

Last Orders Study Guide

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Plot Summary

A group of friends is mourning their friend Jack's death at the pub. Ray is divorced and a somewhat successful gambler, who had been dubbed "lucky" by Jack. Ray buys Lenny a drink, and they talk about why Jack's wife Amy isn't joining them. Amy wants Ray to fulfill Jack's wishes to have his ashes scattered into the ocean at Margate. Vic, the undertaker, shows up with Jack's ashes in a box. The men look over the remains in amazement and ponder life, death and good times. Jack's son Vince arrives in a Mercedes. The guys pile in and head out for Margate.

Vince pilots the Mercedes through Blackheath. The topics of discussion vary. Amy has decided to visit her daughter, June, at the hospital. Lenny and Vince are angry with her for not accompanying them. Ray sticks up for Amy, saying she wanted Jack's friends to do the deed. There are added bits of detail. Jack really wanted to be a doctor instead of a butcher, it turns out. Vince angered him, because he didn't want to follow in his father's footsteps. He wanted to get away from the family business.

Vince remembers being afraid to touch his dying father in the hospital. Jack talked a lot about his good friend Ray and asked Vince for a considerable sum of money as a favor. Ray had a background in the scrap metal business, but had moved into insurance at his father's insistence. Carol was actually his third choice for wife (after Amy and Daisy.)

Vince fought against his father's insistence that he follow on as a butcher. At one point, he actually signed up to the Foreign Legion just to escape the pressure for a few years. Jack was furious and felt cheated and betrayed. A lot of the resentment from Vince came from the fact that he knew he was an orphan whose parents were killed in WWII. Vince went through several years being angry after he learned the truth at a young age. Vince also became friendly with Lenny's daughter, Sally. After returning from the army, he started up his own automotive business to everyone's astonishment. His father got more resentful over time.

Ray thinks about how he met and divorced his wife, Carol. He had actually been in love with her older sister, but Carol had been the only one to show any interest. Much later, his daughter Susie told him she was leaving with her boyfriend for Australia. Ray was angry, but found himself siding with his daughter, when Carol flew into a rage. He later placed a winning bet and gave the proceeds to Susie for plane fare. Ray realized that he had neglected his wife as far as her love of traveling went. He bought a camper van to try and accommodate her, but she left him anyway.

Vince had had an infatuation with Lenny's daughter, Sally that lasted through most of his childhood. When he returned from the military, he asked Lenny if he could date her and Lenny consented. When Vince got Sally pregnant and left her, Lenny was furious. He convinced Sally to abort the child, and she resented him for it. Lenny's grudge against Vince continued from that point on. Vince went on to start Dodd's Motors at Ray's old scrap yard. He worked out an arrangement to pay off Ray if he succeeded, which he soon did. Ray later regretted selling his scrap yard so cheaply to Vince. He thought



about the early days, when he first met Jack in the African desert. He received his nickname "Lucky" from Jack in WWII.

Vic remembered how he took over the family business of undertaking and learned to love it. He had a respect for people and for what he did that Jack never would have understood. Jack also took over his family business, but felt trapped, like he never had a choice in the matter. There came a day when Jack closed up his butcher's shop for the day and came over to tell Vic he was actually closing for good. He explained that he was having financial problems and Amy didn't know.

The men visit a naval landmark where they walk up a large hill that exhausts some of the older men. After getting back in the car, Vince takes a detour to a place called Wick's Farm. He gets out with Jack's ashes; the rest of the group has no idea why they are there or what is happening. Only Lenny suspects that something is wrong. In reality, Vince is taking Jack back to the place where his parents met - but only he knows this. When he tries to open the jar to scatter Jack's ashes, Lenny attacks him. They fight for several minutes while the others watch in astonishment. At first, Lenny gets several good hits in on Vince and shouts insults, but then Vince gets Lenny in a chokehold and knocks him down. Vince then opens the jar and lets a handful of Jack's ashes go in the wind. He then reseals the jar, and they all walk back to the car.

The group visits Canterbury Cathedral as if nothing had happened. Lenny and Vince appear to be congenial to each other. Then they drive on towards Margate. Ray thinks back to his infatuation with Jack's wife, Amy. Amy had emotionally detached herself from her husband, because he told her that he wanted them both to abandon their retarded daughter. Amy refused. Ray knew that Jack refused to visit his daughter, June in the institution and started giving Amy a ride in his camper van. This soon turned into a short lasting affair that no one else knew of except Vic. Vic had just happened to be at the institution to pick up a body. He saw Ray with Amy and assumed correctly what was going on. He stuck with his instincts as an undertaker, which meant he kept quiet about the affair.

Ray thinks back to Jack's last days in the hospital. He borrowed money from Vince, without telling him what he needed it for and gave it to Ray to bet it on a long shot race for Amy. Ray felt the pressure and had mixed emotions about having the responsibility to pick a winner to safeguard Amy's future. Ray did some research and then abandoned it to go with his gut instinct and won a bet that increased his initial wager by more than thirty times.

The men arrive at the Margate pier as a storm makes the going treacherous. They carry on and walk to the end, where they see remnants of the original jetty where Jack requested his ashes be taken. Ray tells Vince that he has the money and Vince is relieved. They all dip their hands into the jar and scatter Jack's ashes.



Pages 1-16

Pages 1-16 Summary

Ray is at the pub talking to the bartender, Bernie. He sips at his pint and talks about them not seeing the last of their longtime friend, Jack. Lenny shows up and Ray quickly buys him a drink. Jack's funeral service has just ended, and they make nervous small talk. Lenny is upset that Jack's wife Amy isn't joining the regulars at the pub. Vic, the undertaker, arrives with a small, cardboard box under his arm. He puts it on the counter and the others incredulously gather around to read the card on the side, "Jack Arthur Dodds." Vic orders a whiskey and answers questions about the remains of their friend. He opens the box and pulls out a plastic jar, which the others check for weight and then shake their heads. They wonder if it really is Jack, the butcher. Is it Jack, their old friend? It is both strange and comforting that he worked most of his life across the street from his friend Vic, the undertaker.

Ray thinks of an earlier time at the pub, the Coach and Horses when he was drinking with Jack, Lenny, and Vince. The year was 1984, the hundredth anniversary of the establishment, and it specifically was Vince's birthday. The men ogled the waitress in her tight skirt. At forty, Vince was the "kid" of the group. He was a generation younger than the rest. They all made small talk about the name of the pub. Vince's wife, Mandy, soon came to take him home. Jack made her give him a kiss and wished his son happy birthday. The guys stuck around until last call and continued to speculate on the name origins of their favorite eatery.

Vic packs up the jar with Jack's remains but has trouble getting it back in the box. Bernie realizes what is in the jar and is upset at what was just sitting on his bar. He accepts Vic's offer of a scotch and makes all the drinks on the house. A surreal thought goes around the room - Jack the person was sitting in the very same bar only six weeks before. The men raise a toast to Jack and then to Vic for performing the service. It's late morning and more regular patrons start coming in. Vince pulls up in a Mercedes.

Ray thinks of a discussion he had with Amy just after Jack's death. They had just reviewed Jack's last wishes. He wanted to be cremated and his ashes thrown off Margate Pier. They talked while looking over Jack's hospital possessions and gazed at Big Ben in the distance. Amy asked Ray to fulfill Jack's wishes, because she couldn't bear to. Ray agreed to talk to Vince about it.

Jack and Amy had been in the midst of making plans to retire when he had come down with stomach cancer. She spoke of their now ill-fated bungalow in Margate. It was never meant to be. They looked over the river Thames a final time and Ray confirmed that Amy didn't want to accompany the men in fulfilling Jack's final request. She confided in him that they weren't financially able to move to Margate, anyway.



Pages 1-16 Analysis

Tension between Vince and Jack is apparent from the start. There is some foreboding of the real "story" between the two. The author hints that Jack had been the group leader and his loss will create a rift between the survivors. The situation is very bizarre; some don't really believe that the ashes in the container are their friend.

"Where is Jack?" is a theme that is repeated many times in the story by many different characters. The jar/box containing Jack's ashes is studied and scrutinized. Is it really Jack the person, or is Jack gone? Are the contents of the jar all that's left of the good friend of many years, or is it just the discarded material left over after the departure of Jack Dodd's soul? It definitely opens up questions of life after death, which makes everyone in the group wonder.



