

# The Hotel New Hampshire Study Guide

## The Hotel New Hampshire by John Irving

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## Plot Summary

As the story opens, John Berry and his siblings are listening yet again to the story of a bear called "State O' Maine," the bear's owner who is a Jewish man known simply as "Freud," and how the bear came to be part of the lives of their parents on the summer they fell in love. As the story unfolds, the children object to specific statements, insisting that the story be told correctly. John's siblings include his older brother and sister, Frank and Franny, and younger siblings Lilly and Egg. The story is so familiar that all five of the children will sit still and listen, often adding pieces of information.

John's parents, Win and Mary, grew up in Dairy, New Hampshire. Win is the son of Coach Bob, coach of the Dairy school's football team. The two marry immediately after their summer working at a resort hotel where, by a series of coincidences, John has become the owner of a performing bear called State O' Maine who later is called Earl. Win uses the bear as a means of earning a living until he has enough money to attend Harvard. Mary remains at home, having the first three children rapidly. Win is then drafted and the last two children aren't born until after his return.

When the Thompson Female Seminary closes, Win buys the abandoned building and turns it into the Hotel New Hampshire. John and his siblings eventually attend the Dairy school, though their lives are anything but smooth there. When Franny is raped, John feels the effects as well. It takes the two - who are very close - many years to recover. Then Win hears from Freud who wants the family to come to Vienna where he has a hotel. They agree but the plane on which Mother and Egg are traveling crashes and both are killed. At the hotel there is a woman named Susie dressed as a bear who serves as security. The family later uncovers a terrorist plot and is held captive but the plan is foiled when Freud manages to set off the bomb before it arrives at its destination. Freud is killed and Win blinded but the family has become overnight heroes, a fact that helps John in his negotiations for a book written by Lilly.

Lilly has never grown as she should and it's been suggested that she has a form of dwarfism. Lilly has taken on writing as a euphemism for "growing" and her first book is a great success but the next is less so and Lilly, citing her inability to grow, commits suicide. Meanwhile, Win has convinced the family to purchase yet another hotel, the abandoned resort where he met Mary. They agree and live there, convincing Win that it's a successful operation though almost never accepting a guest. Susie, the "bear" from Vienna, returns to the states as well and is on hand when Franny confronts her rapist. Susie and John marry as do Franny and a young man from the Dairy school, a football player named Junior Jones.



# The Bear Called State O' Maine

## The Bear Called State O' Maine Summary

As the story opens, John Berry and his siblings are listening yet again to the story of a bear called "State O' Maine" and how the bear came to be part of the lives of their parents on the summer they fell in love. As the story unfolds, the children object to specific statements, insisting that the story be told correctly. John's siblings include his older brother and sister, Frank and Franny, and younger siblings Lilly and Egg. John notes that all will sit still and listen to the story though the children frequently add pieces of information, ask questions to keep the story on track and insist on their mother's point of view regarding the story.

As the story goes, Mary Bates and Winslow Berry were nineteen the summer they had jobs at the resort hotel, Arbuthnot-by-the-sea. Win had been accepted to Harvard, a rare accomplishment for a student of their small town, but did not have the money available to attend that first year. Mary's summer job was basically one last small adventure before she would settle down to care for her elderly and ailing parents. Both had looked forward to the job, believing it to be an opportunity to reinvent themselves as anything they wanted, but each immediately realized that the presence of the other meant they'd have to be truthful.

Win and Mary live in Dairy, New Hampshire, where Win attended the Dairy School, an all-boys school where Win's father, known as Iowa Bob, coaches. Mary attended the Thompson Female Seminary. They had known each other but only casually. They dance together on their first night at the resort, the workers all having a bit of free time with only a few guests having arrived. A commotion interrupts the dancing and the two rush with the other guests to see a man arriving on a motorcycle with a bear in the sidecar. The bear's name is State O' Maine. The handler has an unpronounceable name and everyone calls him "Freud."

Freud has a seemingly simple act with the bear in which the bear drives the motorcycle. The bear is very attached to the motorcycle and becomes agitated if he's separated from the motorcycle. When Win and Mary occasionally take the motorcycle for a drive, the bear accompanies them in the sidecar. When State O' Maine attacks a man who has taken the motorcycle for a ride, Freud explains it off as a case of a wild bear attacking. The explanation is accepted by the German but the resort insists that Freud leave. Win buys the motorcycle and bear for two hundred dollars - the sum of his earnings for the summer - and Freud leaves.

Win and Mary marry and Win travels around the country with State O' Maine, now called Earl, performing as a way of making a living. Win and Mary have three children in quick succession, naming them Frank, Franny and John. Win is then drafted and it's several years before more children are born. In 1946, leaving the youngest of the children, Lilly, with Iowa Bob, the family travel to the resort which they discover is permanently closed.



They've taken Earl with them though he is now old and hasn't performed in many years. Win is very disappointed at the condition of the resort and is lamenting the fact when there's the sound of a gun. They rush toward the pier where a young boy, armed with a gun to keep seals away from the fishing nets, has shot and killed Earl. A man rushes up and immediately recognizes the bear as "State O' Maine."

## The Bear Called State O' Maine Analysis

Win and Mary are not attracted to each other during their lives in Dairy, New Hampshire, but when they arrive at the resort, they find that they gravitate towards each other as is natural in a situation filled with strangers. In this case, the two soon feel a mutual attraction that is pushed more quickly by the situation, resulting in their marriage soon after the end of the summer.

The personalities of the children begin to emerge as the story of State O' Maine is told. Franny continually asks when Win and Mary consummated their relationship and she doesn't get chastised for it but also doesn't get an answer. John notes that he and his siblings constantly want the story to be told in a specific order with some specific words and phrases. It's Win who says that some stories get better with the telling. John says that he remembers the day on the pier when the young boy shot Earl, and says that's not the same as remembering the stories someone else has told which is how he knows the remainder of the story about his parents' courtship and the bear's role in their lives.

Win seems to remember the summer at the resort hotel as an important event in his life, which isn't surprising. What is interesting is that Win seems to associate everything good that happened in his life as being associated with the hotel rather than with the people and the time of his life. It seems likely that this is why he becomes so determined later to start a hotel of his own.



# The First Hotel New Hampshire

## The First Hotel New Hampshire Summary

The Dairy School has been a totally male school but realizes that it must open enrollment to females in order to survive. With that decision, the Thompson Female Seminary is out of business and Win decides to buy it and transform it into a hotel - the Hotel New Hampshire. Win's arguments for transforming the girls' school into a hotel include his belief that the Dairy School is the key to the need for a hotel. As Win sees it, the parents who attend events at the school or who just want to visit their children at the school will choose to stay at the hotel because it's the only local option. The abandoned school is also an important part of the equation because it's noted that few people would want the property and having someone make a hotel with little chance for survival will be better than having the building remain abandoned. As the family is discussing how to raise the money for the project, Win reveals his plan to sell the family's home. Though Mary inherited the house from her parents, she apparently agrees.

One day John is attacked by some football players who rub his face into the lined football field. In an effort to get even, Franny and John hide in the ferns near the football field and wait until one of the players comes into the woods to "crap." Franny and John then go onto the path through the woods used by the players and crap there so that one of the players steps in it and blames the player who'd gone off to take a crap earlier. At home that night, Coach Bob tells of the incident and Lilly says that she saw Franny and John's involvement which gets the two banished to their room. Lilly later brings them food as an apology but Frank tells on them all, saying that Franny isn't in her own room, but is in John's, and that Lilly took them food. As soon as he tells, Franny slips out of John's bed and goes downstairs. John watches as she attacks Frank, calling him names and physically fighting, with Frank pinching Franny's breast and Franny kicking Frank. The fight is ended when Coach Bob pulls Frank away and Win slaps Franny. Franny's lip is busted and she's taken to the infirmary for stitches. Frank has collapsed on the floor from having been kicked in the groin.

## The First Hotel New Hampshire Analysis

Franny and John are very close, with Frank always seeming to be just outside their circle, though they will sometimes stand up for Frank if he's in trouble. When John asks why Franny is always there to stand up for him but not for Frank, Franny can't seem to explain but says that John and Frank aren't the same. When Lilly tells on them for their prank on the football players, Franny uses the situation to reaffirm the fact that she and John are meant to be united and that they can't count on anyone else.

