

# **Spartina Study Guide**

**Spartina by John Casey (novelist)**

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## Plot Summary

*Spartina* won the 1989 National Book Award. It is the story of a middle-aged fisherman, who sees his heritage begin to disappear in a world of tourism and big business. He is determined to carry on the tradition of New England fishermen by providing for his family on his own land and in his own boat. As he struggles to support his family and attain money to finish the boat he is building in his back yard, he does some foolish things. His temperament has made it difficult to deal with the people most able to help him, and he feels he must isolate himself from them in order to maintain his independence. When he begins an affair with a lady who shares his interest in maintaining the traditions of the coastal town, she becomes the catalyst he needs to see himself more objectively and to find more creative ways of obtaining the funding he needs. Only when he feels he has obtained his goals does he realize that his life centered on the procurement of his boat, not in the security its completion has brought.

When the story begins, Dick Pierce is a forty-two-year-old fisherman, who has a reputation for having a bad temper and being hard to deal with. His ancestors once owned a great deal of the land where the story takes place, but through some poor business decisions and some acts of fate, all is lost except for the small piece which Dick owns and lives on with his wife and two children. He has broken ties with the bank and the larger employers of the small fishing town where he grew up, and where his piece of land has become surrounded by new tourist cottages. His dream of owning his own boat and making a living in order to carry on the heritage passed on to him by several generations is blocked by his inability to make enough money to finish the boat, while at the same time making a meager living at small-time fishing.

Dick begins to cross the line between honesty and thievery, when he steals clams from the local bird sanctuary. Sometime later, without his knowledge, a friend plants drugs on him that he accidentally smuggles into the country. He doesn't want to take the five hundred dollars offered to him as his share, but it means too much for him to refuse. He goes on to assist in a risky drug smuggling operation before his luck changes, and a lady he begins an affair with finds a way for him to borrow the money he needs.

Soon finding that his affair has resulted in a pregnancy, Dick is torn between continuing the relationship with her and telling his wife everything about what happened. He eventually tells his wife, but it is not until his pregnant girlfriend refuses his sexual advances that he discontinues the relationship.

Dick eventually completes his boat. However, on the day of the launch, he learns that a hurricane is bearing down on the coast in his vicinity. He feels his only option to save his boat is to take it out to sea and to try to ride out the storm. Dick and his boat are both challenged to their limits, and Dick realizes that he, himself, might be the weak link in his survival. He eventually returns to the shore safely with his boat, but he finds that life is not as easy as he anticipated. Part of his trouble is that he misses the adventure and pressure he had known the last several years.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Spartina won the 1989 National Book Award. It is the story of a middle-aged fisherman, named Dick Pierce, who sees his heritage begin to disappear in a world of tourism and big business. He is determined to carry on the tradition of New England fishermen by providing for his family on his own land and in his own boat. As he struggles to support his family and attain money to finish the boat he is building in his back yard, he does some foolish things. His temperament has made it difficult to deal with the people most able to help him, and he feels he must isolate himself from them in order to maintain his independence. When he begins an affair with a lady who shares his interest in maintaining the traditions of the coastal town, she becomes the catalyst he needs to see himself more objectively and to find more creative ways of obtaining the funding he needs.

Only when Dick feels he has obtained his goals does he realize that his life is centered on the procurement of his boat, not in the security its completion has brought.

Dick Pierce is a fisherman in Rhode Island, who fished the shallow areas for lobsters. His boat is too small to go off shore far enough to be very successful, and so he must settle for what he can, and often must catch less profitable fish to make even a meager living.

Dick has had many jobs, but can't seem to work for other people, so he is trying to get a loan to finish the large fifty-foot boat he has half-finished in his back yard. He goes to several banks, but his employment history and lack of collateral make it impossible to get the money he needs. He knows a man by the name of Joxer Goode who would hire him to provide red crabs, but his existing boat is way too small to carry the fish or the equipment necessary to be successful.

He has a plan to get steamer clams illegally, but he is willing to take the risk, as it is the only way he can support his wife and two kids at the present time.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

The first chapter of the novel introduces the main character, Dick Pierce, and sets the location of the story as a marshy salt flat on the shores of Rhode Island. Dick is pictured as a poor fisherman, who has lived his entire life in the shallows just inland from the ocean. He has an unstable work history, and very little in the way of possessions. He is portrayed as a man set in his ways, and who resents the tourists he feels encroach on his fishing territory.