Pages 17-28

Pages 17-28 Summary

The men pile into the Mercedes with "Jack" and head towards the coast. Vince is proud and brags that Jack deserves the best. He actually borrowed the car from his own showroom. Ray and Lenny sit in the back seat; Vince and Vic are in front. Vince asks Vic about driving a hearse as he speeds down Old Kent Road. The sun comes out, and they all feel good. It's a real journey for the old men. They are fulfilling Jack's "last orders."

Amy wants Jack's final journey to be with "the boys." She thinks of good times with Jack and realizes that he got it wrong. It wasn't Margate pier, but the jetty where he really had wanted his ashes scattered. She is happy not to be going to perform the deed.

Vic, Lenny, and Vince speak of their wives good wishes. They are Pam, Joan, and Mandy respectively. Ray stays quiet, thinking of his ex-wife Carol. Traffic snarls at New Cross and the car slows. They theorize about fitting the whole group in the car if they had all wanted to come along. Lenny riles Vince that his "super car" still can't avoid traffic. It is frustrating, pedestrians on the sidewalk are moving ahead faster now. Lenny continues to goad Vince.

Vince is frustrated that the flashy car, a 380 S-Class, is stalled in traffic. He thinks that hopefully Jack appreciates his final ride. There was a conversation he had with Jack at the pub. Vince had just become a new father and was getting ready to leave when Jack asked him for some money. He knew Jack was having financial troubles and handed the five-pound note over reluctantly. They argued about the fact that Jack was trapped as a butcher and Vince had chosen to go another way. He thinks of a different time, to a visit with Jack in the hospital, when he first knew about the condition of Jack's stomach and wished it was as easy as a car's motor to repair.

Ray reminisces about a prior conversation with Jack, when he was verbally abused for his choice of an office life. Ray had been working as an insurance clerk and Jack wanted him to live a "real" life. Ray's marriage with Carol was failing, and he visited Jack in Smithfield, the true center of the city in his opinion. He also remembered talking to Jack's father, Ronnie Dodds about the meat shop and Jack's "inheritance" in taking over the trade. Ronnie confided that Jack really wanted to be a doctor as a young man.

Pages 17-28 Analysis

There is a strong assertion that Jack never really had a choice in taking over his father's butcher shop. It becomes known that he did have aspirations of being a doctor, but he did his duty and spent his whole life carrying on the family name. This theme of fate is to be repeated time and time again during the story. Some characters accept their fate happily, some unhappily, and some dodge their fate altogether. There is some question



that there is a rift between Jack and his adoptive son, Vince because Vince "escaped" the meat trade. The first characterization of Jack as the dutiful son (to Ronnie) and Vince as the rebellious son (to Jack) is made at this point in the story. It is also very ironic that Jack is critical of Ray being a boring office worker, while he is trapped in his life. Jack lives the good life at the bar and is the center attraction, but is miserable in his job.

Vince is the youngest member of the group and doesn't fit in to some extent, because he is Jack's "kid." On the other hand; Jack, Ray, and Vic are peers (who all experienced WWII.) It is somewhat odd because all of the men are "old," but Vince is still considered the youngster, as far as the older men are concerned anyway. Vince is the next generation, a baby boomer who grew up in the sixties.

British slang is prevalent in this book. Most terms, even if not known, can usually be figured out by context. "Fiver" is slang for a five-pound note. At the time the book was written (late 1980's,) a British pound was worth approximately two U.S. dollars. "Quid" is slang for pound.



Pages 29-45

Pages 29-45 Summary

The Mercedes speeds through the town of Blackheath, and the men discuss the fact that Jack's wife Amy isn't with them for the voyage. Lenny and Vince are negative while Ray defends Amy. It's her day to visit her daughter June in the home, that's all there is to it, he says. When Ray is pressed as to why he knows so much, it's Vic who quickly tries to change the subject. Vince changes the subject and questions whether Jack can still see them.

Several weeks earlier, Vince had been talking with Jack at the hospital. Jack was heavily sedated and having difficulty staying awake. During the uncomfortable moments when Jack blacked out, Vince found himself fancying the nurse on duty. Jack called him closer but Vince was hesitant to hold hands with his dying father. He rambled on about Ray being a good guy. The reference to the "gambler" of the group reminded him of his own odds of beating the cancer: ten to one against. Jack had lost a lot of weight; his nickname "Big Jack" seemed a little silly. Out of the blue, he asked Vince for a thousand pounds. He wanted it put in his wallet by the bedside. He offered no explanation. Vince cynically asked if it was just a loan.

Ray thinks of his father, Frank Johnson, and the scrap metal business he had run for years. It had been a good trade, but his father pushed him to get a respectable office job. He was genuinely proud when Ray got his job at the insurance house. Then Ray was drafted into WWII, where he served with Jack Dodds out in the African desert. His dad died during the war of a heart attack and Ray found himself in charge of a business he wasn't particularly interested in upon his return. Ray mostly let the scrap yard run itself while he went back to insurance. He found that he liked a young woman named Daisy Dixon, but he wasn't good at small talk or romance and struck out badly with her. It was ironic that almost ten years later, Daisy's younger sister Carol showed an interest. She asked Ray if he would ever sell the yard.

Lenny reminisces about Sunday trips in Jack's meat van. The usual routine was with Jack, Amy, Vince, Lenny, Lenny's wife Joan, and their daughter Sally. Lenny thought at the time Amy was getting snobby and wanted to put her in her place, but didn't. Sally asked why Vince was getting teased at school, so Lenny explained the story. Jack and Amy's birth daughter, June had been born severely retarded and was in an institution. Vince's real parents (the Pritchett's) had been killed in the war by a flying bomb, so Jack and Amy had taken him in. He was their adoptive son. Soon after that, Vince found out the truth and started taking it out on Sally. He became defiant and decided he didn't want to carry on his "father's" meat business. Jack tried insistently to change Vince's mind over and over again, using guilt and threats. Vince infuriated Jack by signing up for the military for five years just to get away from the pressure. Lenny and Jack talked later about their kids and how they had to make their own way in life, regardless of what



their fathers wanted. Lenny still heard the bitterness in Jack's voice about how Vince "deserted" him by joining the Foreign Legion just when he needed him.

Pages 29-45 Analysis

There is much foreshadowing as to what is to come in this chapter while many details are still not yet understood. A very profound moment occurs when Ray is questioned about knowing so much about Amy and June's visitation schedule. Vic changes the subject, because he knows something the others don't. This piecemeal feeding of important story bits out of sequence forces the reader to constantly reexamine what has happened as they put the pieces together to make sense.

Vince's relationship with his "father" Jack is examined. He is a war orphan who was adopted by Amy while Jack was away in Africa. As a child, he finds out about his past and starts to rebel against everybody. With this, Vince bucks the theme of accepted inheritance as far as careers go. Vince becomes the standout of the group, alienating himself from Jack and Lenny.



Pages 46-73

Pages 46-73 Summary

At Dartford, it is finally clear that the group is getting out of the "metropolis" of Greater London and into the countryside. Lenny asks Vince about his daughter, Kath. There is definite tension and Lenny provokes him. Vince pushes the pedal of the Mercedes down enough for everyone to notice his annoyance. There is pressure in the air as the conversation continues, and then the so-called "Jack in a box" gets handed to Ray. They drive on silently.

Ray thinks back to a time when his daughter Susie and his ex-wife Carol were still together in the same house. Susie was eighteen years old and Ray already had a prestigious reputation as a "good" gambler. He sensed Susie was getting ready to drop something big on him, and he readied himself. He had been married to Carol for fifteen years already. She had fancied a traveling lifestyle, but the only real traveling he had done was in the war.

Susie was talking to him; she wanted to move to Australia with her boyfriend Andy. Ray thought it was ironic that Carol's big sister Daisy had probably been the right one for him. He pondered at how strangely things had worked out. Soon Carol came home and an argument broke out between mother and daughter. Surprisingly, Ray found himself defending Susie. He wagered some money on a long shot horse named Silver Lord at twenty to one, won the bet, and snuck the money to Susie for the plane ticket. Carol was crying and Ray realized that she was jealous of her daughter traveling, not sad because she was leaving. He tried to make it up to her by buying a camper van for traveling. Carol said, "That's the last straw," and left him for good.

Vince remembers the trips to the seaside in the van with Jack, Amy, and Sally. He would sit in the middle, watching Sally's legs and fantasizing. Then Jack said one day that they were all getting bigger, and he made Vince sit in the back by himself. It was clean, but the sweet smell of meat was still unmistakable and made him sick to his stomach. Vince told himself he was doing it bravely for Sally. He never complained, but hated his father and told himself he would never be a butcher. Then, one day, Sally stopped going with them to the beach, and Vince felt guilty as he once again got to sit in front. Jack and Amy showed him where they first met, at Wick's Farm.