As Frank is trying to recover from his kick in the groin, he tells Coach Bob that Franny is behind "every bad thing that happens." John listens, noting that Frank is probably right but that it seems that Frank is simply unlikable and wondering why it is that way. John



himself admits that he also doesn't like Frank very much, apparently for the same reason. This bond between John and Franny sometimes seems to extend to Frank and their younger siblings, but it's this strong bond that will keep John and Franny close throughout their lives.

Another piece of family dynamics begins to emerge as Coach Bob and Win argue over the plan to start up a hotel. Coach Bob says that Win is never satisfied with the current situation and always wants to look ahead to some future event. Mary steps in between the father and son argument, standing up for Win. However, she also seems to believe that Win looks too much toward the future and seems to realize more than Win and even more than the children that Win missed a great deal of the lives of the children as they were growing up.





# Iowa Bob's Winning Season

## Iowa Bob's Winning Season Summary

In 1954, Frank begins attending classes at the Dairy School though he, unlike most of the students, doesn't live in the dorms, followed in the next two years by Franny and then John. The family home is sold though the renovations to the hotel take longer than anticipated, and the family continues to rent their home from the new owners for some time. It's discovered that the hotel has a great many tiny sinks and commodes - a mistake in ordering that had been too costly to rectify. The jokes abound, including that one of the restrooms is an "outhouse for elves." There are plans for everyone to have their own rooms and for Coach Bob to move in with the family.

One day in the shower at Dairy School, John is cornered by some football players, including Chip Dove. Chip is taking a poll about Franny's best feature and asks a large black player named Junior Jones for his opinion. Junior is noncommittal, eventually saying she's "just another white girl," but adding that she seems like a nice girl. There's another black player named Harold Swallow, though Harold is much nearer the same size as John but is very fast on the field. One day Franny and John are walking the path through the woods headed for home when they find Frank being held by several of the football players. Frank is face down without his pants. He's being held down and Chip Dove is using his foot to drive Frank down, over and over again, into the mud while taunting Frank about being queer. When Franny and John confront them, ordering that Frank be let go, Chip says that Frank "likes boys," and John notes that Frank seems more angry than beaten. Franny tells Chip that she'll go off alone with him if he'll let Frank go, and Chip agrees. Frank and John follow. Frank clashes his cymbals and John and Franny attack Chip. As they go home together, Frank tells his siblings that it's true, that he is homosexual, and Franny says that she supposes she's always known.

There is a traditional football rivalry between Dairy and Exeter though Dairy never wins. In honor of Coach Bob's final year as coach, the school recruits a group of excellent players and the team goes on to a winning season. As the season nears the Exeter game, the plan to open the hotel for that weekend hits many problems, but the family moves in on time. There are three people hired, Mrs. Urick as the cook and her husband Max as general handyman, and Ronda Ray as waitress. All have rooms in the hotel, though Ronda insists on calling her own a "dayroom."

The family moves into the hotel on Halloween night. There's no electricity and Franny and John go to all the rooms, turning on every light including those outside. An old police officer named Howard Tuck is sitting outside the hotel in his patrol car. Just as Howard turns the ignition, the electricity comes on in the hotel. The shock is so great the Howard Tuck has a heart attack and falls forward onto his car horn. Everyone rushes outside and Franny and John are sent to the school for help while Win continues to try to figure out how to use the police radio.



## Iowa Bob's Winning Season Analysis

The incident involving Frank is another opportunity to look at the family dynamics. In this case, Franny and John are together as usual and see that Frank is in trouble. For whatever reason, Franny can't stand the idea of leaving Frank to the mercy of these boys on this occasion and Franny and John go to his rescue. Franny's idea of handing herself over to Chip is interesting and she will later tell John that she'd always known her "first time" would be with Chip. Another interesting point is that Frank tells John and Franny that he is homosexual and that he has already told his mother. John notes that anyone with a secret of importance tells that secret to his mother because she's the only person able and willing to keep a secret. It's also noteworthy that Franny says she's always known about Frank's sexual preference. It seems possible that Franny's continual interest in sex is at the heart of her dislike for Frank though this is never put into words.



# Franny Loses a Fight

## Franny Loses a Fight Summary

Franny and John rush toward the Dairy School campus in search of police because of Howard Tuck's heart attack. It's Halloween but the holiday always has a sinister air in Dairy and Franny and John run as fast as they can. When they near the campus, they encounter a large group of children running the other way, screaming about giant spiders. Franny and John try to stop several of the children to find out the reason they are running, but not will answer. As they near the wooded path that's the shortcut to the school, John notices that the net is missing from the soccer goals and wonders about it briefly. Then Franny and John run into what appears to be a giant spider web where another student has already been captured. They are followed quickly by a little boy and then flashlights appear as Dairy School football players approach the net.

The players, including Chip Dove, soon walk up to the net and release the littlest boy who scampers away as fast as he can. They then release the other student who always hurries away. With only Franny and John remaining caught in the net, John tries to explain about Howard Tuck and their need for help, but the boys refuse to listen. Chip then tells Franny that she's now going to show him the special place that she knows in the woods, and that two of the other boys - Lenny Metz and Chester Pulaski - are going to go with them to hold Franny down. Harold Swallow is told to stay behind and hold John. Franny agrees and is helped from the net where she immediately begins to fight, but is apparently quickly overpowered and gives up only to turn and fight again. John is helpless, being tangled in the net and held by Harold Swallow but he begins to plead to be released, telling Harold that Chip and the others are going to rape Franny.

Harold finally agrees, releasing John but refusing to allow him to go directly for Franny, saying that the two of them would be no match for the football players. Instead, Harold goes for Junior Jones who calls for his fellow students, called "The Black Arm of the Law." Jones and the others fan out into the woods and locate two of the offenders while Jones carries Franny to the infirmary. Franny doesn't want to prosecute the offenders and takes several baths every day for the coming weeks. The school loses to Exeter, the offenders having been expelled.

## Franny Loses a Fight Analysis

Franny never admits to being raped, but says only that she was "beaten up." The phrase is soon picked up by the rest of the family who honor Franny's wishes to allow the rape to drop without prosecution. It's noted that Junior Jones' sister had been raped, and that this is the reason Harold Swallow had known that Junior would rush to Franny's aid. Junior Jones and his friends - all young black men - termed their efforts to enforce the rules as "hunting." John notes that they always deliver the guilty in some very elaborate manner. In the case of a student who had been caught exposing himself to



female students, Junior's group had wrapped the young man in a clear shower curtain and had hung him by his feet from a shower head before alerting school authorities. In the case of Franny's attackers, one was carried to the dean of men, naked and tied to a pole. Another, in an apparent effort to avoid a similar situation, broke his collarbone crashing into a tree while running naked from his captors, and turned himself in. Both confess and name Chip Dove as the first to rape Franny.

The family has had a pet, a dog named Sorrow who is exceptional in that he farts often and the smell is horrible. John says that Franny is the only one attached to Sorrow who seems to be able to ignore the constant odor. As the family moves into the hotel and anticipates their first guests, Win makes the decision that the dog - who has now gotten old - should be put to sleep. John and Frank know of the decision, though Franny wasn't told in an effort to spare her the anguish of waiting for the event. When Win learns that Franny has been attacked, he sends Frank to the vet's office with the hope that the deed has not yet been done. Frank arrives to find that Sorrow is already dead but he requests the body of the dog and takes it home with him, planning to stuff the dog as a biology project. Frank seems to believe that this will make Franny feel better, saying that it's the next best thing to having Sorrow alive. Though Frank is awkward in his attempt, he does seem to have concern for Franny as his primary motive in this venture.



# Merry Christmas, 1956

## Merry Christmas, 1956 Summary

John says that the period from Halloween to Christmas remains fixed in his mind as the time it took for Franny to stop taking three baths a day in an apparent effort to wipe away the scent of her own body that she associated with having been raped. It's during this time that John takes an interest in body building. He begins a regular workout routine and eats food suggested by Coach Bob. The "diet" includes bananas, oranges, greens, ice cream and pasta. John gains weight so that he's teased by his family as being a "cherub" or "teddy bear," but follows Coach Bob's advice and continues to eat and exercise.

Over time, John becomes able to run for a longer period of time and lifts weights regularly. It's Junior Jones who tells him that he should be able to bench press twice his own weight. Junior will often spot for John, sliding on the weights and then going away and leaving John trapped under the bar, returning occasionally to take off weights until John can lift it.

