. A length of twisted red yarn on the pavement makes Fred think of his wife for the first time in weeks. He pictures her naked on their bed, plaiting her long hair and fixing it with scarlet wool. Experiencing a rush of longing, Fred knows that whatever her faults, Roo is not calculating. Fred feels guilty about not answering her last letter. Perhaps he will write today, or phone. Fearing she might hang up in anger, he decides to send a telegram.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter 8 examines Fred's obsession with Rosemary after their breakup. A single meeting on one of her sets resumes the quarrel. Fred realizes how talented an actress Rosemary is, which causes him to question her sincerity. An interlude with the obtuse but insistent Vogelers, highlighted by Jakie's first word, serves to show passion is crucial to creativity and the enjoyment of life. Fred carries out a plot calculated to force Rosemary to talk to him. When it falls through, Fred breaks into obscenely demonizing her and his mood is snapped only by the memory of life with Rosemary's emotional opposite, Roo. Old feelings for her revive and Fred seems determined to patch up his marriage.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

One fine spring day, Vinnie watches polar bears splashing at the London Zoo. Visiting cousins "doing London" have lured her here. Vinnie is happier than she has been in months, maybe years. Fido must have accompanied Chuck to Wiltshire. Literature teaches that after the age of fifty, women have no slots other than mother, daughter, or sister, but Vinnie feels very unlike the Spinster Professor. Novels expect those her age to be set in their ways, scarred apple trees destined to grow weak and hollow-their fruit crabbed. Most novelists remove the elderly trees to make room for saplings and Vinnie has spent years forcing herself to accept that the rest of her life will be an epilogue to an unexciting novel. No individual, however, feels peripheral in his or her own life and life is not literature. The world is full of people over fifty, who will remain in decent shape another twenty-five years, capable of adventure, change, heroism and transformation. Vinnie vows to be a major character in her own life.

A rain shower has washed the zoo, leaving the air fresh. Vinnie wears a dramatic silk raincoat she could not afford and did not buy. The coat makes her feel taller and better looking - almost proud. Vinnie is proud too of London: beautiful, safe, clean, sophisticated, historical, deferential toward maturity, tolerant of - even delighting in - eccentricity. Vinnie's mood is so good that even a letter in the *Atlantic* praising Zimmern's article causes no rise. Picturing Zimmern trapped in dirty, ugly New York, she fantasizes about him being manhandled by a polar bear but not drowned, because this would bring bad publicity to the London Zoo and traumatize the bear. Vinnie sees Chuck in this big, slow, clumsy, agreeable animal, whose expression is identical to the one Chuck wore last week when he took her shopping at Harrod's.

Vinnie does not want Chuck to look like a cartoon American Packaged Tourist, Western Division. Realizing his cowboy costume brings certain social advantages here, she wants at least for him to avoid packing his pockets with maps and guidebooks, to abandon his camera and to lose his deplorable plastic raincoat. Chuck does not see it as ugly and aesthetic arguments fail, as he bought it new, especially for this trip. One day, however, Chuck forgets the raincoat after a long and satisfying lunch. Vinnie's wardrobe recoils from the garment and Vinnie stuffs it into a curbside trashcan like a dead fish. The next day, Chuck sees in Vinnie's eyes that she is hiding his coat, but she will admit only wanting to get rid of it. After a search of the apartment, Chuck loses patience, ending with a guffaw about a nice sweet lady professor swiping his coat. Vinnie cannot keep up the ruse and admits it is gone-"And good riddance." Offering to buy a replacement, Chuck accepts. At Harrod's, Chuck selects an expensive Burberry trench coat and informs the sales clerk that the lady will pay. Vinnie is amazed Chuck has taken her offer seriously and is concerned what the clerk is thinking about her. Remembering that Chuck is a former juvenile delinquent and an "old con," she tries to think how to request at least partial repayment. Chuck admires his new coat and the way Vinnie signed the receipt like a good sport and, not wanting to feel like a creep or



moocher, demands to buy her a raincoat too, which is why Vinnie is wearing the most beautiful garment she has owned in years.

Vinnie's polar bear of a man also turns out to be great in bed, each of the four days before he left again for Wiltshire. Vinnie muses how she would have missed this joy if the soup had not spilled. Sometimes, Vinnie wonders why any woman would lie in bed, vulnerably naked with another, larger, naked person. The chances of being hurt are enormous-physically and emotionally. Whether through laughing at your aging body, or by turning out to be inept, selfish, incompetent, or freaky, it is a risk. Vinnie plays the state lottery occasionally, so she realizes you play because the unlikely payout is tremendous. With Chuck, Vinnie, the perpetual holder of a losing ticket, feels like one of the winners grinning for the cameras. Vinnie realizes both English literature and contemporary culture deny people like her and Chuck much enjoyment or the regular experience of sex. In earlier eras, people were worn out if not dead by that age. No one wants to picture their parents as lovers-they are supposed to be dignified and disembodied. Elderly couples may nuzzle like the polar bears, but zoo visitors would flee if the bears started really going at it. Only the young and beautiful make love in films. The old and plain must do so in secret.

Chuck has been gone a week and Vinnie misses him acutely and she wants him back, despite the social problems, as her social circle is too old-fashioned to accept Chuck's marital status or lack of education. Vinnie has a professional reputation to consider. While she has no regrets about taking Chuck into her bed, she does not want anyone to find out. The way Chuck looks at her will give it away and Vinnie knows she can neither ask him to behave formally in public nor lie about sleeping with him. Vinnie's friends are entertained by Chuck and like him, but once the two are identified as lovers, their characters will be conflated and she will become a vulgar American in their eyes. Vinnie fears her friends will take her for granted, doubt her ambition and turn her into a small brownish bird rather than the bright-colored exotic waterfowl she is watching. These birds remind Vinnie of the party she must hurry to, in honor of Daphne Vane's memoirs.

Daphne's party is going strong when Vinnie arrives. Vinnie is always uncomfortable at stand-up events because of her short stature and she admits to Just William that she is not having a good time. William remarks on the events commercial nature with guests chosen only to get word out about the book to a variety of audiences. Not feeling well, Vinnie heads for the door, but runs into Rosemary, who seems distracted and perhaps tipsy. Vinnie remembers her promise to Fred and is uncomfortable, knowing the two are wrong for each other. The crowded room is not appropriate for carrying out her commission and Vinnie leaves, but fate intervenes. Rosemary offers to drop Vinnie off and the prospect of catching a bus makes Vinnie accept. Rosemary's smile attracts a taxi and the women climb in.

Rosemary sulks about the party as the taxi moves slowly through traffic. Rosemary complains about "your friend Fred" not really needing to return to his silly old college. Vinnie explains why he must, but Rosemary interrupts saying that Fred is going back to his stupid wife. Vinnie assures Rosemary the marriage is over and Fred cares for her and thinks she is wonderful. Rosemary counters saying that women like Vinnie do not



understand that men are liars and how "wonderful" is code for "the bastard is leaving you." Rosemary's voice alternates between refinement and vulgarity, adopting a low-comedy voice to reject Vinnie's explanation of the tenure system and then wailing about needing Fred, begging Vinnie to convince him to forget his silly job. Rosemary says cannot be left alone again. When Vinnie tries to comfort her, Rosemary slips into a third voice, blurting out how men want not to sleep with her but to have slept with her, for bragging rights. Fred had seemed different, as he had not seen her perform before meeting her and had loved her for herself. Fred continues to phone her service but Rosemary cannot bear to see him unless she knows he will remain for good. Rosemary screams and gestures at spectators, then turns graciously to ask Vinnie to request Fred stop trying to contact her. Changing her voice again, she wants Fred to know he can bloody well screw himself. Imitating Vinnie's intonation and accent, Rosemary denounces all Americans and then shifts to Cockney to demand they stay home and stop "messin' up our country." Vinnie recognizes Rosemary's frequent imitations of Mrs. Harris. Mrs. Harris again emerges as Rosemary surprises Vinnie cruelly by saying she looks sixty and knows nothing about life.

Vinnie flees the taxi, shivering with rage and pain, furious at having taken so much from someone she and her friends (except erratic Edwin) do not like. Vinnie thinks about how acting-mimicking other human beings-is a nasty business. Vinnie wonders whether she truly sounds like Rosemary's imitation. Certain Mrs. Harris has never heard Rosemary imitate her, as such a woman would fly into a rage and maybe even hit the mimic, which is very much what Vinnie would like to do. Vinnie remembers Edwin's warning about Mrs. Harris' bad influence. Alcohol has helped Rosemary's rage at Fred spill over onto her, revealing her true feelings about her. The charlady's voice can say what the refined lady cannot.