Vince came back from his stint in the Army and nonchalantly asked Lenny to go out with his daughter Sally. He bought a '59 Jaguar and fixed it up in Ray's scrap yard. Then he sold it and started again. Soon he progressed to working on two cars and Lenny told Jack that his son wasn't just going through a phase. Jack worried and tried to divert Vince, but his course was already set. Vince didn't think like Jack at all. He was on the way to a success that his adoptive father would never see. It would never be "Dodds and Son," but "Dodd's Motors." Vince thought of steel and iron; he heard motors in his head.



Pages 46-73 Analysis

More information is divulged concerning the tension that exists between Vince and Lenny. There is a plan for Vince to go out with Sally that obviously doesn't end well. The author teases that something bad must have happened between Vince and Sally - because they never married and because Sally's father Lenny doesn't like Vince for some reason. The actual events are hinted at, but discussed later. The author's style of offering these small puzzle pieces out of order to entice the reader is enthralling. When the pieces are put together, a light bulb goes off in the reader's head. This piecemeal style is used over and over again, to great effect. Did the author originally write the story in chronological order, and then break it apart for the flow structure?

Ray symbolizes the lucky guy of the group, with his "good" gambling habits. Still, he doesn't lead a happy life. He is divorced, and his daughter moved halfway around the world, to Australia. For major choices in his life, Ray actually makes wagers and lets them "decide" the outcome of his decisions. This happens when he makes a bet for possible traveling cash for his daughter to relocate. Ray also symbolizes inaction. He puts most things off, especially when it comes to taking care of his wife. He belatedly buys a camper van in the "too little / too late" fashion that puts Carol over the edge when she finally leaves him.

Jack and Amy showed Vince where they first met at Wick's Farm while picking hops as young adults. This event made a great impact on his life, which comes into play with great consequences later in the story. As far as the group expedition to the coast is concerned, Vince is the only one who understands what Wick's Farm really means because Amy isn't there and Jack is dead.



Pages 74-106

Pages 74-106 Summary

They drive through the town of Gravesend. Vic jokes with Vince about buying the car for himself. Vince actually believes him for a minute, before realizing it is a joke. Ray looks around and makes the gruesome assessment of who will "go" next. Out of the old guys (not counting Vince), Vic is the healthiest by far. Ray considers himself in the middle, with Lenny at the bad end of the healthy scale. He figures that Vic Tucker had the benefit of the nice, ocean air he breathed in the Navy. Jack, Lenny, and Ray all enjoyed the desert dust in the Army. When Lenny asks Ray about his daughter in Australia, Ray thinks of his ex-wife, now remarried and living just down the road. The other guys joke about stopping in to see her on the way back. Vince asks Ray what type of fancy vehicle he wants to be carted off to the ocean in when it's his turn. They ask him what's stopping him from visiting Sue "down under." Ray pictures Vince driving his "box" around and resents selling him the yard so inexpensively.

Vic Tucker is thinking about his unique profession. He knows of undertakers who would take advantage of someone in their most difficult hour to make an extra pound. He is proud to know that he is not one of those kinds of undertakers. Vic himself actually feels humbled to see all people, at their best and their worst. He has learned over time to walk the fine line between seriousness and inspiration. He knows he had been "chosen" because his father taught him the trade. He truly feels satisfaction in what he does. Vic runs the show when he does a service.

Vic remembers looking out his window, watching the other shops close up for the day, including Jack's shop, right across the street. Usually, Jack had his routine where he closed up and walked towards the Coach. However, one day, he looked both ways and crossed towards Vic's place. He knew something was going to happen and was right. They made small talk before Jack broke the news that he was planning to sell the shop. Jack tried to downplay the situation, but Vic saw the pain on the strong man's face. He knew that there was something wrong. Jack said that he had only made the decision five minutes before. He explained to Vic how Amy was disappointed, because he had missed June's fiftieth birthday. He had meant to leave work early, but obviously hadn't. Vic was incredulous how Jack was not able to do such a small thing for his wife and daughter. Jack promised to tell Amy about closing the shop for good. He admitted to Vic that he had really always wanted to be a doctor.

Ray thought of Jack, and how he had gotten his nickname "Lucky." It was during the war and the two men had just met for the first time. Jack thought Ray was fortunate, because he was small, and therefore a smaller "target" for the Germans to shoot at. Simply put, Jack deemed him lucky and the name stuck. The men served in both Egypt and Libya together and realized they both had homes back in Bermondsey. Jack and Ray saw the pyramids and witnessed some of their friends dying in front of them. They



became closer and visited a bordello together. Then one day Jack showed Ray a picture of Amy, and he was infatuated at once with the other man's wife.

Vince fought in school, because he was angry about his sister June. He knew that technically she was not his real sister. However, when other kids talked about it, he hit them anyway. He even hit Sally when she broached the subject. Soon, Vince was in trouble with the headmaster for his behavior. He still went to visit June and was angry that his father never visited. He maintained that he would never be a butcher.

Ray remembers being with Amy in the hospital just after Jack's surgery was over. The doctor had just told him that the cancer was inoperable. He didn't have to tell Amy, he just looked at her, and she knew. She cried, and he was reminded of how his ex-wife left him. She had told him over the phone that it was over. Ray realized that "lucky" might not be a fitting nickname after all. He sat alone in the dark all night.

At the time, Vince was with Mandy. They were still a new couple and traveled everywhere together. They loved to have sex in different cars and even in the camper. In fact, they even lived in Ray's camper for a while. It was the time of hippies, and they fit right in. Vince didn't think the changes taking place were because of the late sixties music, like everyone thought. His revelation was that people were becoming mobile for the first time. Everyone could travel if they wanted to.

Pages 74-106 Analysis

There is more forewarning of Ray's obsession with Amy. A flashback explains that soon after meeting and becoming good friends, Ray had seen a picture of Amy that Jack showed him and fallen instantly in "love." This infatuation was to last years, and eventually lead to an affair that complicated their lived immensely.

Jack and Vic are contrasts in how they took to their fate handed down in the form of family businesses. Jack wearily accepts his fate; giving up his dreams of being a doctor, but Vic learns to appreciate his strange trade and grows into the job. Eventually he becomes not only content, but also proud of his career and place in town society. He learns the intricacies of his craft and becomes a very nonjudgmental person.

As an insurance expert and gambler, Ray is always thinking in terms of numbers and percentages. This gives him strange insight when he evaluates the group in the car and makes mental notes on which friend he thinks will die first. He has the ability to be impartial and puts himself in the middle of the pack. Ray figures his out of shape friend Lenny will be the next to go, followed by him, then Vic the undertaker. This dark, cynical humor pops up periodically during the scope of the book

Pages 107-118

Pages 107-118 Summary

Vince stops the car for a drink at the pub in Rochester. There seems to be a storm in the distance as they step inside. Vince carries Jack's remains for the first time. They joke with the barmaid about Jack not eating, and then order a round. It is very surreal for them all. It still seems like Jack will come sauntering in the door at any time. After a few drinks, Ray gets teary and goes in the bathroom to recover. Lenny and Vince aren't acknowledging each other. Vic tries to keep the peace. Then, Vince gets angry and announces to the group that he is leaving. Anyone who wants can come along. As he hastily gets up to leave, he forgets to take the box with him. Lenny angrily picks it up and runs after him. Everyone else follows, and Lenny berates Vince back at the car for leaving Jack in the bar.

Pages 107-118 Analysis

There is building character and theme development as to the friction that obviously exists between Vince and Lenny. In typical author style, this friction is noticed, but the reason behind it is not divulged until later in the story.



Pages 119-143

Pages 119-143 Summary

The group walks up a fairly steep hill in Chatham, looking for a famous naval landmark. They struggle up the slope with varying degrees of difficulty. The landmark is elusive and there is some confusion as to their proper course. It takes them quite some time to get to the top of the hill. Lenny is having the worse time of it, panting and complaining the most. Vic is ahead of the "older" group; Vince is almost out of sight in the lead. Even at the summit, there are trees and trails. It's not obvious where to go. Then they leave the forest, and the obelisk is there in front of them. Lenny is really having trouble breathing.