The game between Dairy and Exeter is a disaster with three of the players having been expelled. One official notes that it would have been good for the team to save the expulsion until after the game, but they realize that Coach Bob would have refused to coach had that happened. Junior Jones makes the only touchdown and someone takes a picture, enlarging it as a Christmas present for Coach Bob. After the game, the hotel is serving the guests dinner. A man from Texas invites the other guests to join him at his table and it's only then that the guests realize that the chairs and tables are all screwed to the floor - a leftover quirk of the days when the hotel was a school. That night, Frank, Franny and John listen through the hotel intercom as the Texan and Rhonda Ray have sex in her room. The next morning Rhonda propositions John.

As the family settles into the business of running the hotel with few guests, Egg develops a severe hearing problem and it's noted by the family doctor that Lilly hasn't grown in the past couple of years. One day Franny and John hear someone in another of the rooms upstairs and discover that it's their parents, having slipped away to be alone for sex. John notes that Franny seems surprised that Win and Mary love each other and that it seems to put an end to her constant bathing and a beginning to her recovery after the rape. Franny and John go to the theater one day to walk Egg and Lilly home and encounter Junior. Franny and Junior go off together and begin spending time together. When a doctor is a guest at the hotel, he says that Lilly has a form of dwarfism. Then John has sex with Rhonda, the first time of many.

As the family looks ahead to Christmas, Coach Bob cuts down a Christmas tree. It's a family tradition to leave the tree without gifts until Christmas morning and the majority of presents are to be silly, though John buys Rhonda a nightgown. Frank has completed his project of stuffing Sorrow and he tells John that he's chosen the "attack pose" with



Sorrow screwed to a board. The night before Christmas Even, Coach Bob says he had a dream about Sorrow returning and that the dog had tried to attack and John wonders if it's a premonition of some sort. Everyone has hidden their gifts, and on Christmas morning John goes to Coach Bob's room to lift weights before breakfast, as is their normal routine. When one of them forgets to tighten the screw on the barbell, some of the weights slide off and one rolls to the closet door, prompting the door to open. A number of things fall out, including the stuff mount of Sorrow, in an attack mode. Coach Bob has a heart attack and dies on the spot.

## Merry Christmas, 1956 Analysis

John and Franny discuss the reason John is working so hard at getting himself in better shape only on the surface, though both know that it is linked directly to Franny's rape. Franny tells John that even if he is bigger and in better shape, there's no way to be certain that he'll even be near enough to save her if she's ever raped again. John doesn't tell Franny, but his goal seems not so much tied in his ability to save her as in his feeling of helplessness while she was being raped.

One morning it's raining and John runs up and down the stairs rather than going out in the rain. Rhonda that the next time it's raining John should come to her for his morning exercise. John isn't certain whether it's a true invitation or not but waits impatiently for a day when it would be feasible to knock on Rhonda's door to take her up on the offer. Though Rhonda is much older than John, their affair becomes an important part of John's life for some time. During that first time with Rhonda, John knows that Franny and Frank are listening on the intercom and says that first encounter forever colored his idea of what's acceptable with regard to sex. He says that he forever after continues to whisper in the throes of passion as if fearing someone is listening.



# Father Hears from Freud

## Father Hears from Freud Summary

Franny moves into Coach Bob's old room and Egg shares a room with John. The family is very conscious of the doctor's pronouncement of dwarfism and Lilly is given a larger room than the rest of the children. The stuffed Sorrow has been dropped in a trash can but John witnesses Egg taking the item from the trash. Though Coach Bob's death has put a damper on the situation, the family decides to go ahead with the New Year's party that Coach Bob had insisted they plan. When the party seems on the verge of not happening, Lilly says she's looking forward to the event and everyone pitches in to make it happen for her. By now, Franny has been seeing Johnny Jones for some time and Johnny is planning to attend the party. He has announced that he's bringing his sister to be John's date. Another of Franny's friends and her boyfriend are also planning to come. Mary hires a band for the event, three high school boys. The band is Hurricane Doris and the lead singer is Doris, who serves as lead singer.

When Junior arrives with his sister Sabrina and Franny's friend, both John and Sabrina realize they've been lied to. Sabrina takes it well, realizing that Junior needed a ride to school. John had asked the girl's age but had been told only that she was at least sixteen. As it turns out, she's twenty-eight, but is very nice to John. They dance together and John offers to carry her bags upstairs but she says she has none. She does let John show her to her room and there allows him to kiss her. Though John has had repeated sexual experiences with Rhonda, he seems fearful of trying to make a move with a girl near his own age. Sabrina tutors him but warns against bumping teeth. When that happens, John is horrified to discover that he's apparently knocked out her front teeth, but she tells him that she was hit in the mouth with a pipe when she was raped and that she has false teeth. She then tells him that she has a question that she's never been able to pose to anyone before, goes to the bathroom and removes her false teeth, then asks him to tell her honestly if it was "gross." He assures her that it's not and leaves the room to return to the dance downstairs where he makes a move on Franny's friend, Bitty Tuck.

Bitty is amazed at John's ability to kiss and invites him to her own room where John finds that the window has been left open. They are on the bed when Bitty says she has to go to the bathroom and proceeds to insert her diaphragm, but screams and falls out. John rushes to the bathroom to find that Egg has hidden Sorrow there, having caught the dog's fur on fire while using a hair dryer and then doused it in the tub.

Later, John is downstairs when Doris, very drunk, propositions him and then leaves. A man arrives with a letter for Win. The letter is from the Jew Win and Mary had known as Freud. He says he has a hotel in Vienna and needs Win's expertise to help run it. Win is immediately excited and makes plans for the family to move to Vienna.



## Father Hears from Freud Analysis

Junior's sister, Sabrina, had been raped. John knew that one of Junior's sisters had been raped and asks Franny if Sabrina is the one. As it turns out, Sabrina is Junior's only sister and had been raped, but John's question to Franny seems to make Franny somewhat angry. She asks John if it would make any difference about his willingness to go out with her and John denies that it does, but admits to himself that it makes a difference in how he'd handle the situation. He notes, for example, that a rape victim should be touched more carefully. While John and Franny have always been very close, it seems that Franny's rape has increased dramatically their emotional ages.

While John has gone often to Ronda's room, the lure of having sex available as often as he wants seems to be fading somewhat. John admits that he's thinking more and more of younger girls and tries to get Franny to set him up with one of her friends, though she says that her friends are too old for John. When Ronda realizes that John is distancing himself from her, she tells him that the polite thing for him to do is to tell her, though it doesn't really seem that she wants a showdown over the situation. On New Year's Eve, when Franny has already gone to bed, Junior has sex with Ronda, which will cool off the relationship between Franny and Junior. These emerging relationships are interesting in and of themselves, but the reactions of Win and Mary are also interesting. When Franny's friend Bitty is planning to have her boyfriend accompany her for the party, Mary sets them up in a room some distance from most of the other guests to give them some privacy. There seems to be no taboo on sex in the house and the family seems open to the racial mixture of Franny and Junior.

John notes his ability to be "embarrassed" for other people. This seems to be empathy but also could be tied to some of John's deepest personal fears - that he will embarrass himself in social situations, for example. John notes that Franny says that the family may seem strange to others but that they don't find anything strange about each other. John, however, seems to worry at least somewhat about what others think of him and of the family. He also claims to feel embarrassed for other people. He says that he's embarrassed for the woman who sings with the band Hurricane Doris, for example.





# Sorrow Strikes Again

## Sorrow Strikes Again Summary

As the family prepares for the move to Vienna, Ronda Ray tells John that she wants to go along. John is relieved when his father says they can't afford to take her. Lilly has become interested in the circus that had booked rooms in the hotel for the summer. The circus is owned by a midget known to the family as Fritz. At Frank's insistence, the family learns about Vienna, studying the language, history and maps of the area. Frank picks up the German language more quickly than the rest of the family and the thought that they'll have to be dependent on Frank for directions and help when they go somewhere spurs John to study harder.