Dick's goal is to finish the boat he has started building in his backyard, but he cannot get a loan for the materials he needs. There is a feeling that he will do whatever it takes to

feed his family and to get the money necessary to make his dream happen, even bordering on the illegal.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

Dick borrows a tractor from his neighbor, Eddie Wormsley, and takes his two boys into the bird sanctuary to get clams illegally. They follow an old causeway that hardly anybody knows is there. After sneaking back out with a fifty-five gallon drum full of clams, he returns the tractor and washes it for Wormsley. The next day, he sells the clams for one hundred twelve dollars.

### Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter Two begins to show a new side of Dick, as he does whatever he can to make money to finish building his boat. He also has a flashback to a time when he accompanied Parker on a boat delivery. This shows that the two of them are capable of breaking the law. It also depicts Parker as the leader, who got Dick into a scheme to smuggle drugs. He pays him five hundred dollars for his effort. This compares with only one hundred twelve dollars for a whole night's work for himself and his two sons.





# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Dick remembers a time when his friend, Larry Parker, got a job taking a fifty-foot boat to the Caribbean. On the way, they did some questionable things that included illegal expense at bars with the boat owner's credit card. Parker also met a couple of tourists and took them on a two-day fishing trip and charged them five hundred dollars. Dick got forty percent for doing most of the labor, while Parker kept the tourists company and showed them how to fish.

They got the boat to its destination only one day late. Then, Parker sold the airline tickets they had been given to return home, and instead got them passage on a boat to Miami. He then left Dick to take the bus home on his own.

A month later, Parker showed up at Dick's house, wanting to know what happened to some boots he had left for Dick to bring home. At first, Dick denied bringing them, but Parker knew Dick too well to believe him. When Dick got the boots, Parker pulled out several plastic pouches of heroin from the lining. Dick was very unhappy that he had been used to transport the drugs and told Parker that he didn't want any part of the money. However, when he was offered five hundred dollars, he just could not say no.

Dick had been on other trips when Parker had been hired to move boats, and it seemed like he always found something outside of what they were supposed to be doing to pick up some extra money at the boat owner's expense. However, this time, Parker offered Dick a partnership in becoming a small dealer of cocaine.

Dick's wife says that Parker is a bad influence on him, and Dick realizes this is true, but, in some ways, Parker keeps him in line and out of trouble. He seems to know the system.

The Neptune is a local bar, where the fishermen hang out. It is there that Dick finds Parker, who has a new cast on his right forearm. He announces he has a new boat and one college kid to help him, but he needs another hand and asks Dick to join them. Dick is not excited about joining them, as he knows that Parker tends to work kids too hard and then offer them drugs to keep them going even longer. As they continue to talk, Parker tells him he needs some more lobster pots that Dick has, and also a little help doing repairs to the boat which Dick can also do. Dick decides he probably will join him. Parker tells him he wants to make enough money to buy a boat he can use for chartering wealthy people on various kinds of trips. He also wants to get swordfish that are worth a lot of money. He explains that Dick is undervalued for what he knows, and that Parker wants to make him worth more. As a result, Dick can make more money for his boat project.



Parker tells Dick he will pay him two dollars an hour less than the boatyard would pay, but he must sign on as a crewmember in order to do the work. Dick knows the job is not what he would like to be doing, but money is money. Also, there is the lure of going for swordfish, even though Parker won't commit to paying for a spotter plane, which makes it more probable of being successful.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

The Neptune is introduced. It is a local bar where fishermen and other local laborers congregate to drink, discuss the local news, and to do some business-related deals. It is here that Parker begins to plant a seed in Dick's mind that he is not getting the money he is worth by doing small jobs to make a few dollars.

Dick's wife, May, is developed more thoroughly as a loving wife and mother, but one who distrusts most of Dick's friends. She is the stability that Dick needs, but also the one whom he must skirt in order to be involved in the projects that are somewhat less than honorable.

The author uses the analogy of a wealthy person who looks for undervalued stocks to invest in and compares that to the fact that the people in the area, who don't understand his worth, undervalue Dick.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Dick checks his pots and gets fifteen dollars for the lobsters. No money to save, just groceries. He knows if he goes out with Parker, his boys can check his traps, even though May is not generally in favor of it, unless conditions are very good. He still thinks it is a good idea to go for the swordfish, but wishes Parker would hire the spotter plane, even though it costs fifty dollars an hour plus a hundred dollars per fish.

Dick checks Parker's boat and sees that it needs to have the wood and stuffing replaced, but the rest of the boat looks seaworthy. On the way home, he stops by Goode's office and finds that he is out in his boat at Sawtooth Island, so Dick takes his skiff out there and tries to look as if he is fishing. He finds the Goodes, a very athletic couple, with another couple all dressed in very small swimsuits. They are looking at various spots on the island from where they are huddled up. Dick thinks they may be interested in buying the island, and it makes him think back to when his great uncle had owned most of the land here. It has all been sold, and Pierce is bitter, when he thinks that all there is left is the one-acre he owns. Nonetheless, Joxer Goode would make a good neighbor, and Dick could get closer to him if they lived near each other.