Vinnie arrives home angry, miserable, headachy and distrusting the entire Zimmern-like world, when Chuck phones from Wiltshire to announce that he has a copy of an etching of the Hermit of South Leigh. Vinnie's voice betrays her mood and Chuck coaxes out the story of her encounter with Rosemary. Chuck wishes he were in London to comfort Vinnie. Myrna used to switch moods and voices on him and it spooked him. Chuck suggests Vinnie come to folklore-rich Wiltshire and stay the rest of the summer with him. Vinnie cannot leave London for a whole month, but short visits might work. At the prospect of seeing Chuck without her friends knowing about it, Vinnie's headache dissolves.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 delves deeply into Vinnie's psyche. By allowing herself to love polar bear-like Chuck physically, even if she cannot allow friends to know, Vinnie is freeing herself from the strictures literature and culture place on sensuality after fifty. Still, a drunken Rosemary destroys and enrages her, saying she looks sixty and knows nothing about life. Chuck's kindness calms her and Vinnie appears to be looking forward to spending time with him, isolated in the countryside. Mrs. Harris' banal influence on Rosemary is

brought to the fore and it seems likely her circle of friends will face some sort of intervention once they reassemble in London.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Packing for home, Fred is too bitter to enjoy the delightful midsummer weather due to his unfinished research, unanswered telegram to Roo and his certainty that he will never see Rosemary again. All his scholarly work seems false and forced, a total waste of time. Fred cannot even bear to look at a favorite snapshot of open, trusting Roo. Surely, she does not love him and never has. Fred fills his wastebasket with now meaningless memorabilia: the scarf Rosemary gave him and a pocket mirror commemorating their first kiss are unbearable as he will never see her again or the few belongings he had left at Rosemary's house. Several times in the last week, Fred used fetching them as an excuse for phoning, but Mrs. Harris and the service told him Rosemary is out of town. Fred feels their relationship reenacts Anglo-American history: Rosemary can grant him anything but independence. Musing that they are at war, Fred is angry and in debt on both sides of the Atlantic.

Fred examines a postcard from Roberto Frank. It pictures Sir Joshua Reynolds *Cupid as Link Boy* (1774), in which the urchin resembles Fred at that age nine or ten. Cupid is a brooding dark, scorching angel and Fred thinks about being twice mismatched to beautiful, angry, impossible women. Roberto would laugh at that. Fred orders himself to smarten up and forget them. Continuing his cleaning, Fred comes upon the keys to Rosemary's house and he figures he can sneak in and fetch his favorite sweater and annotated *Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*.

Doubts assail Fred on the train and he stops at the Victoria and Albert Museum, which he has put off visiting for five months. Fred's mood keeps him from enjoying rooms full of national treasures from the period of his specialization. Rosemary and her friends have again put Fred off England and London. There are too many ghosts of their affair. Fred is as lonely and shut out of life as at the beginning of his trip. Recently, he read about the end of Rosemary's "Yankee connection" in a *Private Eye* article that listed her previous connections, including several Fred had met but never suspected of being predecessors. Viewing the Great Bed of Ware, Fred pictures Rosemary being attended by a dozen naked males and questions why cultural museums even exist. Art museums continue to interpret and shape the world through their displays, but all of these artifacts are functionally dead-like his passion for Rosemary and love for Roo.

Fred rushes outdoors, revolted. If only he could make Rosemary listen. Why has he become so cautious-so English? Fred resolves not to be a British twit as he strides toward Chelsea, but twenty minutes later, he is reluctant to enter familiar rooms as an intruder. Concentrating on his sweater, Fred rings and calls out, then uses his key. Unsurprised at the house's darkness and silence, he finds it a mess, suggesting Mrs. Harris is also away. Hearing noises downstairs, Fred resists the impulse to flee and descends. Fred recognizes Mrs. Harris, drunk on Rosemary's gin. Though he has seen her only once and briefly, Fred is sure she has altered for the worse. Explaining he has



come to collect his belongings, he refuses to be intimidated by the drunken, challenging old charwoman, who addresses Fred as "Professor Know-All," one of Rosemary's private nicknames for him.

Climbing the stairs, Fred thinks someone (other than himself) ought to warn Rosemary of her perfect charlady's behavior in her absence. In Rosemary's bedroom, Fred finds a terrible mess, probably a testimony to Rosemary's state of mind when she left town. Fred is angry that Mrs. Harris has failed to clean it up and then feels guilty over having persuaded Rosemary to hire the woman. Finding the bathroom littered and foul, Fred suspects Mrs. Harris has been treating the place as her own, which would better explain the disarray, since Rosemary, when he last saw her, was very much in control. Fred finds his sweater among clothes that bring back intimate memories, leaving him gasping for breath. Weeping, Fred hears Mrs. Harris climbing the stairs. So, he hides in the closet. Ignoring Mrs. Harris' taunts about missing his sweetie, he is struck by her use of two of Rosemary's private code phrases for making love. Sickened, he wonders if Mrs. Harris had spied on them. Fred abandons his search and tries to move past the filthy, foul-smelling Mrs. Harris, who refuses to budge. Imitating Rosemary's voice, the charlady grabs his arm and rubs her body against his. Mrs. Harris is surprisingly strong, but Fred manages to shake her off without pausing to see if she is all right after she falls, startled, into a pile of Rosemary's shoes. On the street, Fred is calmed by the panorama of the Thames and knows this sight of Rosemary's bedroom has cured him of sentimentality. However, he is not over Rosemary and deserves to suffer pain. Clearly, Rosemary is over him. Calmed, Fred returns to his packing.

Fred is depressed but nearing equilibrium when he meets Tom and Paula, two honest, eager visitors from America, unlike both the Vogelers and Vinnie. Fred conceals his disillusionment with London as he recommends sights, restaurants and cultural events, sanitizing his tale of meeting Mrs. Harris. Tom's remark that such a thing could only happen to Fred makes Fred uncomfortable and that night in bed, Fred wonders what Tom meant. Girls and women have always thrown themselves at Fred while men have often been less than sympathetic, not realizing the burden of being constantly pursued. Fred muses about the mystery of physical attraction, unable to put out of mind Rosemary's apple blossom breasts, which he will never see, touch, or kiss again. Why, he wonders, did Mrs. Harris's breasts slipping out of her dress disgust him? The same size as Rosemary's, the charlady's breasts had the same strawberry nipples and the same pale-brown mark on the left one. Fred shudders and struggles for another explanation but finds none. The filthy old cow he knocked down in the closet is his false true love, Lady Rosemary. All of Rosemary's personae are an act and he will not return to her even if she begs him.

Drinking the remaining liquor as he cleans out the kitchen, Fred remembers Edwin's comment about Rosemary being a bit frantic and sometimes getting "into a state." Rosemary could not have anticipated Fred's visit, so her behavior as Mrs. Harris was more likely a state rather than an act. Fred wonders if her friends know she is this disturbed. Was Edwin warning Fred about what happens when she drinks? Or was Edwin asking Fred to look after her in his absence, unaware she was on the verge of throwing her substitute protector out of the house? Someone ought to be taking care of



her now, whether she is binging or breaking down - but whom? Drunk himself, Fred passes out, wanting only to return to America and Roo, who will probably not want to see him. Coming to with a headache, Fred is determined to warn Rosemary's friends but is only able to reach Vinnie.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter 10 follows Fred through the final days of his pathetic, fruitless sojourn in London. Emotionally back where he started, the ghosts of Rosemary hover everywhere and he cannot let go. That bubble bursts dramatically however, when he encounters Mrs. Harris in Rosemary's house, filthy, drunk, insulting and amorous. Only that night does he realize Rosemary and Mrs. Harris are the same. The spell is broken and Fred's sights turn to America, but he still feels responsible to find someone who can help his disturbed lover.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Vinnie is bored, listening to bland platitudes about children at a professional symposium and after fat, pompous Dr. Smithers exceeds his time slot, she wants to refute his thesis and declare children ought to be left as unique individuals rather than being sanded down (like her and her colleagues) by the nasty Contemporary World. Vinnie muses about how refreshing it would be if all the scholars in the room could turn into young adolescents and the undergraduates to babies. All would share a single thought: why am I sitting here listening to this nonsense? All would drop to the floor and commence playing, scribbling, building and demolishing with shrieks of mirth. The very idea of transforming children's literature into a scholarly discipline invites divine retribution. Vinnie's profession pricks her conscience. Watching Maria Jones and smug, cliché-rich Dr. Smithers in action, ripping out wildflowers and installing barbed wire, makes Vinnie question her more gentle, but still destructive, activities.