Through Freud's correspondence, they learn that there are prostitutes in the hotel, that prostitution isn't illegal, and that there are also some sort of "diplomats" in the hotel. As the time to leave draws nearer, Egg becomes more worried, saying that he can't "see" what it's going to be like. At various times, John explains specific things to him, such as the fact that they are going on two separate planes because Win and Mary believe that both parents should not be on the same plane. That night, John dreams that his mother died and the next day Frank brings Sorrow back, stuffed into a new position, demurely sitting with a "glazed happiness" about his expression. The appearance of the dog startles Egg when he wakes, but he is quickly taken with it. Mary warns Egg that Sorrow is not to be taken out of Egg's room, then goes on a tirade, ordering Franny to help wash the car and repair the damage she's done to the lawn while driving too wildly, ordering Frank and Lilly to clean their rooms, and telling John that he should clean up his language.

Fritz and a dozen other midgets, all part of his show, arrive to take ownership of the hotel, Win having sold the hotel to Fritz. Lilly is enamored with the fact that they are all very small. The animals arrive just as Fritz is taking Win, Lilly, Frank, Franny and John to the airport. The plan is for Egg and Mary to follow the next day. Mary asks that Win take Sorrow on with him but Egg refuses and Mary gives in. John notes that it's the fact that Sorrow floats that brings the rescuers quickly to the site of the plane crash that costs Mary and Egg their lives.

## Sorrow Strikes Again Analysis

There is a new look at Franny's recovery - or lack of - from the rape. It will be revealed here that Win told Franny soon after the rape that this could be "the luckiest day of her life." What he means by this seems to be that she should look for the good in every situation, even this one. John notes that Franny seems to find this attitude helpful. What's interesting is that John will later be told that Franny has simply moved on past the rape without ever dealing with her feelings about the attack. Another interesting fact that emerges here is that Franny has written to Chop Dover - her attacker - two times



after the rape. She tells John that she gave him just basic information about herself and her life and doesn't say that she mentions the rape at all. John seems to realize that this is wrong but Franny seems to see nothing at all wrong with it. It will take an outsider's view to make Franny begin to deal fully with her feelings.

John's dream about his mother's death doesn't seem to concern him overly much, though it could be a foreshadowing of the plane crash that costs her life. It's also noteworthy that Lilly's size has continued to be a note of worry for her family and for Lilly. As the family is preparing to move to Vienna, Lilly says that she wants to remain in the hotel with Fritz's act. After the death of her mother and younger brother, Lilly says that she wishes she had stayed, that life with Fritz's group would have been "easier." John notes that his father has to identify the bodies and that he seldom then talks about Mary and Egg, preferring as usual to look forward. This tendency had prompted arguments between Win, Coach Bob and Mary on other occasions as Win was forced several times to defend his tendency to look toward the future.

There are reasons for each of the children's names, except Franny, and John notes that this seems to have always bothered Franny. Mary apparently chose Franny because it sounded good with her only sibling at the time, Frank. The youngest, Egg, seems to have been named Egg because Frank had explained that the baby growing inside his mother was nothing but an egg early in her pregnancy. The information prompted the name and the name stuck.



# Sorrow Floats

## Sorrow Floats Summary

John, Frank, Franny, Lilly and Win arrive in Vienna safely, not yet aware that their mother and Egg would die the following day on their own trip. They arrive at the hotel which is in a very obscure location and discover that the candy store next door has burned. There are no guests other than the prostitutes and the radicals. The room assigned to Egg is very small with no window and the children all predict Egg won't like it, but then agree that both Egg and Mary won't like Vienna at all. They arrive to find the bear in the lobby and soon discover that Freud is blind and that the bear is really a young woman named Susie dressed in a bear costume. In costume, Susie keeps order in the hotel. Susie has horrible acne scars and seems to feel more comfortable in the costume than out of it. They soon discover that Susie has been raped and she hates the fact that Franny has never dealt with her own experience, though Franny argues that she's fine.

John describes the prostitutes who frequent the hotel, including a young girl of eleven who doesn't yet perform sexual acts but allows men to masturbate while watching her. The girl's mother also lives in the hotel and plans to have the girl out of the situation before she is old enough to begin having sex.

After Mary's death, the children are taken in more fully by the prostitutes and John attributes this to the fact that the children are motherless. Franny announces that she's going to take on the role of parent because Win "doesn't know what's going on." One day Susie makes a remark that John takes as a statement that she's homosexual though Franny claims to be unsure. The children begin settling in though they want to go home, back to the United States. When Win asks Franny what she thinks they should do, Franny says that she believes they should give the situation a chance to "see what it's like." One night Frank and John, unable to sleep, find Franny and Susie in a sexual encounter and the boys go to their father's room, begging him to take them back to the United States. Win says that he'll do so as soon as the hotel is a success and John says that it takes eight years for that to happen.

## Sorrow Floats Analysis

John notes that Susie tries to analyze Franny's rape experience and that she wants Franny to be angry as Susie was when she was raped. While Franny insists that she's okay, John seems torn, pointing out that it's not normal for the victim to contact her attacker or to expect that the attacker will contact her in return. John says that Susie will go on to become a rape advocate and that she'll later come to see that women have to deal with the experience in different ways. Susie seems more comfortable as a bear than without the costume and says that no one dares fight back when they believe she



is a bear. There are a few people who know the truth and it seems strange that the secret has remained intact considering Susie's close contact with many of the clients.

When Susie first meets Franny, she sniffs Franny's crotch, which is a foreshadowing of the relationship that emerges between the two. When John and Frank see Susie and Franny in a sexual encounter, they seem distressed, which is interesting considering Frank's sexual orientation. What's more interesting is that Frank and John suddenly feel the need to comfort each other, which is not typical of their relationship because it's usually John and Franny who are close in times of worry.

When John notes that "Father was blind, or he soon would be," he seems to be referring to the actions and needs of his children but the statement is actually a foreshadowing of the fact that Win will actually lose his sight later in the story. Franny seems to be the natural one to take over the family when Mary dies and with the rest of the children pleading with Win to return to the United States, Win asks Franny what she thinks. John notes that Franny's opinion is respected and that it's hers that will tip the scales. Franny doesn't explain her reason but says they should give Vienna a fair try before returning home.



# The Second Hotel New Hampshire

## The Second Hotel New Hampshire Summary

The family remains in Vienna for seven years. John and the others listen to one of the young radicals who lives upstairs as she reads aloud to them, apparently prompting a love of literature that results in John and Lilly deciding to major in literature at the university. Frank majors in economics and Franny in drama. The woman who reads to the children has only a code name - Miss Miscarriage. John feels an attraction for her but is unable to follow through on this attraction for many years. As time passes, John and the others notice some strange movements by the radicals but don't really understand the importance until many years have passed. For example, the group has a mechanic who is known by the code name "Wrench" who always works on their car though it is never driven. John says it will eventually become clear that the car is actually rigged with a bomb that is waiting the right opportunity.

Over the years, the various members of the family sometimes go for a walk with Freud, who reveals that he was held in a German death camp and that he was the victim of experiments that cost him his sight. When Win suggests that the hotel be named The Hotel New Hampshire, Freud readily agrees and they hope to attract American tourists. Though the hotel doesn't remain filled, there are guests and most are "timid." When John later asks Frank what he remembers about their life in Vienna, Frank lists four events, including the day the family went to buy barbells for John, and says he remembers more but doesn't want to remember more.

One night, John is listening to Miss Miscarriage read to him and he kisses her. She tells him to stop, to leave, but pulls him nearer. As they are about to have sex, John asks if she has protection to prevent a pregnancy and she says that she will be dead before a baby could be born anyway and so it doesn't matter. She reveals their plan - to hold John's family hostage and to blow up a large opera house. She says holding an American family hostage will gain more attention. She then says that she's been chosen to drive the car with the bomb that will begin a series of explosions. She pleads with John to leave the hotel before the plan can be put into effect and John promises that he will do so. As John goes home that night, he finds that Franny is outside searching for him with the news that Franny has sold a book. John asks how much money she's going to receive with the idea that it might be enough to move the family out of the hotel. He tells Franny what he's learned and she reaches up to kiss him on the cheek but he turns his head at that moment and their lips meet. They kiss for a long time, then move to the opera house and kiss some more.

## The Second Hotel New Hampshire Analysis

The story has constant pieces of foreshadowing. For example, John says that Frank's decision to major in economics ends up being a good one because he'll eventually



manage money for all of them. There is also a foreshadowing of a sexual tension between John and Franny. It's noteworthy that this chapter covers several years, ranging from soon after their arrival in Vienna and going on until John is in his early twenties.