Dick still holds onto his dreams, but realizes himself that he is not an easy person to work with, though the boatyard owner who fired him still calls him to do a special job now and then. He feels he is a pretty good boat builder. He has built and sold beetlecats of wood, and a couple of skiffs, and, of course, a small one for the boys. Even though he gets by with the skiff he still has, it is harder every year to see his dream of owning a larger boat slip away, and it has been three years since he began to build the boat in his backyard. He continually dreams of the day he will bring it into the harbor, and how Joxer Goode would want him to sign a contract with him. Everyone would admire his work.

He is using his tongs to catch quahogs, and, as he does, he admires the fine, shiny grooves in their shells. Today his catch is unusually good. Soon Joxer Goode is waving and calling his name. He asks Dick if he has a bottle opener to open some cold beer they have. He is introduced to the other couple, Marie and Schuyler van der Hoevel, and opens their beers with a rigging knife. Goode tells Dick that Marie and Schuyler are going to be his neighbors as they have bought what has always been called The Wedding Cake that was the first house Dick's great uncle built.

Barbara, Joxer's wife, asks Dick if he would do a favor for them. They are to have thirty people to the island for a clambake, and would like him to sell them the clams and a few lobsters and oversee the pit. When he mentions he is going out to sea in a few days, Schuyler tells him he is a filmmaker, and would like to go with them and bring along a camerawoman. He is surprised, as the trip will be for several days and is not a luxury trip, but Barbara tells him to work out the deal of the clambake first, and then to decide



on the boat trip. With that, Goode offers Dick five hundred dollars to cover the cost of food, labor, and the use of his boat to help ferry people to the island. Dick sees it is an easy three hundred dollar profit, but also realizes that it could be the start of a lot of work and service to someone else that he has always sworn not to do. He finally agrees, however, with part of the deal being that Goode will come to his house to see the boat he is building. Dick has some thoughts that Goode might help him finance its completion.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Dick cannot make enough money to do more than just barely get by. He sees some possibilities of making extra money, and one is to work with Parker in preparing a boat to go for swordfish, the other is by working for the Goodes to put on a clambake to welcome the people, who have just purchased the first building his great uncle built in the area.

One of his goals is to get Joxer Goode to look at his boat in hopes of getting him to help with its funding, and he sees that by doing the clambake he may be able to accomplish two of his goals.

A pattern exists of Dick not holding jobs for any length of time due to his temper and his insistence on doing things his own way. As an independent fisherman, he can do things however he wants. However, he realizes he cannot get ahead or even get the money to finish building his boat the way it is going. He has also sworn that he will not fall into the routine of working for others by doing odd jobs and lowering himself to that stature, but the offer from Goode has too many advantages for him to pass up.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Dick's two teenage boys are named Charlie and Tom. He drops them off to dig steamers illegally in the bird-sanctuary. Charlie asks why there are three-peck baskets when the limit is two. Dick tells them he is the third and will be back soon. Dick is thinking that by the Fourth of July he will have the money to buy the diesel engine he has put a deposit on, and by fall he will have enough money to finish the boat.

At last he decides to do some outside work that is necessary, not because he isn't good enough to be a fisherman, but because it will allow him to remain a fisherman

## Chapter 5 Analysis

The theme of Chapter Five, which is only two pages, is that Dick sees working for others as servitude he doesn't want to perform. However, he also sees the labor of working for others as a tool with which to gain his freedom by being able to complete his boat, and thus to become a real fisherman. He justifies his decision to give in somewhat by thinking that he is not really compromising his dignity.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Dick gets the clambake going with the help of his sons. Soon, Goode is transferring people from the shore to the island. As they arrive, they stand in a semicircle on high ground looking down on Dick and his boys as if they are part of a show. Soon Goode asks Dick to have his wife and boys join them for dinner, but Dick declines the offer and tells his boys to go swimming and then go home.

