

The Ginger Man Study Guide

The Ginger Man by J. P. Donleavy

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Plot Summary

Ginger Man follows Sebastian Dangerfield, a young law student from a wealthy American family, as he drops out of Dublin University law school, makes a mess of his early marriage, and drinks his way through the Dublin pubs. Dangerfield is a womanizer whose only ambition is not to work. He finds himself in squalor and poverty, moving to London, wrecking relationship after relationship, and finally discovering it will be twenty more years before he can expect any inheritance from his wealthy father's death.

As the novel begins, Dangerfield is struggling while studying law at Dublin University and living in poverty in a spooky, rundown house on the edge of a cliff in Ireland. His wife and baby daughter are away, and he has his friend O'Keefe over. Dangerfield buys food and liquor on credit, and they get drunk and wreck the house. Marion comes back and is furious with his drunkenness. After the backyard falls down the cliff in a storm, the Dangerfields move to a tiny house in Dublin. The plumbing is bad and the toilet pipes break over the kitchen. Dangerfield is broke, and he and Marion fight.

Dangerfield meets a woman named Chris who works at a local laundry, and they begin having an affair. Dangerfield starts feeling guilty, though, and goes back to Marion for a time before getting bored and frustrated and going back to find solace with Chris. One day, Dangerfield leaves his fly open on the train, and when he gets home, he has a big fight with Marion. She has written to Dangerfield's wealthy father, complaining about how he mistreats her and their child. Dangerfield is furious, thinking that he'll be disowned. However, Dangerfield's father sends Marion money. She threatens to leave him, and Dangerfield gets drunk and smashes up a bar. He takes refuge at Chris's, but she is upset at his lying about what's happened. He leaves her house the next day, only to find that Marion's moved out.

Dangerfield follows Marion to her new address and insinuates himself in the nice little house she's rented. They rent out a room to a woman named Lilly Frost. For a while, Dangerfield is happy but continues with his drunken behavior. One day, he finds Marion has taken all the money and moved away. He begins an affair with Lilly. Meanwhile, his former landlord and other debts have followed him. While drunk at a party, he meets yet another woman, named Mary. He gets her to give him money to move to London, and he leaves Lilly.

In London, Dangerfield hooks up with some old friends. He writes Mary to come join him. His father dies, and he expects a big inheritance but discovers that it will be twenty years before he will see a penny of the money. When the money goes away, he fights with Mary and drives her away. However, at the end of the novel, he meets an old friend who's now wealthy and flush with money. Dangerfield makes up with Mary and plans for a future with her.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

Ginger Man follows Sebastian Dangerfield, a young law student from a wealthy American family, as he drops out of Dublin University law school, makes a mess of his early marriage, and drinks his way through the Dublin pubs. Dangerfield is a womanizer whose only ambition is not to work. He finds himself in squalor and poverty, moving to London, wrecking relationship after relationship, and finally discovering it will be twenty more years before he can expect any inheritance from his wealthy father's death.

As Chapter 1 begins, Sebastian Dangerfield encounters his friend Kenneth O'Keefe, a fellow student at Trinity College, Dublin University, in a bar in Dublin. Both American students are broke, waiting for checks from the G.I. Bill. Dangerfield has just pawned an electric fire, so he buys O'Keefe a drink. Dangerfield says his wife Marion and baby Felicity have gone to her parents. They've got a creaking old house in an outlying town, and Dangerfield asks O'Keefe to visit. O'Keefe envies Dangerfield his wife, since it means regular sex, and O'Keefe can't overcome his virginity.

In Chapter 2, O'Keefe comes to visit Dangerfield's rattletrap country house on the edge of a steep cliff. Dangerfield chops up a blue blanket with an ax to make a scarf in Trinity's colors, so he can go to the store and get credit on the strength of his college and his good English accent. He gets liquor, ham, cheese, and a chicken. O'Keefe cooks up his meal, while Dangerfield asks O'Keefe about his sex life. The frustrated O'Keefe ran away from one woman who asked him to her room back in North Carolina.

Dangerfield insists nothing is the matter with his marriage, though his wife's away. O'Keefe brings up the fact that Marion's parents backed out of paying a 250-pound dowry at the last minute and talks about how close Dangerfield is to utter bankruptcy. O'Keefe also mentions Constance Kelley, a girl in America who strung him along for two years but was really looking for wealth and social position. O'Keefe imagines being rich and going back and seeing how poorly she's turned out. O'Keefe has tried to have sex with his cousin, but she wants marriage. Dangerfield suggests putting out an ad. The men eat their food, and O'Keefe hears sounds in the spooky house's attic. Going up to investigate, O'Keefe finds a one-eyed cat. To ward off the spooks, the two men build a fire and play the piano.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The Ginger Man is told in a modified stream-of-consciousness style, from the point of view of Sebastian Dangerfield, a ne'er-do-well American law student at Trinity College, Dublin University in Ireland. Dangerfield is a unlikable character, used to a life of ease, and is violent, drunken, and idle in his poverty. Poverty and money are the primary motivators throughout the novel. Dangerfield is in college on the G.I. Bill after World War



II, and he lives off the checks he gets from the government. When his checks run out, he has nothing to fall back on, except pawning his possessions and opening up charge accounts he can't afford. Dangerfield doesn't think about consequences or plan for the future. If he had plenty of money, this attitude would have few negative effects, at least for him. However, Dangerfield's poverty gives his carelessness and hedonism real consequences.

Dangerfield pretends to O'Keefe that things are fine between himself and Marion, but in reality, Dangerfield is unhappy in his marriage. He sees the baby as a responsibility, dirty diapers and noise. He sees his wife as a source of constant nagging, chores, and again, responsibilities. Dangerfield doesn't want any responsibilities. Despite his position as a husband and a law student, he is ultimately directionless.



Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary

As Chapter 3 begins, Dangerfield is expecting Marion back the next day and dreading the return of his nagging wife and troublesome baby. As Dangerfield walks O'Keefe to the bus, O'Keefe ogles the local women. Dangerfield asks to borrow money, but O'Keefe won't even part with a shilling. Finally, as the bus approaches, O'Keefe agrees to give Dangerfield three pence, on the promise that it will be paid back the next day when the G.I. Bill checks come in.

On the way back to the house, Dangerfield stops in a shop for cigarettes. A woman on the street asks him for a light, and Dangerfield talks to her. Her name is Alma, and her friend is Thelma. They work in a biscuit factory. Dangerfield gets the two girls to walk with him, as he shows them around the area. He holds Alma's hand as Thelma walks ahead. Alma won't come in to Dangerfield's house, though she lets him kiss her. As Dangerfield sits alone in his creaky, wind-blown house, he dreams of being rich. In the freaky, noisy house, Dangerfield gets drunk and takes the ax, chopping up his pillow. He barricades himself in the room with the mattress, holding the ax for protection.

In Chapter 4, Dangerfield awakes to his furious wife's return. He's forgotten to pick her up at the train station. The house is a wreck, and Dangerfield's obviously been drunk. When Dangerfield insults Marion's father, she slaps him on the face, and the baby begins to cry. Hung over, Dangerfield threatens to kill the baby if it isn't quiet. He leaves his wife in tears and goes into Dublin, thinking she doesn't have the guts to divorce him. He sees the prostitutes on the streets and thinks that he wouldn't dare have sex with them without protection, which can't be bought in Catholic Dublin.

Dangerfield goes to a pub for a drink and puts it on his tab. He dreams about having a house with a small bar where his friends can come visit and drink. Then he walks to the office to get his check from the G.I. Bill. The receptionist tells Dangerfield that his check is there, but she tells him that she can't release the check to him without his wife's permission. Dangerfield insists he must get his check at once, fuming at the woman. She says that she'll need to ask her superior, but Dangerfield won't let her. He bangs the desk and demands the check immediately. The woman turns over the check, and Dangerfield warns her that in the future he'll need his check immediately. He laughs as he walks out with his check, just as a man comes in to ask what's the matter.

Chapters 3-4 Analysis

O'Keefe and Dangerfield relate on two basic topics: sex and money. They are the two things that are necessary to their lives in their estimation. O'Keefe lacks both, but ultimately O'Keefe is responsible for his own problems however much he blames



everyone around him. Even though he knows it's unsafe to loan Dangerfield money, and even though he complains and says he can't, he does loan Dangerfield three pence.

Dangerfield, too, makes his own disasters, and the worse his problems get, the more he creates disasters. When Dangerfield gets drunk, he gets violent. The scene with the ax is the first real indication of Dangerfield's violence and his underlying anger. What brings out Dangerfield's anger is his poverty. Dangerfield is from a rich family. He believes, on some level, that he deserves to have life handed to him, just as the man in the shop hands him liquor and ham and chicken based on his accent and the color of his scarf. When life isn't easy and Dangerfield isn't treated as special by the world, his sense of entitlement turns into a vicious, violent anger, which he doesn't hesitate to take out on his wife and baby. Ultimately, Dangerfield is selfish and self-centered, and no one else is truly real to him. Dangerfield's violence comes to a head when he goes to pick up his check; however, his anger is quelled when he receives the check. He laughs as he leaves the office.