Vic thinks of his father and his calling. His grandfather had died, and his father had told him the bad news. He wasn't surprised to find out that his father was going to be taking care of his own father (Vic's grandfather.) Vic knew it would be him too someday. He knew that it was his destiny, and he didn't really have a choice in the matter, but this thought comforted him.

Ray looks at the memorial and finds himself thinking of odds, insurance, and premiums. Insurance and gambling truly make up his life. Vince is amazed at how out of shape the old guys are. Lenny is angry that his wife Joan isn't there with him. He gets to the obelisk last and looks around, considering himself the "odd man out" of the group. He thinks solemnly of the trip as duty. Vince asks Ray (off to the side) about some money for Amy. Ray says he doesn't know what he's talking about. Vince is worried about the obligation of taking care of Amy. He thinks of a WWII picture with Jack, and all his buddies gathered around.

The men walk back down the hill towards the car. The sun shines for a moment, and then goes back into the clouds. They get back on the expressway (M2,) and Vince really gets some speed up. He gets the Mercedes up to ninety-five.

Pages 119-143 Analysis

The author infers that Jack has not been financially astute through all the years he promised Amy they would retire. He doesn't have money like he has pretended to. There is a reference about some money that Jack asked Vince for in the hospital. Ray plays dumb when asked about it. This topic of the money is broached little by little, until being totally divulged at the end of the book.

Ray's view of life in gambling terms is very cynical, yet very true in many ways. He thinks of playing the odds at the track and the odds of a soldier in battle. Some just never had a chance. He also realizes how similar his insurance tasks are to his gambling hobby. It's all based on numbers and probability. To win at gambling, you just have to beat the bookie's spread. To be good at insurance, one has to create a good

spread. In other words, an insurance agent acts more like a bookie than a gambler. Insurance works because it covers its own "spread." If too many clients die, the insurance company doesn't make money.



Pages 144-191

Pages 144-191 Summary

Then suddenly Vince slows the car and curves off the main road, towards Wick's Farm. He mutters, "detour," because everyone knows its not the way to Margate. He stops the car at a public footpath and asks Ray for Jack's remains. Vince then takes the jar and starts walking. The rest of the men are confused, but belatedly follow down the muddy path. Vince is far ahead, walking across the field. Lenny complains about him, speaking about the fact that Vince and Jack are not really blood related. Lenny is suspicious, and struggles to walk closer to Vince.

Vince stops at the edge of the hill and hesitates, and then he starts to unscrew the jar. Everyone just stares in shock except Lenny, who curses and runs at him. They tussle and the barely closed jar falls, but doesn't open. Lenny grabs it and Vince tries taking it from him, but Lenny keeps it out of reach - taunting his younger adversary. Lenny puts the jar down and punches Vince twice, stating the punches are for Sally and Jack. Then Vince suddenly explodes at Lenny and puts him in a headlock, blocking his airway. The men trade punches and Lenny falls, exhausted. Vince takes the jar and explains that Jack wants to be scattered here. Lenny insults him for his treachery. Vince takes a handful of ashes and lets it disappear into the wind. He then puts the cap back on and says, "this is where."

Mandy thinks of how everything started. She had been hitchhiking in London and caught a ride from a guy named Jack in what turned out to be a butcher's van. She was angry with her dad, who had called her "naughty." She was also angry with her step dad, Neville. Then soon enough, she met up with Vince, and lived in "uncle" Ray's camper van. Vince explained that he really wasn't Jack's kid and was never going to be a butcher. They were very intense lovers. Mandy realized how much had changed. Standing on that corner in London, she had no idea how getting in the butcher's van was forever going to alter her life.

Vince had some regrets in his life, too. He was selling a car to an Arab named Hussein and noticed that his daughter Kath was being scrutinized even more than the car. Instead of being angry, practical Vince asked Kath to take a ride with the man to clinch the deal. He knew his daughter needed to make a living. Vince justified his act as being practical but realized that he hadn't done the right thing.

Ray had arranged to take more time off work to make his schedule match Amy's. She was visiting June twice a week. He arranged it so he only worked three days at the office with less pay. He made up for the income loss at the track. Ray offered to take Amy to see June, and she agreed. It saved her the arduous bus rides and transfers she had been accustomed to. Ray told Amy that he had "met" her in the desert (when he looked at Jack's picture.) She looked at him and knew that he was infatuated with her. It did make her visit to see June much easier. The bus ride was very complicated and



takes a lot of wasted time. Ray asked Amy to accompany him to the horse track instead of going to see June. She agreed, and they had sex in the back of the camper. This went on for fourteen weeks.

Lenny really hurts bad, but feels gratified that he had finally stood up to Vince. Vince had sold out his own daughter, Sally by turning in her boyfriend for having stolen property. Lenny had been a boxer for a while, so he was accustomed to the soreness.

The strange looking group walks back across the field. Vince and Lenny are breathing hard. Then, the rain starts up and the group just barely gets to the car in time. Vince sits silently in the car for a moment before starting it up and heading out. He talks of taking the road towards Canterbury. Lenny makes a joke about seeing the cathedral and Vince calls him at it. It is the new purpose. They are going to see Canterbury Cathedral.

Ray remembers Jack in the hospital. They talked about the war. Jack was sad about how hard it was going to be for Amy in his absence. Jack smiled and asked "lucky" for a favor. Ray thought about himself and Amy guiltily. Jack mentioned the camper, and he became even more uncomfortable. Jack had offered to buy the camper so he could travel with Amy and get her what she deserved. Ray thought of what had occurred with Amy in the camper and told Jack it was not for sale.

Vince also remembers visiting Jack in the hospital. He had talked to the doctor and finally found out that Jack was inoperable. He detested the smug surgeon and his crude mannerisms. Vince found Amy and Mandy and broke the news with a slight turn of his head. The doctor talked to them all about pain management, but Amy couldn't listen. Vince's thoughts kept drifting back to the bomb that had killed his parents, but not him.

Pages 144-191 Analysis

Years of stress and resentment between Vince and Lenny come to physical blows when Vince tries to thwart his father's wishes to be disposed of at Margate. Although Lenny despises Vince because of what he had done to his daughter (causing his split with her, at least to some extent,) he also had intuition as to what Vince planned to do at Wick's Farm. So when the cap starts coming off the jar with Jack's ashes - Lenny is ready. Vince portrays the bad guy as he tries unsuccessfully to thwart his father's wish to be scattered at Margate. The sea symbolizes the escape that the Dodds will never have. The first visit to the sea was an "escape" from the trials of life, particularly what to do with June.

Vince has his reasons for trying to put his dad's ashes at Wick's Farm. None of the other men understand this. They see his actions as treachery, especially Lenny. Vince sees it as justice to put his father's ashes where he first met Amy. Unfortunately, he is the only one in the group to think this way.

There is also a disturbing scene where Vince shows his callousness by basically pimping out his own daughter to sell a car. He is very practical, so much that he convinces himself that it's no big deal to include Kath with the sale.



Pages 193-261

Pages 193-261 Summary

The twisting road leads the group to Canterbury at last. Vince calls out he sees the cathedral, but Ray doesn't see it. They are coming in a back way and the huge structure is still out of sight. Ray thinks that it would make a good end to their journey, except unfortunately it is just a detour on the way to Margate. Both Vic and Vince announce that they have never seen Canterbury Cathedral. From Vince's tone, Ray finds it hard to believe he attacked Lenny less than an hour before. Then they finally see the spire and drive as close as possible before parking. The group sets out walking. Ray holds Jack's remains and both Lenny and Vince are badly mud stained. Then they pass through an archway and into the impressive structure of the church itself. Lenny thinks that he should have stayed quiet about visiting Canterbury. Vic ponders the history of the place, he thinks excitedly of the famous crypts and the high-level bishops who reside there.

Vince thinks back to when he first saw Jack's body. Amy had requested that he "visit," and he finally complied. Jack was on his back and completely covered except for his head. To Vince, it looked like a tablecloth they had him wrapped in. He thought that the body before him wasn't Jack Dodds anymore. He assumed the body was naked under the sheet, and it bothered him.

Ray is tired and suddenly very emotionally exhausted thinking about death and the ash he is carrying that used to be his friend. He hands off the "package" to Vince who then hands it off to Lenny. Ray thinks about his life and his own set of gambling rules that keep him grounded. However, his last rule states, "You can blow all the rules if you're Lucky." He stares up at the immense pillars that stretch up beyond belief. He thinks of traveling to Australia to see his daughter.