One of the prostitutes is called "Screaming Annie" because she has an ability to fake an orgasm, and this event is accompanied by a scream. One particular night the scream prompts the majority of those in the hotel to come running to Screaming Annie's room. There is a couple from New Hampshire who has a daughter Lilly's age and the couple is horrified. The woman berates Win for raising the children in this "sordid" situation. The children note that Win does seem somewhat guilty at this accusation and that they prefer that he remain "dreamy" as opposed to being guilty.



# A Night at the Opera: Schlagobers and Blood

## A Night at the Opera: Schlagobers and Blood Summary

John tells the family about the plan to blow up the opera and they begin trying to decide how to handle the situation. While Win wants to notify the authorities, Freud fears that the family would be guilty by association. They debate the possibility of notifying the American Consulate or American Embassy instead and John notes that they haven't become good foreigners because they don't even know which is better or even if the two are basically the same. They agree to tell the prostitutes so that the women can get out ahead of any problem that might arise. It's then that Susie says she's overheard the radicals talking and that they apparently can't find "Miss Miscarriage." John and Frank go to her apartment and John says that he doesn't go inside but can smell the situation from outside. She is very obviously dead.

John and Win go for a walk that afternoon and John realizes that Win hasn't been in some of the coffee houses that are very nearby. They then see the lights going on in the Sacher Bar, which is a bit upscale, especially compared to the Hotel New Hampshire. John notes that they aren't exactly dressed for the place but that Win seems to be right at home. Inside, Win is greeted by name and orders his "usual." John becomes nostalgic at the situation and cries before they return to the hotel New Hampshire where they warn the prostitutes. John has a sexual encounter with two of the prostitutes and Franny has a similar encounter with one of the radicals. When John and Franny meet back in the lobby, they each accuse each other for their actions. Susie interrupts, saying she's "too old" for this kind of drama and Win says he is also. At his voice, John and Franny turn and find that one of the radicals has a gun to Win's head.

The radicals begin discussing their next move because their plan requires that Miss Miscarriage drive the car. Now that she's dead, they have to have a different driver. The radicals soon reveal that the children won't be hurt and that they won't harm Win as their only surviving parent. They say that they plan to have Freud go with them to a spot near the opera building where he'll be put in the driver's seat and told to simply hit the gas. The plan is that the front of the car has a detonator and when the car hits something, it will explode which will then set off the bomb inside the opera building. Freud says that he's happy to go along and insists that he can do this in order to save Win and the children. As Freud says his good-byes to the members of the family, he tells John to be ready for the explosion. John doesn't really realize what he intends until he sees Freud feeling his way along the car's front, then begin swinging the bat he uses like a cane. Win has stood to watch and screams directions at Freud, to strike lower on the car. The third strike detonates the bomb.



As soon as the bomb goes off, John grabs for the radical holding the gun, holds him tightly and simply squeezes the man to death. Franny reveals that Win is severely injured from the blast and it's soon revealed that he's blind. Franny says that she knew he would be blinded before she even saw the extent of his injuries. There's an immediate interest in the family who sacrificed so much to stop a terrorist plot. The notoriety aids John in his efforts to get more money for Lilly's book and he is quickly successful.

## **A Night at the Opera: Schlagobers and Blood Analysis**

As Win and John go to tell some of the prostitutes about the plan of the radicals, John finds himself pulled into a sexual encounter two times. When he is in bed with Screaming Annie, he asks that she not scream out a fake orgasm, but Annie reveals that she isn't faking and that this level of feeling and emotion keeps her in turmoil. Another interesting point is that John has had fantasies about the prostitute named Jolanta, though John says she frightens him a little. Their sexual encounter doesn't lead to fulfillment for John because of Jolanta's attitude. John has noted Jolanta's hand in her purse on several occasions and he's believed that she has a weapon of some kind. After their failed sex, John finds the opportunity to feel around in her purse and finds a jar with a preserved fetus inside.

There are continuing insights into Susie's personality and it's noted that she was raped twice, and that both had covered Susie's face. John notes that this kind of treatment would "make a bear out of anyone." It will take years for Susie to get over her need to hide in the bear costume.

Win has seemed to falter after the death of Mary and Egg and the children have noticed this difference in him. After he loses his sight, he is somehow more determined and seems more ready and able to take command of the situation. The children have noted that they are happier to have their father feeling dreamy than feeling guilty, but now seem grateful to have him willing to take charge of the situation. Lilly is also changing quickly. With the publication of her first book, she seems immediately to feel the pressure of the requirement to write another and to have it be better than the first. This pressure will become a serious problem for Lilly, but it could be that she's never been satisfied with herself because of her size.





# Being In Love with Franny; Dealing with Chipper Dove

## Being In Love with Franny; Dealing with Chipper Dove Summary

The family returns to the United States, though none wants to go back to Dairy, New Hampshire. They go instead to New York and stay in the Stanhope. Frank later gets an apartment of his own and launches his business as an agent for an array of talents. John and Win move in with Frank while Franny remains at the Stanhope, Lilly having expressed her preference to remain in the hotel. As time passes, the sexual tension between Franny and John continues to grow until the day Franny tells John that it's the right time. John rushes to the hotel with Franny saying that Lilly and Frank are out for a "literary lunch" and will be gone for hours. They have sex and Franny continues to insist that they make love yet again. When Lilly returns, Franny tells her to go away again. Lilly does so but returns a few hours later, only to have Franny tell her to go away again. When John says that he's too sore to continue, Franny tells him that this will be the only time they are together sexually, and that they must have sex again. When they finally stop, both are barely able to walk.

They order room service and are sharing a meal when Lilly returns again. Franny tells Lilly that she'd written an entire novel that day, that it was a project she'd had to undertake, and that she'd thrown it all away. John notes that he leaves "a wounded man." He takes a taxi part way but feels able to walk a portion of the distance. In the middle of the street near his apartment, he encounters Chip Dove with a young girl. John is angry at having encountered Chip on this particular night. When Chip tries to leave, John picks him up, holds him for a second then sets him back down. Chip asks about Franny and John tells him where Franny is living, adding that the family owns the Stanhope hotel now though he admits that he doesn't know why he'd told that lie. Chip says he wants to contact Franny to tell her that he's sorry.

At home later, Lilly calls John, saying that Chip has called Franny and that she's afraid. Franny is an emotional wreck, mentally figuring out ways to remain inside rather than to ever again go out and risk facing Chip. Susie also responds to Franny's crisis and eventually interrupts to say that the family has to let Franny decide what to do. Franny says that she wants to kill Chip. As the emotions settle slightly, Frank says that Chip should be frightened the same way Franny is frightened. As the conversation on this matter continues, the group decides that Lilly will write a "script" for the scene with the ultimate goal of scaring Chip as badly as he'd scared Franny. Susie has been taking acting lessons and has roommates who are also aspiring actresses, and the three will be part of the plan with Susie acting the part of the bear.

After the arrangements are made, Franny returns Chip's call and tells him that she really wants to see him. They then wait for his arrival. When he walks in the door, Franny



invites him in but her role is then done, according to Lilly's script. John is lifting weights when Chip arrives and calmly announces that they have planned to rape Chip. Frank is jumping on the bed, which can be seen from the living room, and screams that he isn't going to be the one to rape Chip. After eliminating others in the room from the list of possibilities, he's told that the bear is going to rape him. Franny begins massaging the bear in a place where the genitals would be and the bear appears to become aroused. The bear, of course, is Susie and Chip begins to be afraid. Lilly comes in, screaming that they can't continue to allow the bear to rape people. Though Franny had been given no additional lines in this play, Franny interrupts and tells Chip to leave. They all notice that he has wet his pants as he stumbles from the room.

## **Being In Love with Franny; Dealing with Chipper Dove Analysis**

It seems that almost everyone is aware of the sexual tension between Franny and John. Lilly tells them at one point that they will have to deal with the situation eventually. Susie also mentions the situation, saying that they have something dangerous between them.

When Chip contacts Franny and she becomes so frightened, her siblings also falter. Even before Mary's death, Franny had been an important guide for the family, and Franny's importance increased after the death of their mother. It's not clear what John was thinking when he told Chip how to find Franny. Win isn't told about Chip contacting Franny, but is told that she isn't feeling well.