The arrival of the G.I. Bill check means Dangerfield ends the chapter on a high note. All is suddenly right in the world; however, Dangerfield is not seeing outside of the moment and lives only in the present. The money will be gone soon. Dangerfield is on a rollercoaster of highs and lows that keeps moving downward, as he latches on to one source of money after another and drains each one in his pursuit of pleasure.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary

Chapter 5 begins a few weeks later, in early summer, and Dangerfield knocks on O'Keefe's door. O'Keefe's room is a disgusting mess, but O'Keefe isn't interested in doing anything about it. He's going to France to teach English. He gives Dangerfield a jug he bought back when he had hopes of making his room a nice place to live and make friends with the upper-class. He puts down his failure to his lower-class accent. Now he's dropping out, having wasted his time. O'Keefe gives Dangerfield some razors and ties he's leaving behind. O'Keefe is also leaving behind his notebooks, from when he thought he could be a writer. O'Keefe drops off his keys and goes to buy Dangerfield a cup of coffee. He tells Dangerfield about trying to go to a gay party but getting uninvited at the last minute because the friend he was going with is black.

Dangerfield has realized O'Keefe has money saved up for his trip and begs to borrow some. Dangerfield finally cajoles him into lending the money, but O'Keefe insists that he needs it in France when he arrives. He reveals that he got the money out of his relatives by threatening to go to the consulate to be deported due to poverty and then making sure the story of the broke American reached the newspapers. O'Keefe heads off on his trip, remonstrating Dangerfield again to return the money before O'Keefe arrives in France.

In Chapter 6, Dangerfield and his wife have moved to 1 Mohammed Road, The Rock, Dublin, since their back garden in Howth fell off the cliff into the sea during a storm. The tiny, rundown house is owned by Egbert Skully, the Dangerfields' landlord, who is happy to be renting to an American. They have make-shift furniture, and Marion nags Dangerfield awake in the mornings. One day, Dangerfield flushes the toilet and the pipes break, pouring waste all over Marion downstairs in the kitchen. Dangerfield walks out on Marion's rage but returns with a gift of a fashion magazine.

Dangerfield thinks of a time when he went to St. Peter's Church in Drogheda to see Blessed Oliver Plunkett's decapitated head. Touching the saint's head is supposed to be good luck. Dangerfield watches the girls who work at the laundry go down the street. Over dinner, Marion nags Dangerfield about getting the plumbing fixed, and they get into a fight. Dangerfield thinks that everything will be okay when they have money. That night, Dangerfield asks Marion if she thinks about death, and she says he's being morbid. She tells him that he screams in his sleep, but he laughs and pretends to be mad. Though Dangerfield hasn't bathed, the two of them make love, getting a condom from the drawer. Dangerfield thinks of a woman he made love to in Indiana when he was younger.



Chapters 5-6 Analysis

O'Keefe again succumbs to lending money to Dangerfield. The first time O'Keefe loans Dangerfield money, he only loans three pence and gets his money back. However, O'Keefe knows what Dangerfield is like and that he can't be trusted with money. Loaning Dangerfield the money he's saved for his move to France is one of the ways that keeps O'Keefe in poverty. On the other side of the story, Dangerfield is quick to sniff out signs that his friend has money and to keep after O'Keefe to suck his money away.

Dangerfield's house in the country shows the poverty of the country. The house is large but also falling down. The cliff in the backyard is a dangerous drop, and the house itself is precarious, full of strange noises and haunted by its own poverty. The house he moves to is just as bad, but this time it's a house in the city. He moves from rural poverty to urban poverty. The house is too small, exposed to all those around with no privacy, and things in it don't work. It's too expensive, and Dangerfield is trapped by a lease. In the midst of poverty, Marion yearns for the world of her high-fashion magazines. Dangerfield feels trapped, both by the house and by his wife and child.



Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary

In Chapter 7, Dangerfield says he's going to the park to study, and Marion tells him to take their daughter with him. He objects, but Marion is still cleaning up the sewage from the burst pipes and harasses him about getting the toilet fixed. The mail contains a postcard from O'Keefe and a lot of bills, for which Marion blames Dangerfield. He's pawned most of their things and set up credit accounts at stores. Dangerfield leaves with the baby and tries to study law in the park but is distracted. A woman who works in the laundry comes up to play with Felicity, and Dangerfield talks to her, immediately attracted.

That night, Marion makes a sheep's head, which Dangerfield loves but Marion abhors. Marion complains about their finances, asking Dangerfield to take a part-time job, but he says he has to study for his law degree. Marion accuses Dangerfield of alienating all her friends, people who could help with his career, through his rude behavior and drunkenness. After they fight, and Marion runs upstairs crying, Dangerfield steals the money she's been saving and leaves. He goes out drinking and runs into the woman from the park, Christine, and invites her for a drink. They talk, and Dangerfield walks her home. She agrees to see him again.

Chapter 8 begins at the end of July. Bill collectors are pounding at the door, and Dangerfield is worried about passing exams. He meets Chris for coffee and holds her hand. She invites him into her house. She tells him about going to London University but dropping out. She's of Irish-Russian descent and hates working in the laundry and living in Ireland. Dangerfield comes home late, and Marion accuses him of lying about what happened and why he's not on time. As the affair goes on, Marion realizes something is wrong. She tells Dangerfield that they hardly talk anymore, and he blames it on studying. Marion wants him to ask his father for money, but Dangerfield refuses. She's left to deal with Skully asking for rent. Dangerfield is remorseful and stays home with Marion for a few days.

Dangerfield gets a letter from O'Keefe in France. He's been unable to lose his virginity. He tried to seduce students but failed and got chastised. He's also being tormented by a boy but cannot consummate a gay relationship either. O'Keefe asks Dangerfield about the money he owes and says he's saving up money for a prostitute. August and football season come. Dangerfield grows bored with his home and his wife. He plans to go see Chris again.

Chapters 7-8 Analysis

Marion and Dangerfield are living in two different worlds. Marion is in a world of consequences and realism, where budgeting money and social niceties are required.



She wants to have the plumbing fixed. She wants to face their problems. On the other hand, Dangerfield doesn't want to deal with anything. He wants to be left alone. He doesn't want to get up in the morning, deal with the landlord, or get a job. He wants to have the world handed to him on a silver platter and to have no interaction with everyday problems. Dangerfield is an escapist. Chris is part of his escapism. He is getting away from his marriage and his wife and all the problems of his life by running away to Chris.

Meanwhile, O'Keefe shows that his problems are self-perpetuated. Every time O'Keefe comes close to having sex, he backs out for one reason or another. Anyone who agrees to have sex with O'Keefe isn't good enough for him, and he'll only pursue impossibilities. O'Keefe tries to seduce two students when he advertises himself as a private tutor. One of the students responds to the advertisement ready and willing to succumb. O'Keefe immediately rejects her as not good enough. The other unwilling student is the one O'Keefe pursues and the reason he is chastised.



Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary

In Chapter 9, Dangerfield goes to see Chris, tapping "D" in Morris code on the door to let her know it's him. She makes bacon and fried bread for them. He says Marion has been upset about money and their house is falling down, which is why he hasn't been around. Chris admits she went to see Felicity in the park to meet Dangerfield. After they eat, Chris changes her nylons, and they go to a pub and get a bottle of gin. Chris wonders if their relationship can go anywhere. She asks if he loves Marion, and he says sometimes he cares for her, but he makes both Marion and the baby Felicity unhappy. Chris thinks she and Dangerfield are good for each other.

Chris and Dangerfield go back to her room and get ready to make love, but Dangerfield hits his toe and cuts it. Chris washes the hurt toe for him. They have sex and then smoke cigarettes. Chris asks him about Marion again, and he says their sex life waxes and wanes. Chris tells Dangerfield about walking in on her parents having sex when she was 17. She supposes she wants to get married and have children, and he confesses to wanting to sleep with her the instant he saw her. They talk some more, and then begin to make love again.

In Chapter 10, Dangerfield walks away from Trinity College, carrying books. He stops at a store to get liver for dinner. He goes to the station and runs into the restroom before catching his train. He sits down in a car, noting the other passengers. One of them is staring at him, and Dangerfield is annoyed. One of the girls in the car lets out a gasp, and Dangerfield thinks the other passenger must be feeling her up. Another girl has her face pressed tightly into a book. Finally, the man who was staring at him speaks, saying that there are ladies in the carriage. Dangerfield ignores him, thinking there's something wrong with the man. Only after another passenger, laughing, points to his crotch does Dangerfield realize that he's left his fly unzipped and he's hanging out of his pants. Horribly embarrassed, Dangerfield runs from the train, almost forgetting his liver. One of the passengers remarks that Dangerfield can't seem to remember his meat at all.

Chapters 9-10 Analysis

Dangerfield doesn't mind when Chris talks about their relationship, but it's indicative of the women around him looking forward to the future, while Dangerfield, like a baby, doesn't care for anything but his present happiness. Dangerfield wants to be cared for, just as Chris washes and tends to his injured foot. He is looking for someone or something that can tend to his every need, and in return, he offers nothing but himself, believing on some level that he is more important than anyone else. Chris believes that they are good for each other, but she has not seen Dangerfield when he is not comfortable and happy, only when he is escaping from unhappiness.