Lenny thinks of Sally, and how Vince got her pregnant and then didn't step up to take care of her. Lenny had paid for the abortion and Sally had never forgiven him for it. She had wanted the baby, and Vince for that matter. Lenny pondered the act itself. The doctor had been a complete hack. He wondered why he cared so much about this one life considering all the death he had seen in the war? Lenny passed the bag containing Jack to Vic. It was a "relay" of sorts. Vic read the names on the crypts. He missed his daughter and wondered what it might be like visiting her. He also had a crush on Amy.

Vic remembered a funeral run out at the Fairfax Park Hospital and Home. He realized with a shock en route that that was where June was staying. It was the place where Amy always visited and the place Jack refused to go all those years. He saw the attempts to pretty up the grounds, but it was still an institution after all. There were bars on the windows. Vic had learned over the years to keep quiet about what he saw over the course of his job. He knew where his boundaries lied. He showed his forms to the receptionist and found that he had twenty minutes to kill. After wandering around the back for a stroll, Vic suddenly realized that it was Amy's day to visit. He sat on a bench



and saw Amy with Ray. Vic did a double take and easily spotted Ray's camper in the parking lot. He moved to the hearse and watched them for several minutes. Vic sensed the chemistry between them, even from his distance. Then they walked back to the camper and Vic noted that they didn't take the turn to go back to London. He thought again that his business was to keep secrets and not make judgments.

Ray thinks of visiting Jack in the hospital. The two men had talked and Ray wondered for a minute if Jack was ridiculous enough to imagine that his old friend "Lucky" could save him from his cancer. Then Jack explained that he was at peace with the situation, it was Amy he was worried about. He hadn't been telling her the truth about the finances. He closed the butcher shop, because he had to, not because he wanted to. His loan was due. Jack secretly owed twenty thousand pounds on the shop. He told Ray that he wanted him to place a bet for him, no pressure of course! He said that he needed a winner more than ever before because it wasn't for him, but for Amy. He handed Ray a wad of bills and told him not to bet on the wrong horse. It was one thousand pounds.

Ray snaps back to reality. He's in the cathedral and seems to have been left behind. He sits and waits in the pew until Vince finds him. The men regroup, and they head to a pub on the way back to the car.

Ray ponders how Vince came to own his old scrap yard. They were at the Coach and Vince made the proposal with far too much confidence for Ray's taste. Vince wanted to buy the place outright. He was planning to set up Dodd's Motors at the site. He asked Ray to give him five years to make a profit. Ray was to loan him the yard and get the loan back, plus interest. If Ray didn't have the money in five years, then Ray got his yard back. But to Ray's eyes, Vince seemed far too certain of the deal. They discussed amounts and Vince smiled. Ray knew that he was selling out Jack, who still wanted Vince to take over the butcher shop. After Vince left, Ray mulled the idea over. He made a bet on the races to decide the outcome of his scrap yard, but he didn't like the outcome. Vince was living with Mandy in Ray's camper in the yard. He realized suddenly that he would sell to Vince, because he never sold the camper to Jack.

Back in Bermondsey, Amy thinks that the deed must have been done already. She misses Jack terribly - she already had said goodbye. Amy knows in her heart that she had chosen June over Jack a long time ago. She is on the bus headed to see June. She watches the stations go by from the second story of the double-decker bus. Amy had met Jack while picking hops as a young lady and recalled the event for a moment. She had been a good "hopper," getting up to seven bushels a day. She had loved to watch the worker gypsies in the evening who would camp out near the fields. Used to the outdoors, their skin turned tan, while hers turned red in the sun.

Amy would chat with Jack often. He was a big man and Amy was very attracted to him. They strained beans together, with the colander between them. She felt alive with Jack, and they flirted. June was conceived right there in the hop bin. Amy got pregnant but everything was still good for a while. They took a trip to Margate for the weekend. It was like a honeymoon. Jack and Amy went to the fair, and he won her a large teddy bear.



But he didn't smile and neither did she. They walked out on the jetty, by the water. Jack told her to forget about June. That is where she parted with him. She knew what he was going to do with the bear. Suddenly, they were alone on the long pier. He had thrown it into the water.

Ray remembers doing his homework for the big bet, analyzing numbers, old log entries, and previous bets made. Gambling on horses wasn't about hunches or luck like most people thought. Ray considered horse-betting a function primarily of math and odds. To overcome a bookie's edge, he had to keep his own book and do his homework. He looked over the listings for long odds. Ray knew that only suckers bet by name only. But then, this bet was special. He knew there were such things as safe luck and wild luck. Ray tried not to look at the name on the page, "Miracle Worker."

Ray picked up the phone and called his bookie. They accepted his wager on credit and the bet was official. Ray thought he would make up the difference if he lost - it was the price of the camper that he never sold Jack. He walked to the Coach and thought he should stop by the hospital to tell Jack about the bet he made. However, he didn't, but got a pint at the bar instead, figuring he could just do it later. The races were on the television. Ray didn't tell Bernie about his bet. He watched, entranced, thinking he was the jockey. Ray somehow knew all along what would happen. He didn't even have to watch the race. Miracle Worker came in and paid thirty-three to one. That would come to thirty-four thousand pounds in total. He went home and thought again that he should stop by the hospital. Instead, Ray napped and was roused by the ringing of the phone. Amy told him Jack was dead.

Pages 193-261 Analysis

The author creates a huge emotional roller coaster when Ray goes through the process to make the big bet for Jack. Ray does his research and eventually decides to make a bet that his usual facts and figures don't advise him to make. It is "the bet of a lifetime." There is obvious pressure that he is betting on Amy's livelihood. He cares for both Amy and Jack, which makes it more difficult for him to be impartial. He finally makes the bet based on the bad idea (by his own guidelines) of relying on the name of the horse. He wins a long shot at 33:1 odds (that is, the bet pays at 33 times the initial bet.) Then Ray makes the fateful decision to nap before telling Jack at the hospital. Jack dies before he can be told the news that was his last worry. He was at peace with the idea of dying (Jack said that dying was easy, living was the hard part), but worried because he had taken on debt without telling his wife. The thought of her finding out about the debt after he was gone upset Jack, and it would have eased his conscious much to know the bet paid off. Alas, this did not happen.

After the fight, Vince feels guilty for getting the best of Lenny and does the first thing that comes out of Lenny's mouth when they reach the car. In this example, he takes yet another detour to Canterbury Cathedral when Lenny nonchalantly mentions it. The fight releases years of tension between the two men. Vince "played nice" and went out of his way to let Lenny carry Jack's ashes later.



Pages 262-295

Pages 262-295 Summary

A storm is coming fast as the Mercedes nears the ocean by the Margate seaside. The car itself shimmies in the wind. Spray flies up over the pier. It looks dangerous. Vince parks and the men wait in the car, waiting for the real rain to come down while Lenny uses the bathroom. There are arcades by the water, but it is quiet at this time of year. April is out of season. Vince explains that they are looking at the pier that sticks out into the water. There used to be a jetty, but it had been severely damaged in a storm. Jack really wanted the jetty, but he has to settle for the pier. Lenny returns, and Vince drives to the literal end of the road. Ray thinks that the Mercedes is truly a hearse.

Vince reflects about Jack. He had walked into the hospital feeling very edgy, because he had one thousand pounds cash on him. He was doing well financially, but it was still a lot of money. Vince thought of the money as "conscience clearing." Jack was in the bed looking really bad. He had tubes sticking out every which way and electronics crowded around the bed. Vince left the money, thinking he probably would never see it again. It would get stolen before Jack even woke up.

In his last days, Jack never talked about June to Amy. From his hospital bed, he brought up Vince, but that was it. Amy thought to herself that since Jack wasn't talking about June, she wouldn't talk about Ray. He would never know what had happened between them. All she had ever wanted was for June to talk, but it never happened. She hated Jack for his wanting to write off June. She thought, "you bastard, you butcher." Now she had to fend for herself and June was on her own. She hated Jack.

On the pier, Ray fantasizes about giving the winnings to Amy directly. The weather is getting worse. The open ocean goes all the way to Norway from where the men stand. The wind is coming in a strange direction so the structure doesn't really protect the harbor. Vince says, "lets do it" and the group sets out along the 200-yard pier. It's raining harder, and they fight against the elements. Ray grabs onto Vince for support and quietly tells him that he has the one thousand pounds. Vince says that Jack made the right decision.