John notes that their revenge on Chip isn't nearly as horrible as what Chip did to Franny, but adds that the revenge really couldn't be that horrible without being "too much." While he doesn't elaborate, it seems that John knows the continued toll the rape has had on Franny for all the years since it had occurred.

Frank has continued to tell Win that he can do whatever he wants and Win continues to be undecided about what he wants for a long-term goal. In his forties, he is still young enough to have dreams but doesn't seem to have a clear-cut idea of what his next move should be.



# The King of Mice Syndrome

## The King of Mice Syndrome Summary

As Christmas approaches, Win decides that he wants a seeing eye dog and John says that he'll make the arrangements. Though the children are usually available to take Win wherever he wants, he says that he wants the dog for companionship as well as for his aid in helping Win maneuver. Win then says that he knows what he wants to do next - another hotel. He wants to buy the Arbuthnot-By-The-Sea and promises that if he can't make a success of this hotel, he will never try it again. The children agree to make it happen and Frank and John drive to Maine to see the property. They discover that the owner is elderly and lives in California. The man refuses to sell the property without meeting the new owners and flies John and Frank, at his expense, to California. There, he goes through an incredible series of questions in an effort to assure himself that the new owners aren't Jewish. John and Frank don't cooperate, much to the amusement of his attorney who is apparently Jewish.

John notes that the children agree to Win's plan for another hotel and that John plans to live with Win, providing care as necessary. However, John also has another plan - to fool his father. The plan is to convince Win that the hotel is operating but to never open it to guests. For fifteen years after they buy the hotel, Win believes the stories John concocts about the operation of the business.

Win and John move into the new hotel. Frank remains in New York, living in his apartment while Lilly lives at the Stanhope. Lilly's book, "Trying to Grow," is a huge hit, followed by a movie of the same name. Franny plays herself and is an instant success as an actress. Lilly produces another book but it is not nearly the success of the first. One night she calls Frank but gets his answering machine. When he listens to the messages later that night, he hears Lilly's voice and realizes that she's told him good-bye. He rushes to the Stanhope but finds that she's dead on the street.

One night Susie arrives at the new hotel, dressed in the bear suit. John encourages her to remove the suit and they make love. They soon marry as Susie mans a rape crisis center housed partly in the hotel. Win encounters the young rape victims and, unable to see them, responds to their voices. Susie says that Win is, in many ways, her best counselor, though Win seems to believe them to all be guests of the hotel and refers to them as such. John and Susie marry and he begins trying to convince her to have a child, but she fears that any child of hers will be ugly and refuses. Meanwhile, Franny and Junior Jones have married and Franny accidentally becomes pregnant. Franny is busy with her acting career and Junior has a legal firm called the Black Arm of the Law. They believe themselves too busy to devote themselves to a child and ask John and Susie to raise it. John and Susie agree.

## The King of Mice Syndrome Analysis

John goes to some extremes with his explanations of how the new hotel is operating. He tells his father that the hotel is very exclusive and caters to only a few exclusive guests. John also says that the hotel does such a good business during the summer that there's no need to be open or to accept guests in the off-season. Win seems to accept all this, especially when he occasionally hears voices of those in the neighborhood or those visiting the beach. In fact, only the main building is restored after the Berry family purchases the property. The rest of the buildings are destroyed.

It's noted that Frank has been very discreet with his sexual preferences throughout the years, including his teen years in Vienna. Back in New York, Frank visits a bar often, but there seems a lack of any kind of steady relationship.

John notes that Win has only one demand with regard to his seeing eye dog - that it have no resemblance to Sorrow. They choose a German Shepherd for the first and John says that the dog's only bad quality is that it eats out of Win's lap at the table, but that Win encourages that action so it's really Win's bad habit as much as the dog's. Over the coming years, there are three additional dogs. Win names one of them Fred because there's a near-deaf handyman at the hotel who answers each time they call out. Win names the dog Fred with a warped sense of humor at the fact that he'll at least be calling Fred's name when the handyman answers. The fourth arrives soon after Lilly's death and with no one in the mood to think up a name, he calls it only "Four."



# Characters

## John Berry

John is the middle of five children, the son of Mary and Win Berry. The story is presented from John's perspective. John's father is seldom at home during his early childhood, a fact that he seems to gloss over as if it does bother him but he tries not to allow it to do so. The same seems to be true of the accident that takes the life of his mother, Mary Berry. John seems ambivalent about most things until Franny, the object of his adoration, is raped.

The feeling of inadequacy is the catalyst for a regular workout routine in John's life. John begins lifting weights and running. With a diet recommended by his grandfather, Coach Bob, John gains some weight before leveling off. John kills one of the terrorists with his bare hands and vows after that to never again put that much emphasis on his exercising. John spends his later life caring for his father and pulls off the ultimate scam by convincing his father that they live in an operating hotel. John marries Susie.

## Franny Berry

Franny is the second oldest of the Berry children and the oldest girl. Franny decides that she will become the person who mothers the children upon the death of their mother. After the deaths of Franny and Egg, John and some of the other children want to return to the United States, but they all look to Franny as the person who will decide whether they return or stay in Vienna. Franny says that she thinks they should give Vienna a chance, and the family agrees without additional comment.

Franny is raped as a teenager, and though she claims to have gotten past it, she really doesn't until she and her family and friends frighten her rapist. Franny eventually marries Junior Jones and both remain very busy with their lives, Franny as an actress. When Franny becomes pregnant, she agrees to have the baby, arranging with John that he and Susie will raise it.

## Win Berry

Win is the father of Frank, Franny, John, Lilly and Egg and the husband of Mary. Win is a self-proclaimed dreamer and it's his idea to open the Hotel New Hampshire, the second in Vienna and the third in Maine. Win goes blind in his forties helping thwart a terrorist attack.



## Robert Berry

Also called Coach Bob or Iowa Bob, Robert Berry is the father of Win and grandfather of the five Berry children and coach of the Dairy School's football team. Coach Bob moves in with the family when they start the Hotel New Hampshire and there grows very close to John when he begins his exercise routine.

## Frank Berry

Frank is the oldest of the five Berry children and the one who eventually reveals that he is homosexual. Frank has several interesting quirks, including that he enjoys wearing uniforms. He plays the cymbals in the band as an opportunity to wear a uniform. He also volunteers to be the "doorman" for the hotels operated by the family. Frank becomes the family's agent and takes on that role for an array of others, apparently ranging from athletes to authors.

## Lilly Berry

The fourth of the Berry children, Lilly is very small, having been tentatively diagnosed as having a form of dwarfism. In some ways Lilly seems to accept her size but in other ways seems to constantly battle her small stature. Lilly eventually earns a degree in literature and writes a book because writing is her euphemism for "growing." Lilly's first book is an overwhelming success, but her second is not. Lilly commits suicide by throwing herself from a hotel window.

## Egg Berry

Egg is the youngest of the Berry children, having been named Egg because of John's insistence that the baby still growing in his mother's womb is an egg. Egg seems to be going deaf before the family's move to Vienna. Egg remains behind to travel to Vienna with his mother and the two perish in an airplane crash.

## Mary Berry

Mary is the wife of Win and the mother of Frank, Franny, John, Lilly and Egg. Mary is an accepting woman who agrees to go with her husband's ideas to open a hotel from an abandoned school and then to go to Vienna. Mary dies in a plane crash with Egg on their way to Vienna.

## Freud

The man known as Freud is actually a Jew with an "unpronounceable name" who first meets Win and Mary at the resort in Maine where the three are working the summer



season. Freud returns to Germany where he's arrested and held in a death camp. Though he loses his sight in that camp, he owns the second Hotel New Hampshire in Vienna. He dies in a bomb explosion.

## Susie

Known first to the Berry family as Susie the Bear, Susie is a young woman who has a face badly scarred from acne and who lives in Vienna with Freud. Susie is convincing as a bear and is a rape victim. Susie seems to spend a great deal of time trying to deal with her own feelings of inadequacy, based mostly on her appearance. Susie eventually runs a rape crisis center and marries John.

## Junior Jones

A football player at the Dairy school, Junior is the one leading the other young black men to find Franny's rapists. Junior goes on to play professional football until a knee injury puts him out of the game. He then goes to law school and begins a firm called "Black Arm of the Law." He marries Franny.