Chapter 10 is entirely devoted to Dangerfield getting on the train with his fly unbuttoned. The chapter is more or less an elongated, crass joke. However, his reaction to the other passengers highlights his self-centeredness. Dangerfield thinks that the other passengers are unbalanced or wrong in merely looking at him and talking to him. He doesn't think to look to himself for a possible problem. Though Dangerfield is the source of all his own problems, he never thinks of "checking himself." The incident on the train is a microcosm of Dangerfield's troubles.



Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary

In Chapter 11, Dangerfield stops at a pub to calm his embarrassment over his open fly. When he arrives home, Marion is angry at his drinking and threatens to leave. She tells him she's written his father, complaining about him. Dangerfield is furious, telling Marion she's gotten him disinherited. He smashes a lamp and raves at her, threatening to strangle her. To calm himself, he cooks a sheep's head. He goes out to get some butter and has a few more drinks. Since the grocer doesn't know how much two ounces is, Dangerfield has to ask for a half of a quarter pound of butter.

When Dangerfield returns home, he gives Marion the clear broth from the pot with some bread and butter. To excuse his earlier rage, he explains that he left his fly open on the train. Wishing he could get out of his lease, he eats the sheep's eyes. Then, he breaks one of the chairs that came with the apartment into firewood and goes out and steals some coal. He writes a letter to O'Keefe, complaining about his financial woes and encouraging him to finally have sex. He complains about Ireland but then urges O'Keefe to return.

In Chapter 12, Dangerfield comes down one morning to find his wife ready for war. She's gotten a letter from his father, with a check enclosed and tells him she's leaving. Dangerfield goes out to get a drink, but he's turned away from a pub because the bartender says he's already had enough. Enraged, Dangerfield works his way through pubs all around town. Then, when he is drunk, he goes back to the first pub. He goes up to the bar and asks for a drink. The bartender spills a small amount on the bar, gives him his drink, and then asks for the money due.

Dangerfield asks if the bartender remembers him and if he thinks Dangerfield is drunk now. The bartender says he doesn't want trouble and brings Dangerfield the bottle to replace the spilled whiskey. Dangerfield, however, fills his glass to the brim. Dangerfield finally gets the bartender to say he doesn't think Dangerfield is drunk, and then Dangerfield says he is. He throws the whiskey bottle and begins wrecking the bar.

After destroying the pub, Dangerfield runs off. He steals a bicycle to get away from the people pursuing him and makes his way to Chris's room, accidentally running into a boy on the way. Dangerfield leaves the child the stolen bike and goes the rest of the way on foot. He's a mess, and Chris realizes something is wrong. Dangerfield tells her that the people in the bar attacked him. She gives him a bath and makes him some hot chocolate. Dangerfield asks her to run away with him, but Chris tells him to ask again when he's sober.



Chapters 11-12 Analysis

The backlash of Dangerfield's embarrassment is severe. Dangerfield refuses to acknowledge he's caused his own problems, and then when he is faced with the consequences of his actions, his response is anger. He takes out his anger violently on his wife and on the furniture of his house. Dangerfield is still not acknowledging consequences as he breaks up the landlord's furniture.

Dangerfield's reaction to the incident on the train is only a prelude to his reaction when Marion gets money from his father and then won't give him any. He goes on a rampage without thought about where it might end up. He merely wants to let loose his rage. When the man at the bar refuses to serve him, Dangerfield sees a potential outlet for all his anger. He purposefully goes through Dublin getting drunk so that he can go back to the first bar and tear it to pieces. The reason the bartender likely thinks Dangerfield drunk in the first place is Dangerfield's highly emotional reaction to his fight with Marion. Again, Dangerfield has created his own problems. He runs to Chris when he realizes that he's hunted with nowhere to go, but he doesn't trust her with what's happened or talk about the situation he's in. He merely expects her to care for him, no matter what.



Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary

In Chapter 13, Chris wakes the next morning, gives Dangerfield breakfast, and leaves for work. When she comes home, she shows him the paper, which tells what actually happened. When Dangerfield tries to make love with her, she pushes him away. He goes out into the rainy streets. When he gets back to his house, Dangerfield finds it locked and knocks down the door. The house is empty, and Dangerfield finds a note from Marion that she's moved to 11 Golden Vale Park, The Geary. Dangerfield goes out to the address and finds a pleasant house in a nice area. He begs Marion to let him in, lying to her about what happened the previous night. He gets Marion to let him in and give him a bath, and he looks with happiness at the garden, a source of cheap food.

In Chapter 14, Dangerfield establishes himself in Marion's new house, sneaking back to the old house to extract items at night. The protestant landladies trust the couple because they are not Catholic. Marion says they should rent out the sitting room, and Dangerfield rents it to Lily Frost, a Catholic woman in her thirties who works as a botanist. Dangerfield is thrilled with his new living situation. He and Marion have separate beds, which saves having to find birth control, which cannot be bought at the good Catholic druggists' in Ireland. Dangerfield stays up late nights talking to Miss Frost.

Dangerfield's contentment is disturbed when Skully comes looking for him at his new address. Dangerfield pretends he's not home, hiding behind a closed curtain. Finally, Skully leaves. When Marion comes home, she is frustrated and upset, feeling they're back where they started, with creditors hounding them. Dangerfield tells her not to worry and says that he'll make up a story to explain Skully's harassment to Miss Frost. He tells Miss Frost that Skully is a delusional mental patient and to ignore his claims that he's Dangerfield's former landlord. He blacks out the front of the house, so Skully can't see inside.

Chapters 13-14 Analysis

When Chris is naturally angry about the account in the paper of a man destructively attacking a bar without provocation, Dangerfield refuses to accept her being upset. He just walks away from her at that point, forgetting her at the first sign that she is anything but doting on his every need. Even better, Dangerfield sees an opportunity of escape from his self-inflicted problems when he realizes Marion has moved to a nice house. Just as when O'Keefe has money, Dangerfield sniffs out and draws the money away from O'Keefe, Dangerfield is ready and willing to sniff out every penny and every opportunity Marion has, drag it away, and use it up. Just as O'Keefe is unwilling to lend to Dangerfield, Marion is unwilling to let Dangerfield into her house. Both ultimately succumb, and for both it portends disaster.



Dangerfield continues to get into people's good graces by virtue of his background and his accent. Everyone he meets, shopkeepers and landlords alike, take the superficial evidence of Dangerfield's reliability, playing into his belief that things should be handed to him. He does not respect anything that's given to him, however. As much as he lives as if there are no consequences to his actions, the consequences are very real. Skully's arrival is the arrival of consequences from Dangerfield's past.



Chapters 15-16

Chapters 15-16 Summary

As Chapter 15 begins, Dangerfield goes out to get breakfast, complaining about Felicity making noises. He tells Marion he's going to Trinity and asks her for a pound to pay toward the electric bill. She refuses to give him any money. On the way out, Dangerfield takes two decanters from the front room and breaks the gate in his anger. He pawns the landladies' decanters for fifteen shillings and encounters his friend Percy Clocklan, pawning steak that he gets from a woman in a shop in exchange for sex. Percy asks after O'Keefe, whom Dangerfield confirms has gone to France and gone in for men. Percy also invites Dangerfield to a party at their friend Tony Malarkey's in the Catacombs, but Dangerfield declines, citing his financial woes.

In Chapter 16, Dangerfield is heading to the party despite his initial rejection of the invitation. He protests to Clocklan that he should be getting home, but Clocklan insists that Dangerfield must come and laughs at the idea that Dangerfield's wife might throw him out. At the party, Dangerfield talks to a girl with green eyes. Her name is Mary, and she's stuck at home caring for a sick father and two young brothers. A fight breaks out across the room while Dangerfield continues to talk with Mary. He tells her he's American, and he asks if she likes her father. She reveals that he beats her and constantly accuses her of seeing men. She doesn't leave because of her young brothers. Dangerfield asks what she wants to do in life. She doesn't know, but she likes to draw.

Malarkey brings Dangerfield down to the wine cellar to see Clocklan and another guest having sex. After that, Dangerfield turns off the lights on the party, causing havoc. Sebastian takes Mary home and kisses her on the way. They stop at a tavern, and Dangerfield gets into a violent quarrel with the cab driver about the fare. However, he patches things up, inviting the driver in for a drink. It's after hours, but Dangerfield gets them into the tavern. He leaves the driver to pay the bill and goes out back to take a leak, getting felt up by the barmaid on the way back.

Sebastian walks with Mary. He tries to kiss her, but she pulls away because they're in the open where people can see. They hold hands, and Mary talks about possibly getting a job coloring photographs when her uncle can take her brothers, allowing her to move out. When they get back to Mary's building, Dangerfield kisses and fondles her. She takes him out back to a coal shed. There's a mattress on the floor, and the landlord hides stout in the shed. Dangerfield confesses he's married, but Mary says she knows and doesn't care.

Sebastian and Mary begin to fool around. He asks her if she would come to England with him, and she says yes. She says she has thirty pound in the bank. They start to make love, and Mary says that she wants to do everything. Sebastian is concerned because he has no birth control, but Mary says she doesn't care. Sebastian arranges to



write to Mary, and she says that she'll give him half her money to head out to London and then send for her. He asks her to write to him under the name of Percivil Buttermere.