Perusing the *New York Review of Books* during the discussion period, Vinnie comes upon a prominent advertisement for L. D. Zimmern's forthcoming work, a collection of essays entitled *Unpopular Opinions*. An author's photograph shows neither a polar bear nor a victim of the Great Plague. Zimmern is older and thinner than Vinnie had pictured him, bearded and smiling with irony or scorn. The book will certainly include his awful *Atlantic* article, will be widely reviewed, acquired by every library and read-even at Corinth. British, French, German and other editions will most likely follow. A sour, burning pain fills Vinnie and she tries to picture Zimmern as one of the children she has been imagining, but she cannot make him young. Only Zimmern sits still middle-aged and condescending amidst the riotous children, one of whom is Vinnie. Violent fantasizing, Vinnie realizes, is unhealthy and useless, while she can gain revenge in magazines that Zimmern and his colleagues will never see, writing them will make her seem neurotic and obsessed. Talking about what is wrong with one's life sets up a magnetic force field that repels good luck and attracts bad-better to suffer misfortunes in silence.

The only person Vinnie can safely complain to is Chuck, who has declared Zimmern a no-account, sorehead creep. Chuck's ignorance of the academic world is both restful and frustrating-as are many things about him. This ambivalence has kept Vinnie from visiting Wiltshire. Chuck's refusal to reconcile himself to having non-aristocratic forebears is frustrating, but he has assured her the way she loves him makes everything okay. Vinnie has resisted telling him she does not love him, assuming Chuck means nothing more than sex. Memory of physical pleasure with Chuck strikes Vinnie at 3:30 AM, but by morning, her appointment book has filled up, leaving no time for a trip to Wiltshire.

Vinnie cannot conceive of sharing space with Chuck-or anyone-after so many years alone and she has to conceal her irritation when acquaintances bring up the danger of



her living alone. The alternative, she knows, is worse. When they suggest she get a dog for protection, she sees this as completing the picture of the stereotypical spinster. Fido is already too much for her. Lying together on the carpet for the last time with Chuck, Vinnie had felt crowded and invaded. Unable to imagine having to politely restrain natural impulses and benevolently put up with anxious inquiries, Vinnie remembers in marriage how living with someone introduces noise and clutter to life, with negotiating, asking and granting permissions and having to inform the other about actions. Even living with easy-going Chuck would be like a permanent game of Grandmother's Steps and just as you begin tolerating such a shared life, a man will walk out on you. No thanks, Vinnie decides.

Unfortunately, it is too late for Vinnie to say "no thanks." Wanting to go to Wiltshire, this Chuck has gotten into her life more deeply than she can admit. Vinnie imagines how spending time with him in the English countryside will entangle them more. Thirty years of experience has taught Vinnie that no man will ever really care for her. A husband claimed to love her, but left. Other lovers, carried away by desire, lied to her. Chuck has said he loves her, but that is probably politeness or an old-fashioned ethical justification for adultery. However, he has, told her she makes the women in Tulsa look like plow horses. If Chuck loves her, it is because she is nice to him, cheers him out of despair and restores his confidence. Vinnie did all these for her ex too, but she was still abandoned for someone younger, prettier and nicer. To counter the pull, Vinnie accepts invitations in London and reminds herself of Chuck's faults, but she still cannot stop wanting him.

After the symposium and reception, Vinnie resists the temptation to call Chuck, when her phone rings. The name of the American caller, Ruth March, does not register. It is Fred Turner's wife, Roo, who needs to get in touch with her husband but is unable to because his phone has been disconnected. Roo needs him to know she must fly to New Mexico for a job but wants to rendezvous in New York City, where their paths will overlap for one night. Vinnie knows Fred has arranged to dine with the Vogelers tonight and watch the Druids' midsummer solstice rites on Parliament Hill, but she cannot quickly find the Vogelers' number. Promising to get word through to Fred, a grateful Roo tells Vinnie that she is staying with her father in New York and gives the number for L. D. Zimmern. Vinnie, stunned into silence, is thanked and told she is a good sport, as Roo still loves Fred.

Vinnie wonders why her sworn enemy's daughter is surnamed March, but focuses on her newfound ability to visit the father's sins on the daughter. By doing nothing, she can thwart the reunion. Vinnie wonders whether Roo is spiteful and destructive like her father. In which case, Fred is better off without her. Surely, no one would expect Vinnie to traipse around London at night to search out Fred—no one, that is, but Chuck, who will be disappointed. Vinnie dresses, plans her route, puts on her new raincoat and sets off. The neighborhoods grow more disagreeable and treacherous the closer Vinnie comes to the station. The train Vinnie boards is more like New York subway cars than the usually clean, friendly London cars. A Jungian monster of dread travels in Vinnie's subconscious. Had it not been for Zimmern, the chain of events that set Vinnie on this



mission would not have occurred. Vinnie imagines Zimmern covered in black beetles like those on a poster she sees. Zimmern cries for help, but Vinnie ignores him.

Reaching Hampstead, Vinnie reproaches her stupidity for undertaking this quest, but hearing Chuck's encouragement in her mind, she proceeds down the street-angry, frightened and doubting she will even find Fred on Parliament Hill. Walking as fast as she can, Vinnie blames Chuck for dragging her out of bed and wishes she had never met him.

On Parliament Hill, Fred and the Vogelers have no fear of nighttime London. Rosemary/Mrs. Harris continues to bother Fred. What a fool she made of him! Fred is also bothered by not finishing his book. Considers how little London has changed since John Gay's day, Fred feels inferior to Gay's hero, Captain Macheath, who is an expert in getting women to love him. The trip has been a failure. Roo has not answered his telegram. The Vogelers have gotten out a bit and appreciated England more, but Fred no longer cares. The Druids anachronistic, phony mummery is disappointing to Fred, but it delights the Vogelers, who fall into a debate over whether Druidism is a gender-neutral faith. In the distance, Fred sees a small, stupid looking Druid approaching, without lantern or hood. How far Britain has fallen, he thinks, then recognizes Vinnie.

Eight hours later, Fred sits on Rosemary's steps, bags packed and nearly out of time if he hopes to reach Heathrow Airport on time. Knowing that Roo loves him and awaits him in New York, he is relieved that Vinnie knows about Rosemary, as does Edwin, who is due shortly from Sussex. The house looks deserted. Edwin emerges from a taxi looking pale and anxious. Fred retreats a bit as Edwin rings the bell and then uses a spare key to let himself in to assess the situation. A few minutes later, Edwin emerges, less worried but angrier. Rosemary is inside, physically all right but confused. Edwin shudders at the state of the house. Fred wants to see Rosemary, to verify she is all right and to apologize for the other day, but Edwin blocks him. If Fred were willing to remain in London and make Rosemary his life's work, Edwin would admit him, but as it is, Fred has done more than enough. Edwin will not allow Rosemary to be further disturbed. Fred loves a person who is not Rosemary. Fred accepts Edwin may be right. Edwin wishes him a nice trip home, asks him not to write, then shuts the door in Fred's face.

Fred would have missed his flight had he met Rosemary. Arriving at the airport at the last moment, he reflects on his disillusioning trip. Scholarship has degenerated into the highway robbery of others' ideas. Like Macheath, he has trifled with two woman's affections without giving thought to the damage he might do, figuring Roo to be too liberated and Rosemary too rich and famous to be affected. Fred has learned that everyone is vulnerable. Roo had wanted badly to accompany him to England, but he had picked a fight. In May, she had probably hoped he would invite her to come, but he had ignored her letters. Fred had encouraged Rosemary to love him unconditionally, knowing his own intentions to leave. Fred has never felt worse about himself in his adult life.

Fred's natural optimism returns as he recalls *The Beggar's Opera* ends not with strict poetic justice, but with Macheath being reunited with Polly. Gay claims he steps into the



third act to please the audience, but Fred suspects it may be because he truly cares about his characters. Fortunate and energetic people may have hope, Fred decides and he strides forward into his future.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter 11 begins with Vinnie confronting uncomfortable truths about her profession, while she watches colleagues tear the life out of children's literature through smug criticism, causing her quest for eternal childhood to unfold. Vinnie's nemesis appears twice, the first time resisting her attempts to force him into her vision of pendants as children and the second time as the reason for her undertaking a dangerous trip across nighttime London. Vinnie's musings about love show how hard a protective shell she has constructed against potential disappointment. Chuck is trying hard to penetrate it and succeeds enough to convince her she must deliver Roo's message to Fred. Fred is at the lowest point in his adult life, professionally frustrated and concerned about Rosemary/Mrs. Harris. At the airport, outbound from London, meditations on the *deus ex machina* ending of the novel he has failed to analyze for publication, gives him hope for the future.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

On a wet afternoon, Vinnie wonders why she has not heard from Chuck in a week, certain it must be a deliberate slight. Perhaps he found someone else after she declined to set a date to visit him. Remembering how he applauded her virtue for delivering Roo's message to Fred, he had also reported on the progress of his research. Chuck can see himself remaining forever in England. Mumpson may be a plebian contraction of De Mompesson, a follower of William the Conqueror, but Chuck is not sure he wants a French lord as an ancestor. Hearing again that Vinnie has no plans to visit, Chuck sounds disappointed and promises to call in a few days. Perhaps he is sulking, Vinnie thinks, or has met someone else. No one answers when she dials his number Monday, planning to announce she is coming. Vinnie is irritated by Chuck and by herself, as she has been out of sorts toward London since letting him into her life. Vinnie imagines Chuck having tea with a distant De Mompesson cousin, with an invisible Fido beside him, studying him and deciding he no longer needs to be there. Fido heads home to Vinnie.