## Chip Dove

Chip is a football player at the school in Dairy New Hampshire and seems to have a sexual attraction for Franny which seems to be returned. Chip and several fellow football players catch Franny and John in a wooded area and three of them rape Franny. Years later, Chip encounters John and learns that Franny is living in New York. When he contacts her, Franny is first frightened of him then angry, prompting Franny's friends to gather with plans to frighten Chip as he has frightened Franny.



## **Objects/Places**

### **The Dairy School**

Where Win attends, Coach Bob coaches football, and where the Berry children attend.

### **Dairy, New Hampshire**

The town where the Berry family grows up.

### **The Thompson Female Seminary**

The school where Mary attends, this is the building that becomes the first Hotel New Hampshire.

### **The Hotel New Hampshire**

The name of the first hotel owned by Win and Mary Berry, this hotel was housed in a former girls' school.

### **Arbuthnot-By-The-Sea**

The name of the resort hotel where Win and Mary work the summer after high school and where they fall in love, this is also the hotel Win buys after the family's return from Vienna.

### **Vienna**

Where Freud owns a hotel when he invites the Berry family to come help him.

### **The Second Hotel New Hampshire**

The name Win comes up with for the hotel owned by Freud in Vienna.

### **New York**

Where the Berry family lives after leaving Vienna.





## **The Stanhope**

The name of the hotel where Lilly lives after the family's return to New York from Vienna. This is also the hotel where Lilly commits suicide.

## **Maine**

Where Win and John live in the resort hotel.

## Social Sensitivity

Like *The World According to Garp* (1978), although with less violence, *The Hotel New Hampshire* mirrors contemporary concerns about rape and sexual identity. John Berry, the narrator, is the middle child of five in a family that establishes and lives in a series of hotels — in New Hampshire, Vienna, and Maine — suggesting the rootlessness of modern life. John's sister Franny is raped as a young girl, and the rage Irving feels about this crime, which he has called "the most violent assault on the body and the head that can happen simultaneously," is objectified in the character of Junior Jones, a young black football player who catches and punishes the rapists and eventually marries Franny. The rape has left its scars, however, and Franny denies her sexuality entirely until a brief incestuous relationship with her brother John restores her self-esteem. Homosexuality is also an issue in the novel.

The oldest brother Frank is a homosexual who is comfortable with his sexual preference, but Susie, a young woman whom the Berrys meet at the second Hotel New Hampshire in Vienna, uses homosexuality — and the bear suit she wears — to escape from the fact that she, like Franny, has been raped. Ironically, Susie ends up running a rape crisis center. As in his other novels, Irving here seems to posit human tolerance and understanding as the only palliative for the problem of violence in contemporary society.

## Techniques

The structure of *The Hotel New Hampshire* is in many ways like that of the traditional novel that chronicles the life of a family over a considerable time.

The first-person narrator alternates scenes of interaction with passages summarizing intervening periods. The narrator also, as in the novels of Fielding and Sterne, directly addresses the reader, heightening the sense that the story is an invention, an artifice, rather than reality. Like the traditional novel, *The Hotel New Hampshire* depends heavily on coincidence: On his way home from making love to his sister Franny, John Berry encounters the instigator of her rape, Chipper Dove, and is able to set the scene for his humiliation; the third *Hotel New Hampshire* is the hotel in Maine where Win Berry and Mary Bates met in 1920. Providing unity and resonance to the novel are two recurring statements. The first, provided by Win Berry's father, Iowa Bob, is "Keep passing the open windows" — a talisman against despair that is effective for all except Lilly. The second refrain, "Sorrow floats," originates in the plane crash that kills Mary and Egg: Sorrow, the family dog, has been stuffed after his death and is traveling to Vienna on the same plane; a pilot reports seeing the dog floating near the wreckage of the crash, and the phrase becomes part of the family's private language and a reminder of the inevitability of sadness in human life.



# Themes

## The Importance of Family

The members of the Barry family are each important to the others in various ways and their importance to each other is at the heart of the story. It could be argued that Franny and John are closer than are the others, but the two of them are also willing and ready to care for the others when the need arises. The truth of this can be seen when they encounter the football players harassing Frank and go to his rescue. The point at which the group is willing to help Franny get revenge on Chip Dove is another example of this, though it takes Susie to remind them that they should do whatever Franny wants rather than trying to take matters into their own hands. Other examples of the importance of family is seen in John's willingness to give up whatever dreams he might have had for himself in order to live with his father in a hotel that is Win's dream and in Franny's willingness to give birth to a child for John to raise.

## Dreams

It seems that throughout the story, Win is the person who has the most dreams and that the family is willing to move with him toward the fulfillment of those dreams. The first of these is seen when Win is accepted to Harvard and holds tight to the dream of finishing school. While owning a bear doesn't seem to be a dream he's given much thought to, Win's willingness to travel with a performing bear - and Mary's willingness to allow him to do so - are evidence that both are willing to work at making Win's dreams come true. Win's next dreams, those of owning a hotel, are also seen through to fulfillment with the apparent cooperation of the family, though there are sometimes concerns about their next move. It's not only Win who has dreams he wants to see fulfilled. Lilly has a dream that she'll "grow," though her lack of physical growth seems to be less of a concern once she begins writing. Her dream of being a published writer occurs fairly quickly. John comes to have a great desire to have a child of his own and it's Franny who finally fulfills that dream, an example of the dreams of the various characters and of the closeness of the family members.

## Self Image

The self image of the various characters becomes a vital part of the story, though this theme doesn't fully emerge until fairly late in the story. It can be argued that Susie - acting in her role as a bear - is the most immediate example of this theme. Susie believes herself to be ugly and is fully willing to hide in the bear costume, seeming comfortable only when others cannot see her face. Though there are acne scars, Susie also seems to be still dealing with the effects of her own rape and this fact will lead her to fulfill her dream of a rape crisis center. Susie continues to deal with her lack of self-esteem through the end of the story, though she seems to be on the road to recovery



with John's love and kindness. John himself is a study in the lack of self-esteem, a result of having been unable to stop Franny's rape. John supports his decision to run for help rather than going to Franny's rescue by saying that the boys would simply have beaten him up and then raped Franny anyway, but he seems to have doubts on this point. After the rape, John begins an exercise and weight lifting regimen that results in him becoming much faster and stronger. Though he loses some of his feelings of helplessness, his self-esteem will not grow for some time.

## Significant Topics

A major theme in *The Hotel New Hampshire*, as is the case in most of Irving's novels, is illusion versus reality. Some critics have pointed to the fairy-tale quality of the novel, and certainly the tame bear, the dog named Sorrow, who keeps reappearing in different forms, and the almost mystically diminutive stature of Lilly, the younger daughter, contribute to this sense of fantasy. But the concept of reality as illusory occurs on a deeper thematic level as well. John Berry says early in the novel, "The first of my father's illusions was that bears could survive the life lived by human beings, and the second was that human beings could survive a life led in hotels." The first Hotel New Hampshire is actually a converted school; the second is actually a haven for prostitutes and political terrorists; the third is not a hotel at all — but by this time the man of illusions, Win Berry, is blind, so all is illusion to him. Susie-the-bear is not a bear after all. And in the work of John Irving, one is always aware that this is, after all, a story: in this case a story told by the narrator, John Berry, who says near the end of the novel, "We dream on and on: the best hotel, the perfect family, the resort life. And our dreams escape us almost as vividly as we can imagine them." This echo of the ending of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) seems deliberate, for Irving has created characters who continually recreate their own lives.

# Style

## Point of View

The story is written in first person perspective from John Berry's point of view. The perspective is limited to those things John knows and is willing to share and this is sometimes very limited. Some aspects of the story are skimmed over or eliminated almost altogether. For example, there are no details of how the family gets through Christmas Day following Coach Bob's death. It's noted that he dies and the story picks up again on the following week with a New Year's party. The perspective is limited to only what John knows, but is further limited by what John chooses to share. For example, the entire week following Coach Bob's death is a blank, with John ending one section at the point when Bob dies in John's arms and picks up a week later. There's no mention of how the family gets through the Christmas season.