Chapters 15-16 Analysis

In Chapter 15, Dangerfield's source of money in Marion dries up. She does not want to live with the consequences of Dangerfield's actions anymore. Dangerfield responds in anger, stealing decanters that he's been trusted with (due to his good protestant background) and breaking the gate. Now, he will have to live with no decanters, with a broken gate, and with the responsibility for theft from his landladies. Dangerfield doesn't think about any of these consequences, although they are pushing him further and further into a bad situation.

When Clocklan invites Dangerfield to a party, Dangerfield can't refuse. He is a hedonist, interested in his own happiness in the present moment. He may protest that his wife will kick him out, but he doesn't believe in his own protests. Dangerfield is more interested in the happiness of the present moment than anything else. When he meets Mary at the party, she offers him another avenue of escape. Just as with Chris, Dangerfield is looking for a distraction from his life and his problems.

Mary thinks that Dangerfield's interest in her life and questions about her feelings and desires are strange. While Dangerfield doesn't truly care about Mary, he knows the right questions to ask because he comes from a culture where people think about their wants and desires. Mary, unlike Dangerfield, has grown up in a culture of poverty, where nothing else even seems possible. She is used to being beaten and abused and responsible for other people's problems as well as her own. Mary has desires but she no outlet for them. She doesn't know that another life is possible. Mary awakens the possibility of another life in her.



Chapters 17-18

Chapters 17-18 Summary

In Chapter 17, Dangerfield wakes, feeling the effects of last night's liquor. The mailman gives him a registered letter from Skully, informing him of his debts, the broken lease, and the unacceptable condition in which he left the rental. Skully threatens to contact a lawyer. A second letter is from O'Keefe, saying that he's arriving back on Monday. He's trying to get a job with Lady Eclair, who is looking for a French chef. He still has not had sex, either homosexual or heterosexual, and he asks Dangerfield to meet him with money.

As Dangerfield looks around the house for aspirin, he realizes Marion has moved out and taken all their things. He breaks open the desk only to find it empty. This time, she's left no address. Sebastian goes to sleep in his favorite chair, which he calls the supine chair because it leans back, allowing him to lie down. When Miss Frost comes back, she finds him there. Marion has gone to Scotland and isn't coming back. Miss Frost offers to make him dinner, cooking some sausages she's brought back. As they talk over dinner, Miss Frost tells him about wanting to start her own business.

After dinner, Dangerfield invites Miss Frost to a pub. He asks for the rent but finds that she's paid it to Marion. Then, he asks for an advance on next week's rent and discovers Marion got a month's rent in advance from her. Still, she loans him a pound and a scarf to wear. They go out for a drink and talk and then come home and have coffee. Dangerfield tells her that he feels uncomfortable sleeping alone and asks if he can sleep on the floor of her room. Miss Frost assents. When they go to bed, Dangerfield holds her hand, which soon turns into more. They have sex, and afterwards, Miss Frost is horrified because she's committed a mortal sin, which she must confess, and the priest will insist on all the details and even tell her mother.

In Chapter 18, Dangerfield wakes, rushes his teeth, and goes to get clothes out of Miss Frost's drawer, but he drops the drawer and wakes her. She consents, somewhat uncertainly, to lend him a blouse. Dangerfield dresses and goes to the dock. He meets O'Keefe as he comes off the boat and offers him one of the gluey oakie cakes he's brought from the house. O'Keefe takes it with distaste and pessimism.

Chapters 17-18 Analysis

In Chapter 17, Dangerfield finds himself alone with his debts, Marion having deserted him. His violence comes out as he breaks the desk, ruining even further the house in which he must live. In Miss Frost, who is used to doing things for other people, Dangerfield sees an opportunity. He is glad to have her cook for him, give him her food, and give him money. Instead of facing his problems, he brings Marion out to a pub with money borrowed from her. A drink is as good a solution as any to Dangerfield.



Meanwhile, O'Keefe has not even been able to lose his virginity to a prostitute. He has one goal in life: sex. It's easily attainable, but he stops himself from attaining it every time. The only conclusion is that O'Keefe doesn't really want to attain his goal. He backs out of going to a prostitute, refuses any woman who tries to sleep with him, and only wishes for sex with women (or men) he can't have.

Dangerfield no longer even has the clothes on his back. All he has is what Miss Frost is willing to give to him, for food and clothing and companionship, when he meets O'Keefe, who has come back to Ireland.



Chapters 19-20

Chapters 19-20 Summary

In Chapter 19, Dangerfield and O'Keefe go to a cafe for breakfast. O'Keefe says that he lost his nerve about going to a prostitute at the last minute. He's still a virgin. O'Keefe demands his seven quid, but Dangerfield puts him off. O'Keefe relates his conversation by mail with Lady Eclair. She asked him about his religion, and when O'Keefe replied that he didn't have one, she insisted that every person must care for his soul.

Dangerfield invites O'Keefe to his house, saying that Marion's away and declaring that Miss Frost is a good Catholic and that there's no scandal going on. After making O'Keefe pay for breakfast, Dangerfield coaxes money for a drink out of him as well.

In Chapter 20, Dangerfield brings O'Keefe to the post office and finds that, though it's not in the right name, he has a letter waiting from Mary, containing fifteen pounds.

Dangerfield immediately goes to a bar and gets a bottle of brandy. O'Keefe follows him, insisting on his money. Dangerfield says he can only spare four pounds, and O'Keefe takes it. Dangerfield refuses to say from where the money comes. O'Keefe talks about how he loves Ireland despite its horrors and wants to start a restaurant. He refuses to stay with Dangerfield, for fear Dangerfield will talk him out of his money and ruin his chances at the job. O'Keefe leaves, and Dangerfield reads Mary's note to him, asking him to write and telling him her brothers have gone to her uncle.

Dangerfield goes home to Miss Frost and kisses her. They cook up sausage again, and Dangerfield is drunk and in high spirits. He tells Miss Frost he's going to London on Friday. Miss Frost is afraid she's going to be damned to hell for having sex with Dangerfield. She's afraid the townspeople will talk, and she's afraid of the priest. Dangerfield thinks that she's just like a little child.

As Miss Frost serves the food, she asks what Dangerfield has been doing to a plant in the front of the house. He says that he's been poisoning it, something he's inexplicably driven to do. Dangerfield thinks about his arrival in Dublin and his first experiences at Dublin University. Miss Frost says that Dangerfield looks tired and gets him some hot chocolate before they go to bed. When Dangerfield asks, Miss Frost says that she doesn't know what she'll do when he's gone. He tells her that she should leave Ireland and asks her to come with him to London. She says that he doesn't really want her to come, and as he's denying it, he collapses forward. Miss Frost brings him to her bedroom.

Chapters 19-20 Analysis

Chapter 19 begins another upswing for Dangerfield. Though his debts and problems are far worse than fifteen pounds can erase, Dangerfield is happy to take anything that (impoverished and abused) Mary has in order to sustain himself for just another small



amount of time. His first thought is to buy a bottle of brandy. Though he pays back O'Keefe, he only gives his friend four pounds, just over half of what O'Keefe is owed.

Dangerfield's new plan is to escape to London, running away from his debts and entanglements. It's not a new plan, really. Escape and evasion are par for the course for Dangerfield. For Miss Frost, the emotional consequences are high. She is a religious woman and believe what the Catholic Church has told her. She is also a part of Ireland and is influenced by Irish society. Though she has a natural desire for sex, she also believes she is damned for having sex. She is damned in the afterlife because it's a sin and damned in the present life because she will be shamed by the society. Dangerfield doesn't think about her shame or her religious scruples. He is only concerned with his pleasure and his own escape from his problems. He cannot see the issue from someone else's point of view. Though he asks her to come to London, and would probably take her if she decided to go, he doesn't truly care about what happens to her.



Chapters 21-22

Chapters 21-22 Summary

In Chapter 21, Dangerfield receives a postcard from O'Keefe and goes to meet him in Dublin. O'Keefe is getting drunk. He's gone to the consulate and asked to be deported back to America and sailing the following night. His interview with Lady Eclair went horribly, and O'Keefe has no resources. O'Keefe is staying with Malarkey in the meantime and brings the news that Clocklan killed himself. A policeman came to Malarkey's during a party and gave him a suicide note found in a whiskey bottle washed up to shore. No body has been found. Dangerfield tells O'Keefe that he's off to London at the end of the week. O'Keefe has heard rumors about Dangerfield's affairs with Mary and Miss Frost and about Marion's desertion.

O'Keefe is surprised that the waitress at the cafe recognizes him and is sorry he's leaving Ireland. He is sorry to be leaving, too. When Dangerfield asks about Tony Malarkey, O'Keefe says Tony spends all day making toys for his kids. When O'Keefe asks what Dangerfield will do about all his women, Dangerfield denies again that he is sleeping with Miss Frost. O'Keefe talks about what his life would be like as a wealthy estate owner, and the people in the bar watch the two Americans. Dangerfield walks O'Keefe to the docks and says his goodbyes.