Vinnie has four collections of folktales spread out for study when the phone rings and a nervous, young American female identifies herself as Barbie Mumpson, in England because her father passed away on Friday. Barbie has an antique picture that Professor Gilson says her father wanted Vinnie to have, should anything happen to him. Vinnie gathers her wits and invites Barbie to tea at 4 PM. Vinnie pictures a terrible car crash, although Barbie has said nothing about an accident. Could Chuck have killed himself, not wanting to live any more? Realizing he has been dead all these days she has been calling him, Vinnie is relieved that Chuck had not tired of her. Of course, this realization only depends on the pain of knowing he is gone.

Barbie struggles with her umbrella as she steps dripping into Vinnie's hall, declaring herself to be dumb about these things. In her mid-twenties, a bit overweight, tanned and healthy-looking, Barbie has her father's appetite, table manners and the square, cleft chin. Barbie complains about pokey, backward, worn-out Britain. Vinnie christens her mentally "The Barbarian." Finding no smooth entry point into Barbie's rambling, sleep-deprived monolog, Vinnie asks directly how Chuck died. Barbie relays that he collapsed climbing the steps of town hall to look at some records and died before the ambulance arrived. Vinnie is relieved at the natural causes, then thinks he would not have been there had she not started him on his quest, nor would he have been alone had she visited. Either way, Chuck is dead.

Barbie reveals her father had several "episodes" in Tulsa and had been ordered to give up alcohol, cigarettes and exertion. Vinnie wishes she had known this-particularly in view of certain heavy exertions. Barbie recalls that when she was little, whenever her father got something into his mind, he did not give up until he had finished it. Sniffing, Barbie recalls a tree house he designed and built. Barbie apologizes for crying and tells



how she had cried when the news first came and then when she was handed her father's ashes, which looked like a health-food soy mix. On her mother's instructions, Professor Gilson had arranged for Dad to be cremated. Gilson and his team had thought highly of her father. Figuring she could not take the ashes on a plane, Barbie scattered them in a quiet, remote field Chuck's ancestors might have owned.

Barbie repeatedly apologizes for her stupidity and Vinnie figures her Visigoth realtor mother is responsible for the innocent Barbarian's low self-esteem. Vinnie is angry at Barbie's parroting her mother's view about how pathetic Chuck's hunting for ancestors had been, while her mother is a D.A.R. with lots of prominent ancestors. Myrna has wondered whether Chuck is involved with a woman and Barbie asks whether Vinnie thinks that possible. Vinnie frostily claims to have no idea, thankful that no records of their phone calls will reach Tulsa her father too loyal for that and Vinnie checks that the sheepskin-lined winter coat is not visible.

Preparing to leave, Barbie remembers the picture of the Hermit of South Leigh, "Old Mumpson." Vinnie suggest perhaps she or her brother would want it, but Barbie insists that her father wanted it to go to Vinnie. Barbie tells her she may throw it out if she does not want it. Vinnie takes possession of the engraving of a man who looks very much like Chuck, had Chuck grown an untidy beard. Barbie confides she was selected for the sad trip because she is the most disposable. Her mother has big deals in the works, brother Greg is busy and his wife is pregnant. The more Vinnie hears about Chuck's relatives, the more she dislikes them. Barbie will be in town a few more days, because her mother booked her on a ten-day charter to save money. Vinnie realizes Chuck would want her to help his daughter, but the best she can think of doing is suggest the Zoo, where she had been so happy watching the Chuck-like polar bear. The thought so depresses Vinnie that she cannot suggest it. Parting awkwardly, Barbie wishes her a nice day and it is that trite, inappropriate phrase that turns Vinnie against doing anything for Barbie. Helping others has brought only disruption and pain into her life. Lending Chuck a book on the airplane ended up introducing a period of surprise, interest and joy that had ended in this. Chuck had known he was ill, living under a death sentence and had failed to follow the doctors' orders. Vinnie pities him but is angry that he did not take decent care of himself. Chuck could have dropped dead on top of her, Vinnie thinks, as she remembers how red his face would get as he climaxed. How could he do that to her? Staring at her bed, Vinnie recalls Chuck had smoked little and said he was giving it up and he had also drunk lightly. Perhaps he had decided he wanted to live. Maybe he took the chance of having sex with Vinnie because he loved her. Vinnie weeps, thinking that the only person who in fifty-four years has truly loved her is now scattered on a hillside in Wiltshire. "If only's" fill her mind.

A week later, having lunch with Edwin, Vinnie learns that Rosemary is doing well in Ireland. Edwin demands discretion as a condition for telling Vinnie the full story, as the British view neuroses and psychotherapy as shameful. Apparently, similar episodes had occurred before when Rosemary was not working. The pressure of having always to be a lady was difficult. Rosemary's doctor was excellent and fortunately, she could not remember Fred's last visit. In America, Vinnie thinks, Rosemary could pony her split personality into talk show appearances and *People* magazine features. Fred in



particular must never know, Edwin insists. Vinnie replies that Fred sent a note about reconciling with Roo. Had Fred succeeded in reaching Posy, she would not have had the same discretion. Edwin says he suspected Mrs. Harris all along - too good to be true. Vinnie allows she thought Rosemary was improving the story a bit. Was there ever a Mrs. Harris? Edwin believes there was originally, a part-time cleaner, to mollify Fred, but that Rosemary had then taken over the role-a break from her stereotype. As a gifted actress, she had pulled off answering the phones. Vinnie recognizes Edwin is rationalizing psychotic behavior.

Edwin shifts the conversation to Chuck and Vinnie uncomfortably reports everything from Barbie's phone call forward, hoping not to fall apart as she has at intervals over the last few days. Edwin pretends not to notice the wobble in her voice. Vinnie nearly strangles when Edwin declares there is a corner of an English field that is now forever Tulsa. Vinnie hopes to go suddenly like that, she says, imagining herself dead, cremated and spread like Chuck over a hillside field. Vinnie longs to see the grotto and talk with Professor Gilson and his students, but cannot move herself to go. Edwin declares that he would like to die well prepared in his bed, mourned by all his friends and admirers. Vinnie reveals how furious she is that Chuck knew about his situation and climbed those stairs anyway.

As Edwin launches into an anecdote about Chuck, Vinnie contemplates how blind anglophilia kept her from going to Wilshire. As Edwin ends his tale, remarking he rather liked Chuck, Vinnie surprises herself by declaring aloud that she loved him and she knows Chuck loved her too. People had wondered about the two of them, Edwin remarks. Then, catching himself, he shifts to consolation before wandering into parts of his life Vinnie has always preferred knowing nothing about. Vinnie realizes she also admired Chuck and feels she can talk no more to Edwin without screaming at his patronizing attitude. Lunch ends awkwardly on the topic of Edwin's mother and her plans to return to the States. Vinnie cannot afford to move here permanently.

Riding home, overfed, in a taxi, Vinnie feels she must escape London and visit Wiltshire. Love, given and received, has changed her. Envy the Londoners who will remain while she is alone and exiled in Corinth, she thinks of how even Chuck will be here forever. Chuck's death makes Vinnie shiver in the summer heat. How wrong for Death to claim a man just as he begins wanting to live. How wrong of her not to be with him on his last weekend. Chuck might not have climbed the stairs in Town Hall, or had she been with him, he might have climbed more slowly and be alive today. Had she known he was ill, she would have insisted he change his ways. Perhaps she would have resigned her job to live with him forever in England.

Vinnie reprimands herself for such unnatural and stupid fantasies, given her fate to be single, unloved and alone. Fido becomes visible to her inner eye, shrunk to half the size of a Welsh terrier and unsure of how he will be received. Vinnie tells him to go away, that she is a well-known scholar with friends on both sides of the Atlantic, who has finished an important book. As she enters her flat, Fido watches, waiting to be told to come in.