The men are now so wet that the rain doesn't matter anymore. Vic gets to the end and the men see that the jetty is still there out in the water, the one that Jack and Amy walked on so long ago. Ray opens the jar and the men reach in and take a handful of "Jack." Ray takes his scoops and opens his fingers and ash turns to wind in a split second. He says "goodbye Jack."

Pages 262-295 Analysis

Many themes come together at the end of the story. The author ties up many loose ends. The present / flashback technique finally catches up with the last of the gaps



filled. Ray tells Vince the one thousand pounds is covered. Vince realizes why Jack wanted the money and that the financial situation for Amy is all right. Ray has handled it. Amy officially writes off her husband and absolves herself of any guilt over the affair with Ray. Finally, Jack's remains are scattered in the right location, just as he wanted. Even the jetty is still there, just unreachable.

There is suspense and action for the old men as they traverse the dangerous pier during the storm. In the final pages of the story, most of the differences between the characters seem to have been worked out, and the men are united in their purpose.

There is major symbolism when Jack thinks of something his father said once about a butcher shop being all about "wastage." "What comes into the shop aint what goes out." While thinking of meat, the real meaning is what happened to Jack's life in the shop. He came out much different than when he went in. It ended up taking his whole life.



Characters

Jack Dodds

Jack is the pivotal character of the novel, even though in the "order" of the story, he has just died. All of his actions are actually completed in flashbacks.

Jack was a Butcher by trade, who secretly wanted to be a doctor. He took over his father's business. It was never in any doubt what he would do for a living. Married Amy and they had a daughter named June, who was developmentally disabled. Jack was upset and basically abandoned his daughter much to the shock of his wife. This caused a rift in their marriage where Amy and June had a bond that Jack didn't.

Jack served in WWII in North Africa with Ray Johnson, who became his lifelong friend. Amy took in a boy named Vince whose parents had been killed in WWII. Jack helped raise Vince, but grew apart from the boy, when he decided not to continue the family business. The stress between Vince and Jack persisted even after Jack's death.

Jack was the "leader" of a group of male friends who would frequent a pub called the "Coach and Horses." Jack always told Amy that he would retire someday so they could travel. He finally "retired," only because he was forced to due to monetary problems. Jack kept this news from Amy. Jack and Amy planned to move to the seaside village of Margate, but he was diagnosed with cancer before this could happen. He pressured his adopted son, Vince to "loan" him one thousand pounds that he then gave to Ray to bet on a horse for him. Jack was worried about Amy's financial situation. He died before Ray could show him that he won. The group of friends drove Jack's remains to Margate, where they took turns scattering his ashes off the jetty into the ocean.

Ray Johnson

The son of Frank Johnson, Ray inherited a scrap yard, but had no interest in running it. Ray worked in insurance and gambled heavily on the horses in his spare time. Ray fell in love with Amy while looking at a picture of her that Jack carried with him. He also became infatuated with another girl named Daisy Dixon, who unfortunately wasn't interested in him whatsoever. Ray ended up settling for Daisy's sister Carol, and they had a daughter named Suzie, who left home with her boyfriend to teach in Australia. Carol divorced Ray and also moved to Australia. Ray used his camper van to travel and work less at the office.

Ray also took advantage of the fact that Amy and Jack were at odds about Jack never visiting his daughter, June in the institution. He began giving Amy a ride in the camper van, so she didn't have to ride the bus. This friendship grew into an affair that was noticed by Vic (although he never told anyone.)



Jack had nicknamed Ray "lucky" due to him saving Jack during the war. Ray did build up quite a reputation as a lucky gambler after the war, but it was more due to his skill with numbers than luck. Ray took gambling seriously and usually came out ahead. For this reason, Jack gave Ray all "his" money when he lay dying in the hospital. He expected Ray to bet on a long shot and win so Amy would not have to worry about money. Ray did win his big bet, turning the initial one thousand pounds into thirty-four thousand.

Vince Dodds (Pritchett)

Vince is the son of the Pritchett's, whose parents were killed during the Battle of Britain by a German V-1 buzz bomb. Taken in and raised by Amy and Jack Dodds. Became their "only" child in a sense, because their natural daughter was in an institution. Vince decided fairly early in life that he did not want to take over the butcher shop from his father, Jack. The more Jack persisted, the more Vince rebelled. Finally, Vince joined the military just to escape the pressure. Jack never forgave him for doing that.

Upon returning from the service, Vince became involved with his childhood sweetheart, Sally (Lenny's daughter.) She became pregnant, and he refused to marry her (making Lenny furious.) Sally ended up having an abortion and fell into a series of bad relationships.

Vince later fell in love with a girl named Mandy, and they traveled around the countryside during the sixties. They had a daughter named Katherine, and he found he had a talent for fixing up old cars and reselling them. Vince offered to take over Ray's unused scrap yard, and Ray reluctantly agreed. Vince then successfully started up Dodd's Motors and became fairly successful in his business.

Jack and Vince were remote as father and son from then on. Jack was always disappointed he had no "heir." Vince did not like the pressure, because he didn't want to be a butcher. He came up with one thousand pounds at his dying father's request, figuring he could ease his conscious with the money. Vince also fought with Lenny over his father's ashes, trying to scatter them in a spot not of Jack's choosing to spite him. In fact, he thought it was justice to leave part of his father at the place where Jack and Amy had met. Vince later found out that Ray had the money, and he was happy.

Vic Tucker

Vic is the son of an undertaker, who followed under his father's tutelage. He grew to be proud of his career, and learned a sense of dignity, compassion, and subtly that served him well. His parlor was directly across the street from Jack Dodds' shop.

Vic also saw Ray with Jack's wife Amy and assumed (correctly) that they were having an affair. Being discreet, he said nothing. Vic also learned early of Jack's decision to sell the shop. When Jack died, Vic acted as his undertaker and ran the ceremony. Vic was



the only person in "the group" who didn't really want to be someone else. He didn't regret his life (like Jack did.)

Lenny Tate

Lenny served in WWII in North Africa, but not with Jack and Ray. He married Joan, and they had a daughter, named Sally. Lenny was good at boxing and dreamed of being famous. He had several good bouts, but was finally bested by a much younger opponent and gave up the sport.

Lenny was hesitant about Vince going out with his daughter Sally after he returned from the service. He became furious with Vince when he got Sally pregnant and refused to marry her. Vince also turned in Sally's follow-up boyfriend to the police, which further infuriated Lenny. This grudge lasted throughout the course of the story. The fight actually helped to relieve tensions that had been building up for years.

Lenny is the most out of shape of the group and has difficulties in running, walking up hills, and any strenuous exercise. Ray sarcastically considers him to be the next one of the group to follow Jack.

Amy Dodds

Amy met Jack Dodds at a young age while "hop picking." She became pregnant and married shortly thereafter. Amy gave birth to a developmentally disabled daughter, June, that caused tension in her marriage. Jack didn't want anything to do with the mute child, which appalled Amy. She made a decision fairly early on to choose June over Jack. Their distance grew over the years, until she had an affair with Ray. She liked the company, but never really loved Ray.

Although not faithful, Amy was a dutiful wife who planned out her life with Jack. They planned to retire by the seaside at Margate (where they had a brief "honeymoon" after June was born.) After Jack died, Amy enlisted Ray to get the group of friends to carry out Jack's "Last Orders."

June Dodds

June was Jack and Amy's natural born daughter, who was severely developmentally disabled. She was diagnosed and never matured past a two-year-old level. June was put in an institution and never able to speak. Jack was shocked and embarrassed by her and refused to visit her. This caused a rift between Jack and Amy, which was never repaired.

June lived at the "Fairfax Park Hospital and Home" and was visited by Amy twice a week for over thirty years. Amy considered it "her duty" to visit the girl.



Carol Johnson

Married Ray after her older sister, Daisy, spurned him. Carol was never happy with Ray's laid back lifestyle. She wanted to travel and see more of the world. Ray was never particularly excited about Carol, since he had wanted Daisy and was also in love with Amy. Carol divorces Ray, marries Barry Stokes, and moves to Australia. This put her closer to her daughter.

Sally Tate

Sally was Lenny's daughter, who grows up as one of Vince's childhood friends. Vince has a relationship with her, and she becomes pregnant. When Vince does not step up to "take care" of Sally, Lenny convinces her to have an abortion. This act turns her cold to her father.

Sally ends up with a rather disreputable man who is turned into the police by Vince, which doesn't help Sally's situation. Her life basically goes bad and Lenny blames Vince for most of her problems. Sally has no contact with her father from that point on.