As Chapter 22 begins, Dangerfield is lying with Miss Frost. He says he's going to call her Lilly. Dangerfield asks about food, and Lilly says they have bacon and tea. She gives Dangerfield ten shillings to buy eggs. When Dangerfield gets back, Lilly insists on cooking. Dangerfield gets into her bed, claiming he wants to be close to the hot water bottle. He notes that Lilly has been packing and bemoans the moving around they do. Lilly is staying with her aunt until she finds someplace new.

Dangerfield wants to have sex with Lilly, but she resists. She's made a resolution not to have sex again, since it's a sin. Dangerfield eats his dinner, thinking about Lilly. Afterwards, he pushes her to have sex with him and not to worry about her religious scruples. Dangerfield is leaving the next day. He undresses her. She says she wants to have sex with him but can't. Instead, she offers him her backside with which to have sex. Dangerfield is somewhat shocked but also grateful and willing. He wonders, though, why she would want to do it this way. As they have sex, Dangerfield thinks of her working in the garden. Then, after it's over, he asks her why she wanted to have anal sex. She tells him that it's because it's much less of a sin.

Chapters 21-22 Analysis

O'Keefe is very similar to Dangerfield. He causes his own problems and refuses to face them in any realistic way or do anything to solve them. He lets his room at Trinity dissolve into disrepair and abandons his studies to run away to France and start anew.



In France, his same problems continue. He won't address his own issues and runs off to try something new. O'Keefe has never been able to get along on his accent and does no better with a French accent than an English or American one. He hopes for salvation from one thing after another and fails. He blames his failure this time on Clocklan's suicide, but O'Keefe's failures, which he blames on everyone but himself, are his own fault. He's giving up and running away again, back to America, just as Dangerfield is giving up and running off to London.

Religion runs throughout the novel. Ireland is a bastion of the Catholic Church, and Lilly embodies the Irish Catholics. Lilly has natural desires that she succumbs to but then is overwhelmed with the guilt her society throws on those desires. While Dangerfield acknowledges no consequences whatsoever, Lilly believes in consequences far beyond the actual ones and punishes herself unnecessarily for her own actions.



Chapters 23-24

Chapters 23-24 Summary

In Chapter 23, Dangerfield dreams of buying millions of socks, which have to be hauled away by a trash truck. Then he wakes up next to Lilly. She doesn't want him to touch or kiss her. She's worried about the other people in the town knowing what she's done. Dangerfield goes to brush his teeth. He considers stealing Lilly's watch to hock but decides it wouldn't be "playing the game." He tells her that he's going to cook sausages and make tea. She is angry that she has to stay in Ireland and face the suspicions and rumors. He begins making breakfast not knowing what to tell her.

Dangerfield offers to take Lilly to London with him. She gets dressed and eats the breakfast he's made. Dangerfield tells her that he's broke; all his possessions are gone, and bill collectors are after him. Yet, he doesn't mind them. Lilly is still terrified of facing life. She tells Dangerfield she doesn't think they should write each other. She cries and runs out the door. Alone in the house, Dangerfield picks up the pile of letters from bill collectors. He takes a bag to steal whatever he can from the house. He writes to the landladies, lying to them that he's going out of the country and will settle his bills when he returns. As Dangerfield is about to leave, Skully comes up to the house. Dangerfield sneaks out and runs off but loses his stolen goods during his flight.

In Chapter 24, Dangerfield lurks around Dublin, waiting for his boat to London. He goes to the college, recalling when he went to the Student Christian Movement club and how he chatted with one of the female members. He tours the botany, physics, and zoology departments, the latter of which has exhibits of insects and animals. He walks out the back gate of the college and around Dublin to Tony Malarkey's. Tony is living behind a bolted door in an empty apartment so the landlord can't evict him. His barricade is so good that the landlord and two policemen couldn't break in. He's sent his wife and children to the country. Tony shows Dangerfield where he sleeps in a hammock attached to the walls with railroad spikes to keep him off the floor where the rats are at night. The landlord has been trying to evict him for a year. Tony has even sold the toilet. He has a system for slipping out of the apartment and re-barricading the door and then opening it with a string hidden in the coal bin when he wants back in.

Tony and Dangerfield go for a drink, and Dangerfield again has to deny rumors that he's sleeping with Miss Frost. They stay out all night, and an hour before his boat leaves, Dangerfield goes to Chris's. She reprimands him for ignoring her and leaving her alone. He asks her to come to London, and she tells him to write to her and kisses him goodbye. Dangerfield gets on the boat and heads away from Ireland.



Chapters 23-24 Analysis

Dangerfield tries to convert Lilly to his point of view that there's no use worrying about consequences or about what other people think. However, Lilly is entrenched in her culture, a culture where she must do for others and be judged harshly by the society around her. Lilly says Ireland is not good to women, and her fear of public ridicule as well as Mary's story of abuse and ingratitude from her father bear out that statement. Women in Ireland are portrayed as subservient and ill-treated by the men around them. Clocklan tells Dangerfield when Dangerfield worries that his wife might throw him out: "This is Ireland!" In Ireland, a man is meant to be king over his wife, and the wife is meant to be subservient.

Dangerfield tours Ireland one last time before he goes to London. Chapter 24 is a retrospective look at what Dangerfield is leaving behind. The college, the well-meant Student Christian Movement, his friend Tony, and Chris are all things he's leaving behind. The college rolls on without him, and just like O'Keefe gave up wheedling his way into the snob section, Dangerfield has given up any pretense of religion. His friends have gone downhill. Tony is living barricaded in the empty Catacombs, his wife and children sent away, living on his last dime. The last element of his life that Dangerfield must revisit is Chris. She shows him how selfish his behavior has been. He left her without a word, never called her, and seemed not to think of her. She wasn't a real person to him and disappeared as soon as he was no longer looking at her. Dangerfield invites Chris to London, just as he invited Miss Frost, but Chris has learned better than to go with him.



Chapters 25-26

Chapters 25-26 Summary

In Chapter 25, Dangerfield is at a hotel in London. He goes out into the hall, and the chambermaid suggests a bath towel. Embarrassed about his poverty and dirtiness, he takes the suggestion of a bath. He enjoys the comfort of the hotel room, and lies back, naked, in the luxurious bed. Then he makes a phone call to his friend MacDoon. MacDoon makes Dangerfield repeat his name three times before he'll believe Dangerfield is in London. Dangerfield gets dressed and heads over to MacDoon's house, stopping on the way to unnecessarily ask directions from a woman with lovely legs.

Dangerfield arrives at MacDoon's, where there are soft chairs in front of a gas fire, and MacDoon's young child is whimpering in a box. Dangerfield tells MacDoon that Marion's left him, and MacDoon says that Dangerfield's father is ill. Dangerfield describes Tony Malarkey's living situation, saying that Tony might cement himself in and build a tunnel out for supplies. Mac is making a kangaroo costume and puts it on to model it for Dangerfield. He also gives Dangerfield a statuette of the head of Oliver Plunkett that he's made. Dangerfield is happy to see the wealth of London, and Mac shows him an inscription on a fountain that says "God Bless the Poor." Mac and Dangerfield go to dinner, and then Dangerfield goes back to his hotel.

In Chapter 26, Dangerfield rents a room in a Victorian house on Bovir Road in London. Every morning, he's called to a breakfast of porridge, bacon, eggs, and tea. He watches the people pass by his window, and he watches a woman across the way, naked in her apartment. He writes to Mary, telling her to bring her fifteen pounds and come to London. Two days later, on Wednesday, he gets a telegram that she's arriving on Friday. Thursday, Dangerfield visits MacDoon and finds there's a letter waiting for him. Dangerfield's father has died, and now he's anticipating a large inheritance.

Dangerfield, MacDoon, and his friend Parnell go out to celebrate. Dangerfield dons the kangaroo costume, and they head out into the town, drinking. The strange crew gets pennies from the crowd that accumulates, and they put them in the kangaroo's pouch. They take a bus and go to a bar in Soho, where Dangerfield sings an insulting song and starts a brawl. They end up taking a taxi to the hospital and then another back home.

Chapters 25-26 Analysis

The last seven chapters mark a change in the novel. Ireland is a land of poverty, and while Dangerfield is there, he moves steadily downhill between grasped bits of wealth. He lives in impoverished circumstances and can't hold on to money. The poverty is not just Dangerfield's poverty. It's all around him. When Dangerfield moves to London, he moves out of the world of poverty to a world of comparative wealth. Though Dangerfield



has little of his own, London is a land of big cars and big buildings. In Ireland, Dangerfield barely bathes, a symptom of his poverty. In London, the first thing Dangerfield does is take a luxurious bath at a comfortable hotel. He has moved to wealth. The inscription to the poor on the fountain in London highlights this change from poverty to wealth.

Dangerfield's living situation also improves, at the rooms in Bovir Road. Dangerfield has gotten here by taking Mary's money. He invited Miss Frost and Chris to come with him. He can't be serious about taking Mary away to a new life. However, he does write to her and admits it's out of guilt. If one of the other women in his life had taken up Dangerfield's offer, he probably would have taken Mary's money and forgotten about her, at least until his current fling dissolved in tears and recriminations.