## Setting

The story has several distinct physical settings and ranged from the 1950s and later. The settings include Dairy, New Hampshire, where Win and Mary grow up. In this setting, there are some fairly detailed descriptions, including that of the Thompson Female Seminary which becomes the first Hotel New Hampshire and is home to the Berry family for a short period of time. The home owned by Mary's family is also described to some degree when that house becomes home to the Berry family. The family then moves to Vienna and there are some descriptions of the people and places there, including the hotel that becomes the second Hotel New Hampshire and the prostitutes and radicals that frequent the hotel. The family then moves to New York and that setting is described to a lesser degree, including the Stanhope hotel where the family remains upon their arrival and where Lilly lives until her death. There is an additional description of some of the streets and the surrounding area. After some time, John and Win move to Maine where the family has purchased a resort hotel - the same hotel where Win and Mary met and fell in love as teenagers.

## Language and Meaning

The story is written in a fairly straightforward style. The tone is fairly hopeful though there are points of despair and hopelessness that recur on a regular basis. The majority of these times of hopelessness are usually presented through foreshadowing. For example, John makes a comment about his father's impending blindness, though that Win is blinded by a blast could not possibly have been foreseen. This foreshadowing is typical of the story and makes the reader aware that there's some monumental event looming. The same happens with Mary's death. John dreams of her death prior to the event, which leads the reader to wonder if that event could be forthcoming. Additionally, John explains to Egg that some parents won't both take the same plane, apparently



another point of foreshadowing of Mary's death. It should be noted that there are various sexual scenes, including homosexual scenes, and an instance of incest that some readers may find disturbing. There are foreign names and words used while the family is in Viennam but these are not overly vital to the ongoing understanding of the story.

## Structure

The book is divided into twelve chapters, ranging from about twenty pages to more than forty. The chapters are named and the names provide an insight into the contents of that chapter. The story is presented roughly in chronologically order with occasional lapses. For example, there is a chapter devoted to the family's decision to move to Vienna and their preparations for the move and Win and Mary's decision to travel on two separate planes. As that chapter comes to a close, it's revealed that the plane on which Mary and Egg are traveling crashes into the ocean. The following chapter backs up to the point of John's arrival in Vienna, with the notation that their first impression of their new home isn't colored by the loss of their mother because the plane doesn't crash until the day after their arrival. These occasional lapses seem to be aimed at building suspense and are effective on this point. Another important aspect of the story is the handling of the passage of time. For example, the older three children of the family begin school in Dairy, and it's not really clear how much time passes, though it must have been at least three years. In other aspects, the handling of time is clearer, such as the fact that it's clearly declared that seven years pass while the family lives in Vienna.



## Quotes

"You can see why we children asked so many questions. It is a vague story, the kind parents prefer to tell." *The Bear Called State O' Maine*, p.13

"Coach Bob was angry with my father, again - for the same old thing, it seemed: for never being satisfied, as Bob put it, for living in the future. For always making plans for next year instead of just living, moment by moment." *The First Hotel New Hampshire*, p. 55

"But the first of my father's illusions was that bears could survive the life lived by human beings, and the second was that human beings could survive a life led in hotels." *The First Hotel New Hampshire*, p. 65

"I was fourteen. In my inexpert years (and I would always be inexpert on the subject of rape), I imagined that one would touch a person who had been raped a little differently, or a little less; or that one would not touch her at all." *Father Hears from Freud*, p. 151

"Coach Bob said that the restoration of the Thompson Female Seminary was 'a task akin to raping a rhinoceros.' It took a little longer than my father had expected." *Iowa Bob's Winning Season*, p. 67

"Whether Vienna was more sophisticated, or less - whether Franny had a room with barbells or a room with lace - we were inhabitants of one Hotel New Hampshire after another." *Sorrow Strikes Again*, p. 183

"The knowledge of what led the rescue crew to the bodies came as no surprise to my surviving family. We had learned this fact of Sorrow, previously, from Frank: Sorrow floats." *Sorrow Strikes Again*, p. 216

"'People are like that,' Iowa Bob would have said. 'They need to make their own worst experiences universal. It gives them a kind of support.'" *Sorrow Floats*, p. 225

"It was as if the power of his daydreaming was so vivid that he felt compelled to simply act out whatever future he imagined - and we were being asked to tolerate his absence from reality, and maybe his absence from our lives, for awhile. That is what 'pure love' is: the future." *Sorrow Floats*, p. 253

"Our father seemed to have lost his character when our mother was lost to him. In seven years, I believe, he grew to be more of a presence and less of a person - for us children. He was affectionate; he could even be sentimental. But he seemed as lost to us (as a father) as Mother and Egg, and I think we sensed that he would need to endure some more concrete suffering before he would gain his character back - before he could actually become a character again; in the way that Egg had been a character, in the way that Iowa Bob had been one." *The Second Hotel New Hampshire*, p. 287





"But then I realized that no one in the Sacher was going to be snotty to us, because I saw for the first time what my father really looked like. He looked like an eccentric millionaire; he looked like the richest man in the world, but a man who didn't give a damn." *A Night at the Opera: Schlogobers and Blood*, p. 311

"He was our hero again; he was our father - at last. He was blind, but he was in charge." *A Night at the Opera: Schlogobers and Blood*, p. 337

"Susie was all business; Susie was the ever-essential friend, the one who'll be a bear for you when the going gets rough." *Being in Love with Franny; Dealing with Chipper Dove*, p. 361

"Whatever we had done, it would never be as awful as what he had done to Franny - and if it had been as awful, it would have been too much." *Being in Love with Franny; Dealing with Chipper Dove*, p. 375

# Adaptations

In 1984, *The Hotel New Hampshire* became a film directed by Tony Richardson and featuring Beau Bridges as Win Berry, Jodie Foster as Franny, and Rob Lowe as John. Critics and viewers have generally agreed that it is not as successful an adaptation of an Irving novel as is the film version of *The World According to Garp*.



## Key Questions

Discussions of *The Hotel New Hampshire* are likely to degenerate into arguments about the book's sexual content.

But for those who can push beyond the graphic sexuality, the novel can generate insights into the connection between violence and sexuality, the need for illusion, the definition of normality, and the response to evil.

1. How does birth order shape each of the Berry children's responses to their various moves and to their lives in various Hotels New Hampshire?
2. Which of the characters do you identify with the most? The least? How are you like and unlike these characters?
3. What connections can you draw between John Irving and John Berry?
4. How well does Irving, the male novelist, understand issues relating to rape?
5. What is the connection between rape and incest?
6. In what ways do Frank's and Susie's homosexuality differ? Is homosexuality learned or inherited?
7. This is a novel filled with props.  
Why the bears? The dog Sorrow? The dressmaker's dummy? The weights?
8. Do you find the novel funny?  
What kind of humor is this, anyway?
9. What perspective does the novel offer on the legacy of World War II?  
How does war represent the incarnation of evil?
10. What is the significance of the refrain "Keep passing the open windows"?



## Topics for Discussion

List the members of the Berry family and their relationships. How does each interact with the others? What aspects of their personalities impact their relationships?

Who is Susie? Who is Freud? What is the significance of Susie's role as a "bear?" Why does the presence of a bear at the hotel owned by Freud seem important to Win?

List three episodes of foreshadowing in this story and their outcomes. Why is foreshadowing important in a story?

What is the relationship between Franny and Susie? Between Susie and John? Between John and Franny? How are these relationships resolved?

What is the event that happens on Halloween night on the Dairy school campus? How does this event impact the various members of the Barry family over the years?

What is it that prompts Lilly to write? What does this have to do with the title of her first book? What opportunity does Lilly's book provide for the family? How does Lilly's life end?

What is the Arbuthnot-By-The-Sea? What is the role this place plays in the lives of the Barry family?

What is Sorrow? Four? Earl? How do these impact the lives of the Barry family?

## Literary Precedents

Although there are no direct models for *The Hotel New Hampshire*, the novel contains references to and echoes of other works of literature. In addition to using techniques associated with the traditional English novel, Irving makes reference to the works of Virginia Woolf, quotes extensively from the poetry of Donald Justice (Lilly's favorite poet), and casts over the entire novel the aura of dream and illusion that characterizes *The Great Gatsby*. The Berrys, like Jay Gatz, keep creating not only hotels, but also their own lives, and the ending of Fitzgerald's novel is Lilly's favorite passage in literature, the model for excellence that she finally despairs of reaching. At the end of the novel, John Berry says, "I hope this is a proper ending for you, Mother — and for you, Egg. It is an ending conscious of the manner of your favorite ending, Lilly — the one you never grew big enough to write."

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