Objects/Places

The Box / The Jar

The jar containing Jack Dodd's ashes is the pivotal object of the story. This becomes a point of emotion, controversy, and deep thought where the characters question whether the contents of the jar are really "Jack." At times, the characters amusingly treat the jar as if it is a person. "Where is Jack" is a repeating theme of the story.

Pint

A pint is the English term for a pint measure of a glass of beer. This traditional "English system" unit of measure is still in use today, having survived the onset of the Metric system. Equal to sixteen fluid ounces.

Coach and Horses

The main characters' pub of choice in Bermondsey is Coach and Horses. More than a hundred years old, it is a central meeting point for the group over the years and a common fixture in everyone's lives.

River Thames

The River Thames is the main water route through the city of London.

Fiver / Five Quid

A Fiver or Five Quid is a five-pound note (about \$12 U.S. at the time of the novel.)

Pound

A pound is British currency (about \$2.20 at the time of the novel.)

Buzz-bomb / V-1

The Buzz-bomb or V-1 is the German flying bomb used heavily during the Battle of Britain in 1940-1941. The devices made a very distinctive noise when in flight, which led to their nickname, "buzz-bomb." Functional, but crude, these unmanned rockets were slow enough to be occasionally shot down by British defensive guns.



City Centre

City Centre is the European term for downtown.

Canterbury Cathedral

Canterbury Cathedral is the very historical church located in the town of Canterbury. Home to many famous / infamous "residents" and one of the largest religious buildings in England. Used as a stopping point by the main characters on the way to the ocean.

Blackheath

Blackheath is one of the first neighboring towns the group passes through shortly after departing Bermondsey.

Bermondsey

Bermondsey is the outlying area of London that is the home of all the main characters. Jack's butcher shop, Vic's Mortuary, Dodd's (Vince's) Motors, and the "Coach and Horses" are all located in Bermondsey.

Hop Picking

Hop picking is slang for manually harvesting grain to be used in beer and spirit production.

Margate

Margate is the seaside resort town where Jack and Mandy took their "honeymoon" after their daughter, June's birth. The location where Jack wants his ashes to be scattered (from the pier.)

Colander

A colander is a large, deep metal dish with holes. Commonly used for straining fruits and vegetables. Straining is the act of washing fruits and vegetables that may be dirty from being just picked in the field. In this story, Amy actually used her colander to flirt with Jack, as they got to know each other better.



Themes

The Bonds of Friendship

The men in the story have been acquaintances for thirty years minimum. Some are good friends, while others merely tolerate each other. They live their lives and have their camaraderie at the pub, where most problems and tensions get smoothed over at some point. The main exception to this is between father and son, Jack and Vince. The other men have more of a bond to Jack, because he is their peer, while Vince is "the kid" in their eyes (even though he is over forty.) It becomes clear that Jack was the binding force of the group, because with him gone, tensions escalate.

Jack, Ray, Lenny, and Vic are comrades in arms, even though they didn't all physically fight together in WWII (although Jack and Ray did), they all were drastically shaped by that pivotal even in their lives. In a way, Vince also sought out his own "war" experience, but Jack saw it as an escape and betrayal of him. He never forgave his adopted son for this action.

Ray, Lenny and Vic are loyal to Jack to the end. They seek to carry out his "last orders." Lenny, being the most suspicious of Vince, suspects and is ready, when Vince tries to sabotage Jack's burial plans. The tension is there, even though the rest of the group doesn't join in. Vince was trying to be loyal to his adoptive father in his own way when he scattered some of the ashes at Wick's Farm. The other men didn't understand the meaning of the place.

Fate and Obligation

The themes of fate and obligation repeat and intertwine heavily in this story. Fate plays a major part in Ray's life, as he routinely makes major life decisions by wagering at the track (if it's a win or loss, I do this.) All the men have strong fathers who push them in varying directions. Where Ray's father is proud that he actually escapes the family trade, Jack and Vic never really seriously considered not following in their fathers' footsteps. Although both resigned to their fates in some manner, these two men take their obligation and inheritance differently. Vic grows to enjoy his trade. He sees the power he has and the righteousness of his compassion. He is proud that he doesn't take advantage of people in their weakest moments like some of his competitors. Vic is truly happy as an undertaker.

On the other hand, Jack plows through life, never really considering if he took the wrong path. He is depressed in the back of his head, knowing there is no escape. The irony is that when he really is forced to leave the business and retire. He dies before it can happen. He admits that he really wanted to be a doctor.



Of course, Jack passes this trait down by pressuring Vince to be a butcher, like his father did to him. He doesn't see that he never even had a chance to live up to his real potential. Yet, he can't understand or be proud of Vince's thriving automobile business.

A major part of Ray's income is derived from fate, via gambling. Besides doing his homework, he also has good intuition, when it comes to races anyway. It is also ironic that besides from gambling, where Ray is viewed as "lucky," his life is pretty empty and his luck sparse (marriage, daughter, etc.)

Mandy's fate is "sealed" when she decides to take a ride with a guy named Jack who picks her up in London in his butcher's van and takes her to Bermondsey. There she meets Vince, and they become very involved, before finally getting married.

Envy

The lives and fates of the main characters intertwine and intermingle throughout the story. Some characters live better lives than others: financially, martially, and spiritually.

Vince is really the only character to actively work to break the mold his father set up for him and succeeds quite well because of it. He finds what he loves in life, and in doing it, does it with enthusiasm that the others lack. Dodds Motors is very successful compared to the other character's professions. In many ways, Vince is resented by other characters for many reasons, the primary one being his success. Jack obviously hates that he has turned away from his "obligation." Much of this envy stems from the fact that Jack never had the guts to stand up to his father and at least try his shot at being a doctor. Vince's success makes him a bigger target.

Ray is envious of Vince because his finances aren't doing as well. If he had known he would have gotten a better deal for his father's scrap yard. Ray's envy is also directed towards his good friend, Jack. He is in love with Amy and has been since WWII, when he first saw a picture of her. Ray exploits the tension between Jack and Amy (because of June) and uses it to start an affair with Amy. He later does feel some guilt over this. Jack, on the other hand is actually envious of his "lucky" friend Ray. This is based mostly on Ray's gambling exploits, because the rest of his life isn't lucky.

Lenny is just an unhappy person; he doesn't like his life in general. The only non-envious person is really Vic, who has learned to be proud of his calling in life.



Style

Point of View

"Last Orders" is told chapter by chapter from a different character's point of view in the first person perspective. The default character is Ray. When a chapter isn't titled with a character name, it is always Ray's perspective. Otherwise, the chapter title is usually the name of the "narrator." About half the chapters are flashbacks, while the other half are from the different character's perceptions as the story unfolds in the present. The author gives "tidbits" of current plot (which leaves the reader guessing until the later flashback explains why things are happening the way they are.) It is a very interesting reading style.

The traveling (present) chapters are mostly told from Ray's point of view. The group is taking Jack's ashes from Bermondsey to Margate and the forward chronology keeps going back to this pivotal trip. All other chapters flashback from this "current" event to take up the different lives of the characters at various points in their experiences. The flashbacks are not chronological, but based on reader need as they slowly are treated to "facts" that explain the interactions of the characters in the present.

Setting

The main setting of the story is in central Britain in the late-nineteen eighties. The account starts in London, and then follows a road trip as the central characters travel towards the ocean to fulfill their friend Jack's final request. During this voyage, many flashbacks change the setting to encompass the 1920's up to the present. Most of the men knew each other in WWII, and the setting ranges from the African desert to war ravaged London during the German Blitz.

The urban town of Bermondsey is the starting point of the road trip. The group travels through the villages of Blackheath, Dartford, Graves End, and Rochester - as the countryside changes from urban to country. They see a naval memorial at Chatham and visit the Canterbury Cathedral. Finally, the men arrive at their destination point: Margate.

The weather also plays a role in the setting. The nice, spring day that seems to start the men's journey quickly turns sour as a storm moves in. There are clouds when the fight occurs between Vince and Lenny at Wick's Farm, but the real storm doesn't unleash until the worse possible time, when they finally reach the destination at the ocean. This creates an actual dangerous situation that tests the resolve of the group, most of whom are not very physically fit to walk out on a slippery pier in a wind/rain storm. When the final deed is done, the storm fittingly lessens.