Dangerfield's father's death is an important turning point in the story, as well. Dangerfield has had expectations from his father his entire life. His way of living seems based on his expectations. One day, his father will die, leaving Dangerfield a fortune. Dangerfield's entire way of life is molded by this expectation. All Dangerfield's debts, all the consequences of his actions, will be swept away by a huge influx of cash that will solve his problems. That day, he believes, has arrived.



Chapters 27-28

Chapters 27-28 Summary

In Chapter 27, Dangerfield is drinking gin from a bottle stashed in the kangaroo's pouch. It's three o'clock, and Dangerfield, MacDoon, and Parnell are still recovering from the previous night's revels. Mac promises not to desert Dangerfield in his upcoming wealth. Dangerfield borrows a clean shirt from Parnell and goes to the landlady's bedroom to sneak some perfume for under his arms. MacDoon suspects Dangerfield is going to meet a woman, and Dangerfield says he'll tell them about it soon. He takes off, looking forward to seeing Mary, who has trusted him. At the train station he finds her in the crowd. She's lost weight after being ill for a while. She's brought pans and plates and part of a sewing machine with her, as well as twenty pounds.

Dangerfield and Mary go to a nice restaurant, and he says they won't need to worry about money. Mary tells him about the scene her father made when she left, and she's glad to be rid of him. Dangerfield excuses himself from the table and goes to call his landlady. He tells her that his fiancée is in London and asks if she can stay in his room with him. At first, she refuses, but Dangerfield says they'll be married in a few weeks and have been separated. He begs her to allow them to stay together. Finally, his landlady agrees, as long as there's no trouble.

Dangerfield and Mary go back to his room and upstairs, where Mary throws herself at him. When Dangerfield says he must take a bath, Mary insists on taking it with him. She wants to see him naked and comments on how thin he is. After the bath, they go back to his room and talk and fool around. Mary says she wants children and could get a job and wants to try everything she's heard about sex.

In Chapter 28, Dangerfield and Mary go to a church, and even that makes Mary want to go straight home and have sex. When Dangerfield wants to walk around, Mary gets sensitive about whether he wants to have sex with her. He calls a taxi and takes her back to the room, where they stay for three days, until Dangerfield hears there's another official looking letter for him at MacDoon's. He runs off to Mac's, and on the way he thinks about Mary. He's beginning to see that she could be rebellious. When he arrives at MacDoon's, Dangerfield discovers his father leaves him a trust fund with an income of six-thousand dollars a year, but he won't receive a penny until he's forty-seven years old.

Chapters 27-28 Analysis

Dangerfield, in borrowed clothes and stolen perfume, goes to meet Mary at the train station. She is the opposite of Dangerfield: practical. Mary has packed pans and plates and part of a sewing machine. She was fully prepared for the idea that Dangerfield would desert her or not meet her at the train station. However, both Mary and



Dangerfield are on a high. Dangerfield is happy to embrace her when he believes his fortune is coming in. All his problems are about to be erased, and he celebrates with her at a restaurant and wheedles his landlady into allowing Mary to stay with him.

Mary has had a difficult life, where she's been saddled with the responsibility of caring for her abusive father and her two small brothers. She's never thought about what she wanted to do, not until she met Dangerfield. However, she has a strong creative drive. She loves to draw and to act and also loves sex. Dangerfield has awakened a force to be reckoned with in Mary, almost more than he can handle. Like Dangerfield, one of the first things Mary does when she gets to London is take a bath, and Dangerfield comments on how unwashed she was and how dark the water gets. Ireland is impoverished, which means it's dirty. London is wealthy, and the dirt is washed away.

The end of Chapter 28 is Dangerfield's worst crash of the novel. He is expecting to finally be lifted out of poverty and into wealth, where none of his actions will truly have consequences. Dangerfield finds that he will have to continue to wait, for another twenty years, before he sees any money from his father. Dangerfield's safety net is gone. Twenty years is a lifetime.



Chapters 29-31

Chapters 29-31 Summary

Chapter 29 begins at Christmas Eve. Mary left Dangerfield two weeks previously. She's gotten a part in a play and a job modeling. Meanwhile, Dangerfield is behind on the rent. He's been arrested for getting drunk and attacking Mac and had to visit the American embassy. After being interviewed, he went into the women's bathroom, used the toilet, stole some toilet paper, and was chased out of the embassy for being in the women's room. Dangerfield heads off to a Christmas party at Mac's and runs into Clocklan, who is not dead after all. His suicide note was a joke. Clocklan is flush with money and buys Dangerfield a drink, promising him a new suit, too. He gives Dangerfield twenty-five pounds and brings him to a barber for a shave and haircut.

In Chapter 30, Dangerfield arrives at Mac's party, but Clocklan sends him to Clocklan's house to get something to wear. Clocklan's maid is expecting him and helps him get a suit of clothes, and the taxi driver almost doesn't recognize him when he comes out. Instead of going back to the party, Dangerfield gets out of the cab and phones Mac, who's got a letter for him from O'Keefe and a beef kidney waiting for him to eat. He also says Mary's coming to the party.

Dangerfield heads to Mac's and eats his kidney. In the letter, O'Keefe says that he is still a virgin, was rejected by his old girlfriend, and wants to come back to Britain. Dangerfield meets an American woman and her British friend, and they share a taxi to the party. Both are wealthy, and the woman is from upstate New York. Dangerfield feels oppressed by their upper-class manner and begins talking about rules for garbage, ash, dead animals, and other refuse in New York. Though the American woman is attracted to him, the British man is offended, and Dangerfield gets out of the cab in the financial district.

Dangerfield calls Mac, who gets him to come to the party. Mary is there, and Dangerfield goes to talk with her. They get into a fight, with Dangerfield trying to beat her. He wants her to give up acting, but she won't give in to his violence, saying that she only got a job for him but won't stand the way he's treating her. They make up, tentatively, and Mary asks him to take her home. On their way out, Dangerfield shouts to the party that Christmas is a fraud, Jesus was Irish, and Judas was British. In the cab, Dangerfield dreams of a house, and Mary says she wants a baby with him. She's bought him slippers for Christmas. She says goodbye for the night but wants to see him the next day and make a baby.

In Chapter 31, Dangerfield wakes up the next morning, feeling good. He's still got Clocklan's stick, and he enjoys walking with it on the way to Mary's. London is deserted on the Christmas morning, and he imagines the families with children opening present as he heads toward his future with Mary.



Chapters 29-31 Analysis

As Dangerfield always does when he is disappointed, this time by not getting his father's money, he takes it out on Mary. By doing so, he's ruined his own situation. Mary was willing to work and support him, but he's driven her away. Now, he has no money for rent. He's gotten drunk and obnoxious, been arrested, and been interviewed at the consulate. If Dangerfield continues on this path, he'll self-destruct and be deported. However, the wealth of London intervenes.

Dangerfield runs into what he's been seeking through the entire story: someone who will not demand anything from him and will simply give him money and complete freedom for being himself. Clocklan, who was reported dead, is now wealthy. Last Dangerfield knew him, Clocklan was selling himself to women in butcher's shops in exchange for steak that he could eat or sell to a pawnbroker. Destitute, his last words to his friends were a suicide note in an empty whiskey bottle. Like a savior risen from the dead, Clocklan has appeared again, this time in the glow of mysterious wealth. He is the embodiment of the hand of God reaching down to save Dangerfield, despite Dangerfield's undeserving nature.

Now, with money, clothes, and the prospects of wealth in his future, Dangerfield starts life anew. He can't stand the society of the wealthy and chooses instead simple Irish Mary, though he shows his desire for her in his typical violence. The end of the novel is ambiguous. Dangerfield hasn't truly shown any signs of change, and this could simply be another temporary upswing in his fortunes. On the other hand, Clocklan's wealth and intentions seem limitless, and in only twenty years, Dangerfield will have a secure income. With poverty banished, will Dangerfield find the heaven he seeks, of a hedonistic life without responsibility or care?



Characters

Sebastian Dangerfield

Dangerfield is the son of a wealthy father, but he's been in trouble all of his life. He is estranged from his father and cut off from his family's money. At the beginning of the novel, Dangerfield is studying law at Dublin University on the G.I. Bill. He has a wife and baby daughter and is living in squalor in Ireland. Dangerfield is a drunk, violent and misogynistic. He is also self-centered and hedonistic. Dangerfield is amoral, living only for his own pleasure. Although he can be charming, Dangerfield shows no true care or empathy for anyone else in his life.

When things are going well for Dangerfield and he has money, he enjoys himself. He likes to drink and party and can show a woman a good time and be a charming companion. However, when Dangerfield runs out of money or when anything goes wrong, Dangerfield can turn nasty. He has a violent temper and is not above hitting a woman. He is like a child having a temper tantrum, but in a grown man, his temper is mean and dangerous.

Dangerfield is good at leaving situations when he's unhappy. He runs to Chris when he's unhappy with Marion. When Marion has a good situation, he abandons Chris. When he loses control of his wife, Dangerfield leaves for London, discarding Miss Frost. Dangerfield is also lazy. He doesn't want to work, preferring to pilfer and pawn whatever he can get his hands on or live off other people's money.