Chapter 12 Analysis

Chapter 12 forces Vinnie to accept that she has given and received love by confronting the death of Chuck. Angry at not hearing from him for days after turning down another invitation to visit him in the countryside, where she could enjoy his company without fear of being seen by her London friends, would still have required that she surrender the independence she had learned to cherish as a protective wall. Learning Chuck has died, Vinnie's first reaction is to suspect suicide-an abandonment of her. Learning he died of natural causes is at first a relief, which turns into a burden, as she learns that Chuck had known about his heart condition and had ignored doctor's orders. As she comes to realize Chuck had been trying to change for her and was taken away just as he was wanting to live, Vinnie finds the strength to declare aloud her love for him. Vinnie will return to America a changed woman, still convinced of her ill fate and accompanied by Fido, knowing that for a short while, she had shared true love.



Characters

Virginia A. ("Vinnie") Miner

A fifty-four year-old Ivy League professor of children's literature, Vinnie is the novel's chief protagonist. We meet her en route to London for six months of funded research on "A Comparative Investigation of the Play-Rhymes of British and American Children." A seasoned international traveler, she knows how to minimize the discomforts of travel, while getting everything she figures she has coming to her. Vinnie has a cadre of academic and aristocratic friends in England and would move there permanently if it were economically possible.

Raised in comfort in a pleasurable, stimulating semi-rural setting, Vinnie found herself at puberty transplanted to New York City, where she withered, short, pimped, flat-chested and plain. Compensating by keeping up with fashion over decades only frustrated her. Vinnie probably attended university in New England, for she has the accent and manners of that region. Having earned a Ph.D., she is now a senior member of the faculty in the English Department at Corinth University. Vinnie has a high libido and is sexually active whenever her plainness permits, but she has convinced herself that the true love she longs for will never happen, particularly after hitting fifty and watching a friend steal her husband after a brief marriage. Vinnie lives defiantly alone, permanently accompanied only by Fido, her imaginary dog-shaped visualization of self-pity. On this extended visit to England, Vinnie is looking for sexual adventure but is surprised when this is realized with cowboy, Chuck Mumpson. Obligated to keep this secret from her British friends because of his seeming uncouthness, it is only after Chuck's death that Vinnie admit she loves him and was truly loved by him. Vinnie is also caught uncomfortably between colleague Fred Turner and her British circle, after breaking one of her cardinal rules of never mixing the two worlds. The trip also teaches Vinnie the danger of turning children's literature into a sterile academic subject that robs childhood of its wonder and charm.

Fred Turner

An overly-handsome 29-year-old American academic in London, Fred is the novel's second major focus. Vinnie Miner sits on the faculty committee that controls his fate in the English department at Corinth University, but they are only superficially acquainted before their research leaves in London overlap. Fred is writing a book about John Gay's long poem, *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London*. From childhood, Fred has enjoyed the entitlement physical beauty brings, surprising family and friends by marrying one of the many women who threw themselves at him. Fred's wife Roo had helped him see the world from a less conservative point of view and made it less uncomfortable for him to deal with lusty female students and envious male colleagues. Angered to find Roo has included photographs of his and other men's penises in a photo exhibition, Fred picks a fight that results in a split before their scheduled trip to



England. Fred then, finds himself alone, under-funded and demoralized in London. Vinnie's pity is aroused by his situation, which translates into a meeting with a British actress, Rosemary Radley, with whom Fred has an affair. The affair and the artistic and aristocratic company he keeps change Fred's dismal, touristy view of contemporary England. Fred tells Rosemary about how he is expected back in Corinth to teach summer school, but she refuses to listen. A messy break-up ensues and Fred is frantic to spend the last three weeks together. In the end, he discovers Rosemary psychotically transformed into the charwoman he convinced her to hire and he flies home. While he is frustrated at having accomplished little research, he is hopeful of restoring his marriage and slipping back into the comfortable, successful life for which he believes himself destined.

Charles (Chuck) Mumpson

The heavy-set, balding Western-dressed passenger who manages to strike up a conversation with Vinnie Miner at the tail end of a flight to London, Chuck was a waste-disposal engineer in Tulsa, OK, until he was forcibly retired at age fifty-seven. The ex-juvenile delinquent, G.I. bill-financed University of Oklahoma alumnus, who is the father of two grown children and grandfather of three now has both the time and money to take a two-week Sun Tour of England. Chuck travels without his busy real estate wife, Myrna, a conceited Daughter of the American Revolution, who would like to be rid of him. Chuck remembers Vinnie as a kind, educated woman who lent him a book to read on the long flight and tries to find her in London for advice on what to see. Thwarted by receiving an intentionally inaccurate phone number, Chuck runs into Vinnie and gradually draws her into his quest to find a mythic ancestor his grandfather claimed lived in southwest England. Chuck's cowboy exterior, grating accent, crude manners and lack of liberal education all repel Vinnie, but these are balanced by his hunger for learning, money to pay for plays she wants to see and the folkloric quality of his quest, which attracts Vinnie's academic interest. From their first meeting in London, Chuck wants to kiss Vinnie and eventually does, following an accidental soup spill in her kitchen. Chuck longs to go further, but as Vinnie begins yielding to her own growing lust, Chuck feels obliged to confess that he has been convicted of vehicular homicide while drunk. This fact does not matter to Vinnie and they become passionate, albeit secret, lovers for several days before Chuck returns to Wiltshire to continue his research and service on the team of an Oxford University archeologist he fortuitously met. Chuck tries unsuccessfully to get Vinnie to join him. Chuck's confession to Vinnie omitted the fact that he suffers heart disease and Chuck dies while bounding up stairs in search of archives. Vinnie, frustrated by not having heard from him from days, receives the details from his daughter, Barbie, who has been dispatched by the family to collect Chuck's belongings and dispose of his cremains. Chuck directed that a picture of "Old Munson," the "Hermit of South Leigh," whom he resembled, be given to Vinnie should anything happened to him.



Lady Rosemary Radley

A beautiful, talented British actress, Rosemary is known by millions as Lady Emma Tally, star of the *Tallyho Castle* television series. The role has stereotyped her, thwarting her ambition of playing major dramatic roles she is certain she can handle. Rosemary's social circle centers on Edwin Francis and she knows, but does not like, American professor Vinnie Miner. Vinnie accidentally introduces her to the lonely, discouraged, but extraordinarily handsome Fred Turner, her colleague and twice-divorced, childless Rosemary attaches herself to him, to the detriment of her career.

Friends are amazed that Rosemary has allowed her elegant house in Chelsea to become a wretched mess inside and mutual friend, Posy Billings, enlists Fred to raise the question of hiring a sturdy "daily" to clean, shop, launder and cook. Fred reluctantly agrees to do this good deed, knowing it will not be easy, because Rosemary hates talk about "boring practical things." Surprisingly, Rosemary hires Mrs. Harris, who transforms the downstairs, while giving friends reason to worry about a reactionary influence on the pliable actress. Rosemary refuses to accept that Fred cannot avoid returning to America on time to teach summer school and throws him out of her house. Fred's attempts to reconcile and enjoy their remaining time together are rebuffed and Rosemary apparently leaves town. Fred uses a spare key to enter her trashed mansion to collect belongings he had left behind. After fleeing without them, he realizes that the drunken, abusive, amorous and repulsive Mrs. Harris (whom he encounters in the house) is, in fact, Rosemary, acting out a psychotic dual personality. Edwin takes over her rehabilitation, which is made more difficult by the British aversion to discussing mental illness and its treatment.

Ruth ("Roo") March

Fred Turner's beautiful, sexually liberated twenty-five year-old estranged wife, who was supposed to come with him to London and whose absence torments him. Roo is a photographer, whom Fred met three years ago taking pictures at a university reception he attended. Opposites from the start, she had had an electric effect on him and they had spent a weekend at her parents' farm after knowing each other three days. Roo's father, L. D. Zimmern, had walked out on the family when she was young, so on the occasion of her marriage, feminist Roo makes up a new surname. Roo writes Fred several times while he is in London, but since he is busily taking up with Rosemary, he ignores them. As the romance shatters however and Rosemary's eccentricities compare badly with Roo's honesty and forthrightness, Fred hopes he and Roo can be reconciled. Roo is out of town on assignment when his telegram arrives and is scheduled to fly out for another assignment when he returns, but she calls his colleague Vinnie Miner to get word to him that she still loves him and wants to rendezvous in New York. On the occasion of that phone call, Roo is staying with her father, who happens to be Vinnie's academic nemesis and while Vinnie is tempted to visit the father's sins on the daughter, she relents and gets word to Fred. At the end of the novel we learn Roo and Fred are rebuilding their marriage.



Lady Penelope ("Posy") Billings

A beautiful, gossipy London socialite and friend of Edwin Francis and through him, of Vinnie Miner, Posy hosts a party for Fred and Rosemary, Edwin and his current lover Nico and her cousin William Just, with whom she is having an affair. Posy enlists Fred to convince Rosemary she ought to hire a cleaning woman to straighten up her wreck of a home.