Language and Meaning

The language and meaning of the story is interpreted through each character's eyes and changes with the point of view. Some of the characters are miserable with their "lot in life" and that they never gave themselves the chance to live for themselves. Some are financially successful while others are not and the envy comes through in their thoughts and conversations. These characters have known each other for most of their long lives. There are many deep-seated emotions laying just under the surface that affect how they interact.

The basic meaning is how a man's death brings together a collection of friends for the last time as a group for "one final mission." Their complicated relationships with each other are delved into in detail as the story unfolds. As the default character, Ray's conflicted feelings for Amy (as the one that "got away") versus the feelings for his friend Jack are delved into. It is divulged that Ray had an affair with Amy and that guilt element further complicates the relationship between the characters. Vince also has some guilt for never living up to his father's expectations (while still being angry that he was expected to do so in the first place.) Ray's guilt for cheating on his friend Jack is a factor when he sells his scrap yard to Vince. Later, after Vince's financial success is apparent, Ray wishes he had made a better deal.

Structure

"Last Orders" is divided into a multitude of very small chapters, most averaging only 3-4 pages in length. For simplicity here, the structure will be examined from the overall "place" chapters (also broken down by page numbers,) which describe the groups' road trip progress from Bermondsey to the final destination of Margate. The progress of the book can be described as linear with many flashbacks.

In "Bermondsey" (pgs. 1-16), the immediate aftermath of Jack's funeral occurs at the pub and the characters are introduced. There is a flashback, where Amy shows Ray her late husband's final intentions and tells him that she wishes not to be involved. The actual road trip begins in "Old Kent Road" (pgs. 17-28), where the four men (and "Jack") set off for Margate in Vince's Mercedes. In "Blackheath" (pgs. 29-45), there is a flashback where Jack asks Vince for one thousand pounds as he lays dying in the hospital. Lenny and Vince also think about their younger days. Ray thinks about his daughter Suzie and his divorce from his wife Carol in "Dartford" (pgs. 46-73.) Ray and Jack's army days are revisited in "Graves End" (pgs. 74-106), as well as Vic thinking about his career as an undertaker. The men make a pub stop for a drink in "Rochester" (pgs.107-118) as tensions start to mount. They visit a naval landmark with Jack's remains and Vince worries about Amy's financial situation in "Chatham" (pgs. 119-143.) Vince takes an unexpected detour and tries to prematurely sprinkle Jack's ashes in "Wick's Farm" (pgs. 144-191.) This causes a fight to break out between Lenny and Vince. It is also noted that Ray had an affair with Amy. "Canterbury" (pgs. 193-261) consists of the group visiting Canterbury Cathedral. Vic sees Ray and Amy together and



suspects that they are having relations. Ray also remembers when Jack asked him to make the "big bet" for Amy. He wins the bet, but Jack dies before he can be told. Amy thinks of how she and Jack met. In "Margate" (pgs. 262-295), the men arrive at the seaside and scatter Jack's ashes as planned.



Quotes

"It's as if because his body's packed up, everything's gone into his face and though that's changed, though it's all hollow with the flash hanging on it, in only makes the main think show through better, like someone's turned on a little light inside." pg. 34

"It took a war to make me travel, to make me see the world, it that's what you could call it." pg. 54

"...It evens out, because in one direction there's what's ahead and in another there's the memory, and maybe there's nothing more or less to it than that..." pgs. 62-63

"You have to make the whole world stop and take notice. There's times when an undertaker wields more clout than a copper" pgs. 78-79

"...You'll never know your mum was tidied up by the butcher across the road." pg. 85

"I think, He wants me to say 'butcher' but I aint going to say it. I aint going to say 'butcher.'" pg. 97

"I thought, First my daughter buggers off to Sydney and stops writing, now my wife goes and bunks it. And they call me Lucky." pg. 100

"Instead of what she'd reckoned on, she got me: Vince Dodds, son of a doodlebug, fresh back from the arsehole of Arabia. Lying under a motor most of the time, when he wasn't lying on top of her." pg. 103

"...I'll tell you what the big change is, the change underneath all the change. It aint the Beatles and it aint the Rolling Stones and it aint long hair or short skirts of free milk and baby-stoppers on thee National Health. It's mobility, it's being mobile." pg. 105

"Racecourse towns. It's when you stand up to piss you can tell how pissed you are. A drink or two helps for putting on a bet. A drink or three buggers your judgement. When I can't get to sleep I tick off in my head all the racetracks I've been to, in alphabetical order, and I see the map of England with the roads criss-crossing." pg. 112

"You could say Vic's got a nerve, dragging us up here to look at all these names when it's Jack's day, like saying Jack aint special. But I don't hold it against him, my grouch aint with Vic. It's a question of duty." pg. 138

"He tries to hang on to the jar but as he tumbles, it pops out of his grasp and Vince and me watch it falling. We watch it falling keener than we watch Vince falling because when it hits the ground one of two things could happen, or both. The loose cap could fly off and what's inside spill out, or the jar could bounce bad and start rolling all the way down the steep slope of the hill." pg. 147



"She looked at me, long and hard, soft and sharp at the same time, and that was when I knew that she knew, or that she'd wondered all along. That I'd just had this thing about her, always. In spite of Carol, in spite of Sue, in spite of her being Jack's anyway, in spite of her having lost her looks by now. But there's a beauty in that itself, I reckon, that's a lovable thing, fading beauty, it depends on your attitude." pg. 170

"I think, Everyone has their own space and no one else can step in it, then one day it's unoccupied. It's a question of territory." pg. 183

"I thought, He aint Jack Dodds, no more than I'm Vince Dodds. Because nobody aint nobody. Because nobody aint more than just a body, than just their own body, which aint nobody." pg. 199

"It's just as well your thoughts don't show in your face, though that aint suck a let-out with my mush. Face like a fire alarm. But you can't help your face, even less than your thoughts. You can't help flesh being flesh." pg. 210

"And they're always sad anyway, these pick-ups from long-term institutions. Taking them out of one box just to put them in another. As if there was never any choice in the first place, and if you'd listened carefully you could've heard the sound of a coffin being nailed, long before I showed up." pg. 212

"I need a winner Raysy. I need a winner like I've never needed." pg. 223

"He said, 'Margate. How about Margate?' As if we could put the clock back and start off again where it all stopper. Second honeymoon. As if Margate was another work for magic." pg. 229

"...everyone wants to believe in hunch bets, and it may look like luck but it's ninety-percent careful clerking, it's ninety-per-cent doing your sums. I aint worked in that insurance office for nothing. People think it's horses from heaven, answering your prayers, but it's learning how to beat the bookie, and if you want to beat the book-keeper, keep a book." pg. 231

"I think, Jack won't forgive me. Either way, he won't ever forgive me. Wound a man once, you can wound him twice. I think of him down there at the shop even now, chopping and weighing, not knowing, while we sit here drinking." pg. 249

"He won't mention June so I won't mention Ray. Fair dos. What you don't know can't hurt. But he looks at me with that unflinching, unblinking look, so I have to dart my eyes away again." pg. 268

"And the most I've wanted, the most I've hoped in fifty years, believe me I've never asked the earch, it that you should have looked at me, just once, and said, 'Mum.' It isn't much to have wished, all this time." pg. 274

"Jack boy, it's all down to wastage. What you've got to understand is that what comes into the shop aint what goes out. Whole art of butchery's in avoiding wastage." pg.285



"...the ash that I carried in my hands, which was the Jack who once walked around, is carried away by the wind, it whirled away by the wind till the ash becomes wind and the wind becomes Jack what we're made of." pgs. 294-295



Topics for Discussion

Why was there tension between Jack and Vince (father and son)?

How did Vince come to terms with the fact that he was adopted? Name at least two incidents where his anger came to the surface.

What were some of the issues that led to Ray and Carol's divorce?

Is Ray a "good" gambler? Is he really lucky, as Jack thinks?

Which men knew each other in World War II? How did it affect their later relationship?

As the only "child" in the group of five, did Vince really fit in? Explain the generation gap between the WWII generation and the baby boomers.

Discuss the financial successes / failings of the main five characters. How did they view each other based on their financial situations?

Describe Ray and Amy's feelings towards each other.

Why was Ray's daughter moving to Australia?

Why did Amy cheat on Jack? Did Amy love Ray?

Why did Jack never visit his daughter in the institution?

What influence does the Margate storm have (if any) in making the characters' decision to walk to the end of the pier more difficult? Does the storm symbolize anything?

Explain Ray's philosophy towards betting and percentages. How would his "system" work in practice?

Why was Jack going to lose his shop?