Kenneth O'Keefe

O'Keefe is an American studying at Dublin University, like Dangerfield. O'Keefe is lower class. He went to Harvard in the States but never fit in with any of the upper-class people. O'Keefe suffers from perpetual virginity. He had a relationship with a woman named Constance in the States, but she would never have sex with him. He believes she was holding out for someone from a higher social status. At Dublin University, O'Keefe hopes to make connections with the upper class but never does. His room at the university becomes a pigsty, and he abandons his notebooks and his desire to become a writer.

O'Keefe takes a job teaching English in France, but when he gets there he finds that his life is no better. He does not seem to be able to have sex no matter what he does. He destroys every opportunity. Women are too ugly, and he's afraid to go to prostitutes. He has an affair with a boy, but the boy is a tease. His cousin will have sex with him if he marries her, but he doesn't want to tie himself down. O'Keefe professes himself envious of Dangerfield's love life, but he seems to prevent himself from having a love life at every possible turn.



O'Keefe loans money to Dangerfield but against his better judgment. He knows Dangerfield is no good and will not pay him back. Still, he gives in, destroying his own prospects at every turn. When O'Keefe is in France, he longs to be in Ireland. He decides to become a chef and maybe open a restaurant. However, he fails his interview before it even starts, blaming his failure on his upset over Clocklan's supposed suicide. O'Keefe heads back to America, but in the end of the novel, Dangerfield receives a letter from him expressing his desire to get back to Great Britain.

Marion Dangerfield

Marion is Dangerfield's wife. She is born of a high class family and appreciates social niceties. She has friends in powerful places and thinks Sebastian has alienated them all through his drunken and boorish behavior. Marion nags at Dangerfield because she is unhappy in their life of poverty and squalor. Marion writes to Dangerfield's father, complaining about her husband's behavior, and Dangerfield's father writes back to her, sending her a check. Marion leaves Dangerfield but tells him to where she's moved. Dangerfield immediately follows her and insinuates himself into her nice, new house. His drinking and philandering behavior continues, and Marion takes her money and leave Dangerfield for good, likely heading off to her parents in Scotland.

Felicity Dangerfield

Felicity is Sebastian and Marion's baby girl.

Christine (Chris)

Chris is half Irish and half Russian. She comes to Dublin to study nursing but didn't like either the work or the pay. She dropped out of school and went to work in a laundry. Chris hates Ireland where she lives in poverty. Chris meets Dangerfield by going up to him and feigning interest in his daughter. She begins an affair with him and begins to fall in love with him. Chris is kind to Dangerfield and easy to get along with, but when Dangerfield shows up at her door after wrecking a pub, she is angry with his drunken rage. Dangerfield leaves Chris and goes to live with his wife in her nice, new house and doesn't seem to think of her again until he's leaving for London. Although Dangerfield says he's made his peace with Chris, she does not seem able to forgive and forget his mistreatment and abandonment.

Egbert Skully

Skully is Dangerfield's landlord at 1 Mohammed Road, where Dangerfield has a three-year lease. After Dangerfield runs out on the lease, Skully hounds him for back rent money.



Lilly Frost

Lilly is a thirty-four-year-old single woman, an old maid in terms of post-World-War-II Ireland. She is a botanist working for a seed company and is a sincere Catholic. Lilly takes a room in Dangerfield's house and enjoys talking to him in the kitchen in the evenings. When Dangerfield's wife leaves him, Lilly lends him money and clothes and has sex with him despite her religious guilt. Dangerfield leaves for London, leaving Lilly to deal with the guilt and rumors caused by her affair.

Percy Clocklan

Clocklan is a friend of Dangerfield's in Dublin. On a boat, he writes a suicide note and throws it in the water in a whiskey bottle. When the bottle is found, all of Clocklan's friends think he's committed suicide. However, Clocklan is not dead. He becomes wealthy and comes to London, where he meets Dangerfield again. Dangerfield is broke and starving, and Clocklan gives him money and clothes, promising to keep Dangerfield safe and fed.

Tony Malarkey

Tony Malarkey is a friend of Dangerfield's in Dublin. He lives in the Catacombs, where he has parties. However, Tony runs out of money but escapes being evicted for a year by keeping the apartment door barricaded. Malarkey sends his wife and children away and completely empties the apartment, except for a pot and a makeshift hammock where he sleeps.

Mary

Mary is an Irish girl, the daughter of an abusive father. Her father beats her and accuses her of being with men. Mary is trapped taking care of her father and two young brothers until she meets Dangerfield. Mary gets her uncle to take in her two brothers and leaves her abusive father to go to London with Dangerfield after trusting him with half of her life savings. Mary is willing to work for Dangerfield and support him. She loves sex and wants to make love with Dangerfield all the time. She also is an attractive, open woman with an artistic bent. She likes to draw and has won an award for acting. In London, when she looks for work, she is able to find work modeling and acting. She even reportedly gets a movie contract. Mary says that she will not take mistreatment from Dangerfield, although she loves him and decides to take him back after he has abused her.



MacDoon

MacDoon is a friend of Dangerfield's who lives in London. MacDoon is associated with the theater. He is a short man with a red beard, who is described as like a leprechaun. He makes a kangaroo costume for the theater and talks about designing bras that uplift women's breasts. MacDoon receives Dangerfield's mail while Dangerfield is in London.

Parnell

Parnell is a friend of MacDoon's who goes out celebrating with Mac and Dangerfield in the kangaroo suit, when Dangerfield learns of his father's death.

Mrs. Ritzincheck

Mrs. Ritzincheck is Dangerfield's landlady in London who allows him to have Mary stay in his room with him.



Objects/Places

The House in Howth

At the beginning of the book, Dangerfield lives in a run-down, creaky, spooky old house on a steep cliff, on Balscaddoon Road in the town of Howth.

Jury's

Jury's is the gathering place in Dublin where Dangerfield goes for coffee and drinks.

1 Mohammed Road, The Rock

Dangerfield and his wife move to a ramshackle, small house at 1 Mohammed Road, where the toilet pipes burst and which is always in disrepair. The windows look out on the road, where their lives are exposed to public view.

Blessed Oliver Plunkett

Oliver Plunkett is an Irish saint, who Dangerfield thanks for any good that happens to him throughout the novel, and who Dangerfield appeals to for help. Dangerfield goes to see Plunkett's preserved severed head and touches it for luck. MacDoon also makes Dangerfield a small figurine of Plunkett's head.

Sheep's Head

Dangerfield's favorite dish is a boiled sheep's head, which Marion finds repulsive.

11 Golden Vale Park, The Geary

When Marion gets a check from Dangerfield's father, she takes the money and moves to a nice little house at 11 Golden Vale Park, leaving Dangerfield with their former lease. However, Dangerfield insinuates himself into Marion's new residence.

The Catacombs

The Catacombs is the apartment where Tony Malarkey lives and where he's barricaded himself in for a year to avoid paying rent or being evicted.



The Kangaroo Costume

MacDoon has fashioned a kangaroo costume, which Dangerfield dons and wears around London during a night on the town after finding out that his father has passed away.

The Bear Pit

The Bear Pit is the pub in London where MacDoon hangs out and where he brings Dangerfield.

The Room on Bovir Road in London

Dangerfield rents a room in a Victorian house on Bovir Road in London, where he lives with Mary when she arrives in the city.



Themes

Poverty and Wealth

Dangerfield as a character is a contrast of wealth and poverty. Born of a wealthy family, Dangerfield is used to having everything he could want. His experience with wealth makes him impatient with poverty. Dangerfield's experience in Ireland, however, is an experience entirely of poverty. As a student, he is constantly out of money. He lives on credit and runs up bills he can't afford. The only thing that allows him to sink more and more into debt, ironically, is his wealth. Dangerfield has the "right" accent, a wealthy English accent. He uses it to get credit in shops, which he has no way to repay.

Dangerfield often finds temporary wealth, through pawning possessions, checks from the G.I. Bill, or loans from friends. However, his wealth is fleeting. He can't manage his money and spends it immediately on drink and revelry. Dangerfield is always seeking to buy his happiness in the quickest and easiest way. In the novel, poverty breeds unhappiness, and unhappiness breeds violence. Whenever Dangerfield runs into poverty, he turns violent and cruel. He abuses the women he is dating. When Dangerfield finds out his wife has money from his father and she won't let him have it, he tears up a bar in his rage. When Dangerfield finds out that he won't get his inheritance from his father for twenty years, he begins being abusive toward Mary and drives her away.

However, when Dangerfield meets the wealthy American woman in London, he can't stand her chatter. He is purposefully crude. Dangerfield, by the end of the novel, has wallowed in the depths of poverty and the social world of wealth is as abhorrent to him as the dirty, stressful world of poverty.

Women

Throughout the novel, Dangerfield bounces from one woman to another. He appreciates women when they take care of him and provide for them, but he abuses women when he is upset and abandons them when he sees a better opportunity. Through Dangerfield's mistreatment of women, the novel highlights the plight of women in a man's world. Marion is Dangerfield's wife. He was attracted to her and seduced her. He thought her parents had money because she had social connections. He married her and they had a child, but then Dangerfield showed no care for either Marion or her child. He ignores her, goes on benders, and seduces other women. He doesn't want her to demand anything from him and wants her to take care of him in every way. Dangerfield ultimately drives Marion away.