Sir James ("Jimbo") Billings

A high-risk investor, who returns early from business in the Middle East, interrupting his wife's party and requiring that William Just be hustled out of the house. Jimbo knows about Posy's affair and is satisfied to look the other way so long as he does not have to see Just and his family life is not compromised in public. Jimbo has interests of his own on the side.

Carissa

One of Fred Turner's former girlfriends, whom the Vogelers both liked and were sorry to see leave Fred's life. Fred sees her quite differently and resents having her name thrown in his face.

Fido

The invisible dog that follows Vinnie Miner, who appears whenever she is filled with self-pity and varies in size and breed to fit her mood. Fido hibernates during Vinnie's first two months in London but awakens when Chuck Mumpson visits late one night, telling his tale of marital woe. Fido betrays his friend of 20 years to accompany Chuck on his lonely way, but he returns when Chuck resumes his quest to find his ancestors and Vinnie takes to bed with a bad cold. Vinnie sends Fido to Wiltshire with Chuck, but when she imagines Chuck has found the prominent relatives he wants and is content with his life (not knowing Chuck has, in fact, succumbed to a heart attack), she draws Fido back. Fido does not know how he will be received, but in the end is invited into Vinnie's flat, now half the size of a Welsh terrier.

Edwin Francis

Vinnie Miner's oldest friend in London, a children's book editor, writer and critic, Edwin introduces Vinnie into the Billings' social circle and tries to enlist her help in heading off a relationship between Fred and Rosemary. Edwin is a gourmand and homosexual, whose current "particular friend" is the Greek Cypriot, Nico. Unable to head off a romance between the scholar and actress, Edwin entrusts Rosemary's care to Fred for the week he will be lecturing in Japan. Edwin returns to find Rosemary has suffered one



of her periodic psychotic episodes, having transformed herself into the Cockney charwoman, Mrs. Harris. Edwin takes charge of her confidential rehabilitation.

Roberto Frank

Fred Turner's childhood playboy friend, who advises him that all you get from carrying a torch is sore fingers. Roberto, who teaches French in Wisconsin, has since junior high school advocated casual sex as a panacea-quantity over quality, just like with baseball cards.

Professor Michael (Mike) Gilson

The Oxford University archeologist who befriends Chuck Mumpson during his quest for the "Hermit of South Leigh" and invites him to take part in his summer digs. When Gilson learns of Chuck's sudden death, he takes charge of settling his affairs, including Chuck's cremation and the delegation to Barbie Mumpson of the task of giving Vinnie a copy of the ancestor he so resembled.

Mrs. Harris

The Cockney cleaning woman Fred convinces Rosemary to hire, Mrs. Harris may have begun as an actual person, but becomes a fictional role Rosemary takes on as a second personality. During a drunken confrontation with Fred in Rosemary's devastated house, a disgusting Mrs. Harris reveals her breasts, which spark Fred's realization of her true identity.

Colonel and Lady Jenkins

The owners of the estate in South Leigh that Chuck Mumpson's hermitic ancestor is said to have owned, while preferring to dwell in a grotto. The Jenkins listen to his story sympathetically.

Maria Jones

A shy, nervous, pedantic lecturer on early etiquette books who addresses the "Literature and the Child" symposium Vinnie attends.

William Just

Posy Billings' cousin, who is often called "Just William." Middle-aged, rumped, knowledgeable and self-effacing, he is a BBC functionary with media contacts sufficiently useful to Posy as to make him acceptable as a lover.



Barbie Mumpson

Chuck Mumpson's daughter, who strongly resembles her father, physically, behaviorally and mentally, she is selected as the least likely to be inconvenienced by having to fly to England to dispose of his cremains and close his affairs. Barbie tells Vinnie about how Chuck died, was cremated and scattered in the fields he had come to love.

Myrna Mumpson

Chuck Mumpson's shrewish real estate-selling wife in Tulsa. A Daughter of the American Revolution, Myrna despises her common husband and has a rich lover whose political supporters will accept his marrying a widow but not a divorcee. Myrna orders her husband's cremation and dispatches daughter Barbie to settle his affairs, booking her on a ten-day tour to save money.

Nico

Edwin Francis's current "particular friend," is a well educated, Greek Cypriot who wants to get into film and to discuss benefits for his island nation.

Oswald

The boring drama critic and TV personality to whom Fred introduces Joe Vogeler at Rosemary's party and whose accidental dousing by Jackie is declared by Rosemary to mark the high point of the evening.

Nadia Phillips

Posy Billings' friend and decorator.

Shara

Roo's twenty year-old, dark russet horse.

Dr. O. C. Smithers

A bland, pompous lecturer on the Virtues and Graces of The Child at the "Literature and the Child" symposium Vinnie attends, he and all overweight British males are detested by Vinnie.



Dame Daphne Vane

Rosemary's ethereal, unworldly-looking former costar on *Tallyho Castle*, Daphne is particularly persistent about learning about Mrs. Harris. Rosemary helps promote Daphne's ghostwritten autobiography, *Vane Pursuits: A Life in the Theatre*, by taking part in a radio program that Fred tries unsuccessfully to crash. Vane's boorish party is the one Rosemary leaves in company with Vinnie, whom she insults during the cab ride home.

Joe and Debby Vogeler

Fred Turner's school companions, they are the only people his age that Fred knows in London. The Vogelers teach in adjacent colleges in Southern California and their subjects are reflected in their attitude toward London. Debby is thirty and teaches British literature, warmly indignant toward the country, while Joe, who is twenty-nine and teaches British philosophy, is ironically resigned. Jakie, their 16-month old son is just learning to walk and is their obsession. Jakie's failure to begin speaking consumes them as they walk with Fred along a canal, but still they manage to meddle in Fred's romantic affairs. All are relieved when Jakie says, "Ball," pointing at a floating object Debby will not allow him to touch.

Lennie. D. Zimmern

A Columbia University professor of English whose article in the *Atlantic*, disparages Vinnie Miner's field of study as useless scholarship—a professional slight that consumes her during her trip to England. Roo March's decision to invent a new surname when she weds Fred Turner disguises the fact her estranged father is Vinnie's nemesis, L. D. Zimmern. As a member of the grant committee, Zimmern blocks an extension of the grants allowing her to stay in London. Zimmern lives in a brownstone in the West Village, in conditions far different from how vindictive Vinnie imagines him. An advertisement for his forthcoming book, *Unpopular Opinions*, includes his photograph, but Vinnie still cannot allow him to be less than a monster. When his daughter reveals the relationship to Vinnie during a phone call while trying to reach her estranged husband, Vinnie is tempted to visit the father's sins on the daughter, but her better side prevails.



Objects/Places

The British Museum

Great Britain's national library, where Fred Turner does most of his academic scholarship. The crowded workspace and antiquarian retrieval system, so different from American institutions, stifle his work and he refers to it by wife Roo's whimsical abbreviation, "B.M.," which also means "Bowel Movement." Fred's aversion slows his work at least as much as his preoccupation with Roo and Rosemary.

Corinth University

A fictitious Ivy League liberal arts college at which Lurie sets some of her novels, said to be modeled after Cornell University. Vinnie is a senior member of the English Department faculty and Fred is an up-and-coming junior professor hoping to attain tenure.

Fortnum & Mason's

A landmark London food store famed for its truffles, where Chuck first finds Vinnie after several weeks in England. Chuck's crass remarks here about employees clad in Regency dress being an "advertising gimmick" irritate Vinnie.

Harrod's

A landmark high-ticket London fashion store, where Vinnie takes Chuck to replace the plastic raincoat he covets, but she has thrown out.

Heathrow Airport

London's international airport, where Vinnie's suitcase is briefly lost, causing her to miss the last bus and require Chuck's help in finding a cab, which helps bond them later. At the end of the novel, Fred sits in the boarding area, contemplating the failure of his academic trip and hoping for a better future with Roo.

The London Library Reading Room

The quiet, old world-feeling library where Vinnie prefers to do her work, it is redolent with the memories of the past's great writers and offers hope of running into contemporary figures.



The London Underground

The subway system, normally cleaner and safer than New York's, which Fred takes only when he cannot walk to destinations in imitation of one of the characters in his research and which Vinnie takes on a fearful trip to deliver to Fred the good news that Roo still loves him.

The London Zoo

The attraction to which Vinnie takes her American cousins but finds herself abandoned by them as they seek to "do London." Watching the polar bears, Vinnie fantasizes about Chuck and about vengeance on Zimmern.

Parliament Hill

The site of the Druids' midsummer solstice celebration that Fred attends with the Vogelers. Vinnie crosses London to bring to Fred the news that his wife Roo still loves him.

Monsieur Thompson's

A posh restaurant where Vinnie meets Edwin for lunch and first hears the rumor of Fred's affair with Rosemary.



Themes

Affairs

Foreign Affairs depicts non-marital sexual relationships between four couples: Vinnie and Chuck, Rosemary and Fred, Posy and Just William and Edwin and Nico. Vinnie, conscious of her physical blandness, briefly tried marriage but lost her husband to a close friend. Convinced that however good she is in bed, she will never truly be loved, Vinnie fights old-age eroticism, is severely Victorian about her body and nakedness in general, but cannot suppress her feelings and comes to London hoping for adventure.

Chuck, married to a controlling wife intent on dumping him so she can marry a rich lover with fundamentalist-Christian right-wing political aspirations, also yearns for love and he expresses it openly and often to Vinnie once she opens her shell enough for him to enter. Only after his sudden death does Vinnie realize what they briefly shared. Rosemary has been twice married and divorced and has been involved in countless painful affairs. Fred arrives in London miserable over a fight with his sexually over-liberated wife Roo and falls for the beautiful British actress, but he cannot abandon his academic career to be with her. This rejection brings on a psychotic episode in Rosemary.

Posy and Just William are cousins and their affair seems included in order to show how the British handle "open marriages" in a healthier manner than Americans. Edwin and Nico's alliance is glossed over, but allows the other characters to show how homosexuality is viewed in that milieu.

Children

Foreign Affairs deals with children primarily through the filter of Vinnie Miner's academic specialization. Otherwise, the only child dealt with individually is 18-month old Jakie Vogeler, beginning to walk but not to talk and a constant worry to his overbearing, intellectualizing parents. Jakie speaks his first word because his mother will not let him have the ball he badly wants and the scene serves to heighten the parents' inability to understand what friend Fred Turner truly wants.

Vinnie had a happy childhood, filled with books, games, movie matinees, radio broadcasts and family celebration. In adolescence however, her family moved to the city and Vinnie found herself plain and unwanted. Over the decades, she has accepted that she is a disadvantaged woman, incorporating into her lectures and writings on children's literature about the need to find and nurture the eternal child within. Notably, she has little interest in or compassion for individual children, assuming they are violent and rather obnoxious.

In one scene, Vinnie is on a London playground envious of the concentration and joy with which schoolgirls skip rope and recite ancient rhymes. Next, she is confronted by a



slightly older, unattractive, mercenary girl who sells Vinnie off-color ditties that are outside her thesis. Children too quickly become adults. Finally, Vinnie is seen, bored at a professional symposium, listening to a colleague stripping from childhood its flowers to wrap it in academic barbed wire. Vinnie imagines everyone in the room restored to childhood, playing happily and wondering why they are listening to such garbage. Only her academic nemesis, who considers her discipline a waste of time and money, cannot be pictured as a child.

Barbie Mumpson's recollections of how her late father built her a tree house years ago shows how lasting and significant memories of compassionate parenting are.

Literature

Foreign Affairs has literature professors as its protagonists, so it is natural that literary themes abound. Chapters have epigrams that identify which character is to be dealt with. Vinnie's specialty is children's literature and a sprinkling of rhymes brightens the text.

Vinnie uses the historical context of "Ring around the rosy" as a pretext for wishing her nemesis would contract the Black Death. L. D. Zimmern has attacked Vinnie personally in an *Atlantic* article and denounced spending public funds on such research. Later, he is appointed to the committee reviewing projects and vetoes an extension of her six-months in London. Literature is bound up in the dark intrigues of politics. The possibility that Chuck Mumpson's quest for his English ancestors might result in a publishable article helps convince Vinnie to extend and deepen contacts with someone she finds, at the outset anyway, illiterate and unattractive.

The second academic in London from the same school, Fred Turner, concentrates on 18th-century literature (a rare specialization in comparison with the Elizabethan and Edwardian eras). Fred Turner shares author John Gay's loathing for mechanical transport and walks around town whenever possible and he regularly pictures himself as a character in novels by Henry James. Fred is frustrated by his inability to concentrate, first because he misses his estranged wife and later because he falls in love with a rich, glamorous and beautiful actress. Fred convinces himself he can learn more from associating with her friends than from books in the British Museum, which he loathes.

In the end, Fred realizes that scholarship is a matter of consuming other scholar's ideas and vomiting them out, somewhat blended. Vinnie, immersed in her affair with Chuck, comes to the same conclusion: life is not literature and cannot-should not-be forced into the norms to which novelists choose to conform.



Style

Point of View

Foreign Affairs is narrated consistently in a detached third person, present-tense voice, primarily as description of people, places and events. However, long passages of dialog are often included. The author is privy to all the characters' inner thoughts and reveals them to the reader. This allows the reader to experience the action from the point of view of each of the characters rather than from any one limited point of view of a single character. Flashbacks to childhood memories are generally narrated in the past tense, linked to a present action or emotion. The change in verb tense from present to past indicates that a character is remembering something that happened previously.

Setting

Foreign Affairs is set in late-20th-century London, after an opening chapter aboard a cramped transatlantic charter jet. All of the characters lament the exploitation that tourism brings, so none of the usual sites are mentioned (other than the Tower of London, in passing). Vinnie lives in a comfortable flat on Regent's Park Road, rented from an Oxford don and she frequents high-class places like Monsieur Thompson's, Fortnum and Mason's and Harrod's, preferring to do her research in the quiet London Library Reading Room. None of these places are depicted in any detail. The way their names are mentioned, even for those who do not know London, suffice to suggest the desired ambience. The aristocratic Billingses and Rosemary live in mansions. The former couple's having a campy late-Victorian feel and the latter's fallen into ruins indoors through the owner's inattention. However, it is restored to splendor through the hard work of Mrs. Harris, then completely undone and left in filth. Fred and his scholar-friends, Joe and Debby Vogeler, are forced to live in frugal apartments and work in the cavernous, antiquated British Museum, which Fred detests but his colleagues seem to ignore. A visit to the London Zoo and a primary school yard, as well as numerous trips on the streets and Underground trains fill out the local color *Foreign Affairs* affords the reader.

Language and Meaning

Foreign Affairs is narrated in language befitting its academic and aristocratic characters and settings, in that it is decidedly high-brow. Contemporary American English is the rule, but asides are common, both overt and covert, illuminating British vocabulary, style and conventions. These are entertaining, usually tongue-in-cheek and never condescending. Profanity is minimal, limited to the young Americans and to a drunken Rosemary/Mrs. Harris. Vinnie's musings tend to be Victorian and her more sensual moments stun by contrast. Chuck restrains his language in order not to offend and apologizes for slip-ups. Only in passages about Roo does the author approach raw



sexuality and those are uncomfortable in the larger context, demonstrating the futility of repression.

Structure

Foreign Affairs consists of twelve untitled chapters. Each opens with a brief epigram appropriate to its content. Chapters dealing with Vinnie Miner and/or Chuck Mumpson are taken from ancient poems and rhymes, while those focusing on Fred Turner are drawn from the writings of his research subject, John Gay. Their story lines generally alternate but sometimes intertwine. The action proceeds lineally and episodically, with the primary characters' backgrounds being recalled compactly and colorfully to provide insight into present actions. Vinnie's sexual hunger is developed slowly in several installments, as her interest in Chuck deepens. Vinnie and Chuck, who meet on a plane crossing the Atlantic to England, are polar opposites in personality and behavior, but they fall in love, parted by death. Vinnie ends the book still set in her self-limiting ways, but touched by the amorous encounter and forced analysis of her profession. Fred enters the novel frustrated and lost and falls in love with Rosemary. Through that affair, his eyes are opened to the reality of upper-class British culture, but he is later rejected and again falls into depression. Fred's research project is a failure, but in the end, his marriage appears on the road to mending and the bright future he always assumed he would enjoy, looms once again. All of the other characters can be expected to continue the static lives they are shown as living throughout the novel.



Quotes

"As has been remarked, almost any woman can find a man to sleep with if she sets her standards low enough. But what must be lowered are not necessarily standards of character, intelligence, sexual energy, good looks and worldly achievement. Rather, far more often, she must relax her requirements for commitment, constancy and romantic passion; she must cease to hope for declarations of love, admiring stares, witty telegrams, eloquent letters, birthday cards, valentines, candy and flowers. No; plain women often have a sex life. What they lack, rather, is a love life." Chapter 1, pg. 12.