Dangerfield also meets Chris and enjoys her company. He lets Chris fall in love with him. He wants to be cared for by Chris, made love to and cooked for. However, when he finds out that his wife has a nice, new house, Dangerfield takes off and never calls or



contacts Chris until he's leaving for London. Ultimately, Chris means nothing to him. The same is true of Miss Frost. For her, sex is a sin, and Dangerfield doesn't care that he cajoles her into something that creates immense guilt in her. He leaves her in Dublin, with rumors abounding about their affair, pretending that it doesn't matter. He mistreats Mary as well. As long as Dangerfield has everything he wants and is served hand and foot, he can be happy with a woman. As soon as he has any trouble or difficulty, he takes it out on his lovers or abandons them.

Religion

Ireland is a primarily Catholic nation, and Dangerfield is completely irreligious. Although he references the Blessed Oliver Plunkett, Dangerfield's prayers are almost mocking. Plunkett's preserved, severed head is on display at a church, an idol-like grotesque figure, promising mythical luck that Dangerfield can never achieve. Plunkett becomes a pagan lucky charm instead of a true religious figure. The saint's head literally becomes a charm when MacDoon makes a small figurine of the head for Dangerfield to wear.

Dangerfield is ultimately self-centered and hedonistic and lives for pleasure instead of for anything beyond himself and his immediate environment. Religion is outside Dangerfield's realm because he doesn't see anything outside of his own wants and needs. He doesn't understand why Miss Frost would feel guilty for having sex. He shows this when he describes how Jesus would tell Miss Frost to go ahead and lay the ginger man.

Dangerfield describes going to a Christian student meeting in the past. He says he felt welcome and that he loved everyone in the group. Was Dangerfield sincere in pursuing the Christian student group? By the present time of the novel, he regards religion as anything but serious. Ireland is full of religion and churches, but it is also full of poverty and misery. At the end of the novel, Dangerfield shouts to the Christmas party that Christmas is a fraud. He is showing his disdain for religion, which is implicit throughout the novel.

Style

Point of View

The Ginger Man has a complex point of view. Although the novel takes place primarily from the point of view of the main character, Sebastian Dangerfield, it moves almost seamlessly from a first person perspective to a third person semi-omniscient narrator. Occasionally, the narration pulls back outside of Dangerfield's perspective, showing how other people view Dangerfield, as when he and O'Keefe are at the pub before O'Keefe departs for America. The transition between first and third sentence is accomplished with sentence fragments, which lack a "he" or an "I," and so exist neither in third person nor first person. These sentences join together passages that refer to Dangerfield in first and third person. The reader experiences a flowing point of view, moving closer inside Dangerfield's mind and then drifting further away to see the world from an outside point of view.

The storytelling style is stream of consciousness. As Dangerfield's thoughts drift to the past or ruminate over his present, the reader sees what goes on in his mind in a disjointed style that imitates the sometimes random flow of thought. Dangerfield is an immature character, a man from a wealthy family who wants a life of leisure and is frustrated by his poverty. He floats through life without direction, and in a way the narrative style floats without direction as well, mimicking Dangerfield's lack of focus. The immature narrator provides a distorted view of the world, emphasizing Dangerfield's anger and selfishness and never truly empathizing with another character.

Setting

The novel takes place in Ireland and England, after World War II. The novel begins in Ireland, centered around Dublin University. Ireland is a poor, Catholic country and poverty is pervasive. The first house Dangerfield lives in represents the poverty of the country. It's a creaky, old, rundown country house, and its location on the edge of a cliff shows its precariousness. Just like Dangerfield's financial situation is on the edge, so is his house in danger of falling off a cliff. When Dangerfield moves, it's to a location representing the urban poverty of Dublin. Dangerfield's second house is minuscule, and he must furnish it with covered crates. The plumbing bursts, and the whole house becomes stinking and dirty. Dangerfield's poverty is only a reflection of the poverty of the country.

The poverty of England is contrasted with the wealth that's seen in London. When Dangerfield moves to London, he stays in a lush hotel. He has a luxurious bath and a comfortable bed. He sees the wealthy driving large cars through the streets. The city is filled with large buildings, and the financial district where Dangerfield goes the day of the Christmas party represents wealth. When Clocklan appears in England, he is



covered in wealth. Although Dangerfield himself is not wealthy, being surrounded with wealth gives him opportunity.

Language and Meaning

The *Ginger Man* is written in a stream of consciousness style marked by fragmentary sentences that describe events in short, compact bursts. The fragmentary style gives a sense of present-tense immediacy to the novel, which moves between the present and past tenses, and often seems to have no clear verb tense because of the fragmented sentences. The language style also allows the narrative to move seamlessly from first person to third person and to reflect the fragmentary nature of Dangerfield's thoughts and experiences. The sentences sometimes are broken in two to emphasize dual meanings of words or ideas, as when Dangerfield says that he "polished. Off the furniture." He is emphasizing that while he said that he polished the furniture, he really destroyed it or polished it off.

Donleavy ends many of the chapters with short, free-verse poems that add emphasis to a thought or idea at the end of a chapter. These almost have a haiku quality with a twist of thought either contained within the poem or continued from the chapter. Chapter 28 ends, "All I want / Is one break / Which is not / My neck," a poem that plays with the word "break." This wordplay reflects Dangerfield's comfort with language and words. Although he's failed at law school, he is well educated and enjoys banter that he shares with his friends. Words and songs are a central part of his world.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirty-one short chapters. It begins in Ireland, while Dangerfield is studying for his degree in law. Dangerfield goes downhill throughout the novel. He comes from a wealthy background and arrived in Ireland with the prospect of a career in law ahead of him. Information about Dangerfield's happier past, however, is told in flashback. Dangerfield is living in poverty in Ireland. His marriage is a wreck, and he feels trapped by his wife and child. His house begins falling apart, and he moves to a worse house in town.

As the story moves forward, Dangerfield experiences short-lived periods of prosperity and happiness. He finds something that's good and latches onto it. Then he uses it up or destroys it, just as he spends any money he gets and then is thrust even further into poverty. Dangerfield follows Marion to a new house when she gets money from Dangerfield's father, but he destroys his good situation through drunkenness and flirtations with his boarder. He moves from one relationship to another, one source of money to another, looking for something to maintain his happiness.

Dangerfield moves to London, looking to be closer to wealth. His father dies, and he thinks he will be wealthy, but his hopes are dashed by his father's will. Dangerfield continues on the roller coaster. When he is poor, he takes it out on the women in his life. He abuses Mary and drives her away, and he is only able to reclaim her when



Clocklan's wealth provides him with another source of money. At the end of the novel, Dangerfield is on an upswing again, with Clocklan's wealth behind him. However, there is no indication that Dangerfield's life will change and that he won't hit a downward slope again.



Quotes

"Marion, stay away just a little longer, please. Don't want the pincers on me just yet. Greasy dishes or baby's dirty bottom." —Chapter 3, page 21

"The new house was not new. And you didn't want to walk too fast in the front door or you'd find yourself going out the back." —Chapter 6, page 47

"In the front gate of Trinity. At least this is a bit professional with all these notices tacked up here. Must admit to an overwhelming fear when I think of exams." —Chapter 8, page 75

"Marion quiet, wild eyes and tearful, watching the man in the rickety chair who held the end of the smashed lamp in his loose pink fingers. Sinister man." —Chapter 11, page 105

"A look, now and again, out the window to see what was to be seen. Police or informers. But just casual persons. Mostly bent and carrying. But it would terrify the life out of me were I to see the squad cars out there." —Chapter 13, page 135

"A cellar of the damned for sure. I cannot tolerate economic cripples and I do not like those who were once rich." —Chapter 16, page 162

"And a bit of this curtain for the scarf that's in it. Just cut it off. Cut. Cut. Cut. Fold. Like that. Hide a few of the ragged edges. Little comb of the hair." —Chapter 17, page 195

"For women are lonely people, lonelier with women and with men, enclosed by sunless children and the little vanishing things that go away during the years of waiting. And hearts. And how was love so round." —Chapter 20, page 234

"Jesus and I have been through a great deal together. And I tell you Lilly, he would roar with laughter and say, why my dear child you laid with the ginger man? Great. Don't worry about it." —Chapter 23, page 255

"I'll give satisfaction if only illusory. I think it might be put I've polished. Off the furniture." —Chapter 23, page 267

"Mary can be petulant. Didn't like the look in her eye when I asked her to hand me my socks from the back of the chair. Sign of rebellion." —Chapter 28, page 318

"In there is Christmas and fire and the kids having a time with tinny toys. This is the strangest part of London being not one thing and certainly not another." —Chapter 31, page 347



Topics for Discussion

What does Dangerfield want out of his relationships with women?

What causes Dangerfield to be violent and to fight with his significant others?

For what reasons does Dangerfield drink? What effects does drinking have on Dangerfield's wife?

What role does religion play in Dangerfield's life and in the novel?

What is Dangerfield's relationship with his father, and why does Dangerfield react the way he does to his father's death? Is Dangerfield only concerned with his father's money?

Why does Dangerfield drop out of college? What does he hope to do with his life?

What attracts Dangerfield to particular women? What qualities does he look for in women?

How does society treat women in the novel?

Describe the different culture of rich people and poor people in the novel.