"The truth is, Vinnie told her, Rosemary probably hadn't meant anything. It was just nonsense off the top of her head, a way of focusing attention on herself or changing the topic of conversation, perhaps-a musical noise, that was all. Words don't matter to actors as they do to a literary person. For them meaning is mainly in expression and gesture; the text is just the libretto, a line of empty glasses that the performer can fill with the golden or silver or bronze liquid of his or her voice. At drama schools, Vinnie has heard, they teach you to say 'Please close the door' twenty different ways." Chapter 3, pg. 69.

"She had thus over the years enjoyed imaginary relationships with, among others, Daniel Aaron, M. H. Abrams, John Cheever, Robert Lowell, Arthur Mizener, Walker Percy, Mark Schorer, Wallace Stegner, Peter Taylor, Lionel Trilling, Robert Penn Warren and Richard Wilbur. As this list shows, she rather preferred older men; and she insisted on intellectuals. When several members of a women's group she belonged to in the early seventies confessed they had passionate fantasies about their carpenter, their gardener, or the mechanic at the service station, Vinnie was astonished and a little repelled. What would be the point of going to bed with someone like that?" Chapter 3, pg. 79.

"From the lake, Posy's house looks unnaturally tall and somehow misshapen; an effect perhaps of its elevation, the shadows and shrubberies that surround it and the fried-egg moonlight. As Fred walks slowly back up the path past the giant dark vegetable birds and urns, he becomes conscious of a strong impulse not to reenter this house, to hike instead into the nearest village and find a bed for the night somewhere (at the pub, maybe?) and take an early train or bus into London in the morning. "But of course he can't do that, it would be rude and crazy; and besides there's Rosemary. He can't leave her alone with two posturing queers and a bossy adulteress whose hair looks like a wig - though only an hour ago he thought it was all beautiful, the real thing." Chapter 3, pgs. 106-107.

"Since she is an authority on children's literature, people assume that Vinnie must love children and that her own lack of them must be a tragedy. For the sake of public relations, she seldom denies these assumptions outright. But the truth is otherwise. In her private opinion most contemporary children-especially the American ones-are competitive, callous, noisy and shallow, at once jaded and ignorant as a result of overexposure to television, baby-sitters, advertising and video games. Vinnie wants to



be a child, not to have one; she isn't interested in the parental role, but in an extension or recovery of what for her is the best part of life." Chapter 5, pgs. 109-110.

"Insisting that she hire Mrs. Harris is one good thing Fred has done for Rosemary. She has done much more for him: she has transformed him from a depressed, disoriented visiting scholar to his normal confident self. His earlier anomie, Fred realizes now, was occupational. Psychologically speaking, tourists are disoriented, ghostly beings; they walk London's streets and enter its buildings in a thin ectoplasmal form, like a double-exposed photograph. London isn't real to them and to Londoners they are equally unreal-pale, featureless, two-dimensional figures who clog up the traffic and block the view." Chapter 6, pg. 138.

There are only a few who rather spoil the effect, who would never have been cast if this were in fact a commercial. For instance, little Vinnie Miner, who is wearing one of what Rosemary calls 'her Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle costumes'-all starched white cotton and fuzzy pale-brown wool like the fur of some small animal. Fred recalls with amazement how formidable she had seemed to him only a few months ago. Already he has absorbed the view of Rosemary and her friends, that Vinnie, though clever and likeable, is a bit of a comic turn, with her passion for Morris dancing and children's books and everything British that is quaint and out-of-date." Chapter 6, pg. 144.

"'I've done it myself, when I was younger. There was this superintendent once at a waste treatment plant in East Texas that wasn't testing right; I'll never forget his face. I didn't have it in for him, no way. I didn't even know he existed, so to speak, but I about ruined his life. It could be that way with your professor.' "'You may be right,' Vinnie said into the telephone-her usual response to statements she prefers not to challenge. And of course it's possible that Zimmern has nothing against her personally. His prejudice, rooted no doubt in an unhappy and deprived childhood, may be against childhood itself; or against women in academia, or against folklore, or some combination of these. But that doesn't exonerate him. Like all offenders, he must be judged by his actions. And condemned. And punished." Chapter 7, pgs. 160-161.

"Fido, or Self-Pity, who has been half dozing beside Vinnie for nearly three days, thumps his feathery tail on the comforter, but she shoves him away. Though she has a perfect right to be sorry for herself now, she knows how perilous it is to overindulge it. To go on feeding and petting Fido, even to acknowledge his existence too often, will fatally encourage him. He will begin to grow larger, swelling from the breadth and height of a beagle to that of a retriever - a sheepdog - a Saint Bernard. If she doesn't watch out, one day Vinnie will be followed everywhere by an invisible dirty-white dog the size of a cow. Though other people won't be able to visualize him as she does, they will be subliminally aware of his presence. Next to him she will look shrunken and pathetic, like someone who has accepted for all time the role of Pitiable Person" Chapter 7, pg. 171.

"'An eye for an eye -' "'Makes the whole world blind,' she finishes. "'Yeh - I see what you mean.' Chuck grins suddenly. 'That a smart proverb. I never heard it before.' "'Gandhi.' "'What? Oh, yeh, that Indian.' Chuck ceases to smile. 'Anyways.' He shifts uncomfortably on the sofa, causing it to creak in protest. 'I thought you oughta know. I



mean, in case you might not want to have anything more to do with me.' "An excuse to draw back has been handed to Vinnie on a platter, but she hesitates. It would be hateful and hurtful to reject Chuck for what happened to him on the Muskogee Turnpike. Indeed, now she looks at the platter again, what is on it seems more like a watertight excuse for going ahead." Chapter 7, pg. 182.

"Even today there are disproportionately few older characters in fiction. The conventions hold and the contemporary novelist, like an up-to-date fruit-grower, reconstructs the natural landscape, removing most of the aging trees to leave room for young saplings that haven't been grafted or put down deep roots. Vinnie has accepted the convention; she has tried for years to accustom herself to the idea that the rest of her life will be a mere epilogue to what was never, it has to be admitted, a very exciting novel." Chapter 9, pg. 207.

"That's what you think, my dear. You think a lot of men want to sleep with me. I used to think that myself.' Her voice alters. 'Bloody little fool that I was. Men don't want to sleep with me, they want to have slept with me. They want to be able to tell their mates, 'Oh, Lady Rosemary Radley, the television star? Yes, I do know her. In fact, I knew her very *well*, at one time.'" Rosemary has slipped into a third voice: tenor, smarmily insinuating." Chapter 9, pg. 219.

"Of course not,' Rosemary interrupts smoothly. 'Tell me something, Vinnie. How old are you?' "'Uh, I'm fifty-four,' replies Vinnie, who makes a point of answering this question accurately. "'Imagine that,' Rosemary smiles sweetly. 'I would never have guessed it.' "'Thank you.' She is pleased in spite of herself and somewhat mollified. 'It's just because I'm small, really.' "'You know what's so wonderful about you, Vinnie?' "'Er-no.' Vinnie smiles expectantly. "'I'll tell you what's so wonderful about you.' It is Mrs. Harris' voice again, speaking through the pink sweet-pea lips of Rosemary Radley. 'You're fifty-four years old and you look sixty and you don't know fuck-all about life.'" Chapter 9, pg. 221.

"No. Lying between the sheets, Fred shudders from head to toe. No, he must have imagined it. "But the memory is photographically clear. Mrs. Harris has Rosemary's breasts. She is about the same size as Rosemary; she has almost the same color hair. She seems to be living in Rosemary's home, drinking Rosemary's gin, sleeping in Rosemary's bed. Of course her voice and accent are completely different. But Rosemary's an actress; she's often imitated Mrs. Harris. Oh, Jesus Christ. Fred sits up in the darkened room with his mouth hanging open as if he were seeing some foul ghost." Chapter 10, pg. 240.

"If it hadn't been for L. D. Zimmern, she wouldn't be here. If he had never existed, he wouldn't have had a quarreling inconsiderate daughter for Fred Turner to marry. Fred would have married some other much nicer girl, who would not have quarreled with him, who would have come with him to London. He would never have had an affair with Rosemary Radley and Rosemary would never have insulted Vinnie in a taxi." Chapter 11, pg. 257.



Topics for Discussion

Could Vinnie and Chuck have made a life together had he not died? What might it have been like?

Could Fred and Rosemary have made a life together, had he been willing to abandon his career? What might it have been like?

What is the function of Fido in this novel? How effectively is it used?

What is the function of the polar bear in this novel? How effectively is it used?

What is Nico's function in the novel? How effectively is he used?

What is the function of Vinnie's airplane kleptomania? Is it effectively developed later?

Can Vinnie escape the psychological shell she has molded around herself?

Does Lurie provide sufficient information on her literary allusions? If not, which one would you like to know more about?

How do the Americans view British society? Are they right?

Can folklore be a commodity?

Should scholars defend their reputations in print or hide from detractors, hoping the conflict will fade?