A lady named Elsie Buttrick arrives, and says hello to Dick and his boys. She is from one of the wealthy families on the island, and is now an officer in the Rhode Island Natural Resources Department, a sort of a glorified game and fish warden. She is very informal and takes off her dress to reveal a red swimsuit, and Dick realizes she has the same good figure she did when she was just sixteen-years-old. As the boys leave, Elsie mentions that she has thought about Dick giving a tour of the salt ponds to school kids. She mentions that he is the only one besides her who knows where the old causeway that goes into the sanctuary is located. Out of the blue, she pointedly goes on to say that once was funny, but if he does it again, he will get fined. She is referring to Dick's illegal trip to get clams. She then becomes friendly again, and asks Dick if she can accompany him to get a load of guests in the skiff. As they leave, she mentions that her brother-in-law is putting up some cabins on Sawtooth Point. Dick is extremely surprised, and Elsie says she thought that was why Dick was invited to the clambake, along with some of the investors and possible purchasers of the cabins. She remains friendly but asks him not to tell anyone that she is the one who told him about the project. Dick notices that she is treating him in a strange way, being so formal at one point, and so personal in the next minute.

Then, she lets it slip that she is going to be the camerawoman Schuyler takes around while he makes his movie, and that they would like Dick to help them with some other projects. When Dick says that he is too busy to help them, Elsie hints that Schuyler has money to spend on his project and that Dick should think about it. As they pick up the guests at the dock at The Wedding Cake, Elsie gives up her seat to her sister, Sally, and takes a place close to Dick.

When they arrive on the island, Dick can't help but notice how insincere they are all as they chat. Looking this way and that and always smiling at anything anyone says, Dick sees them as a school of fish changing topics so quickly like a school of fish changes direction.

Marie van der Hoevel asks Dick if she can help him, but he shoos her away. When he finds that the food is all cooked perfectly, he invites everyone over. Marie is the first to taste quahog, and is obviously inexperienced as she does not know what part to eat and what part is "foreskin." As he notices how pretty Marie is and how well dressed she is, he feels just a pang of guilt about the clothes his wife wears. Then Elsie puts on a



pair of boots and gloves and helps Dick remove the food from the pit. Together, they have to step into the water to cool off the boots. Dick can't help but notice her thighs, as they become steamed pink from the heat of the seaweed in the pit. He is uncomfortable when he sees that his son, Charlie, notices too.

He talks briefly with Goode, who tells him he is buying two refrigerator trucks to haul his own crabs. When Dick asks if he has enough skippers to supply his crabs, Goode replies that he doesn't yet, but he has heard that Parker has a boat now. Dick can't get up the courage to mention his own boat. As they converse more, Goode tells Dick that Captain Texeira is doing a very good job with his two boats, and provides a lot of the red crabs Goode sells. With that, Goode looks at Dick with that certain dismissal of a subordinate, thanks him, and tells him that he did a first rate job with the food.

As the party progresses, Dick sees Elsie swimming back toward the island. He is also aware of the voices getting louder as the light gets lower, and it reminds him of passing the yacht club when he was on a fishing boat, and heard the laughter rising and falling.

He thinks of the seasons and how they relate to the various people, birds, and things that grow on the island. As he thinks of fall and the dying of the things that have grown during the spring and fall, he becomes melancholy, and feels a need to come out of his mood. He realizes he won't be able to buy the land back his father lost, but he will use the proceeds of those that have profited from his land to finish his boat. The clambake will provide some, Parker will provide some, and Goode and Schuyler may be good for some more money. That is when he gets the idea to put Schuyler and Parker together. They are a perfect match, as both are slick and smooth. Somehow, he wants to find a way to create this union as an additional way to get the funds he needs to complete his boat.

As the party breaks up, Dick gets a moment alone with Elsie. He tells her that she and Schuyler can go with Parker and him for swordfish if Schuyler will pay for the spotter plane. Elsie tells Dick frankly that she is not happy that Dick is working with Parker, but Dick tells her that he is not fond of Schuyler either, but they aren't getting married, they are going out to get a job done. He noticed that the noise of the party had died down, and many of the people are diving into the water nude. With that, Dick makes the vow that these people will fund the completion of his boat.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter Six is full of complex events. Dick is admired at being an employee when he provides a successful clambake, and he provides all the services expected of him. Elsie lets it be known that she is aware of his illegal activities in the bird sanctuary, but also hints that she will overlook it. Many of the guests remind Dick of people he knew years ago, who are now above him socially and financially. However, he puts that aside and convinces himself that these people will be the ones who will fund the boat which will allow him to rise in position and stature.

Last, Elsie mentions her concern that Dick is associating with Parker. Dick responds that he is no different than Schuyler, and he and Elsie are both tempting fate by associating with Parker and Schuyler.





# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Dick is unsettled the day before they put out to sea. He is more annoyed as Elsie continuously tries to film him doing the basic things he has always done in preparation for a trip. When Dick decides to check his own pots one more time before they leave, Elsie jumps into the skiff with him, and states her annoyance that he is being so difficult. When he finds an eel in one of his pots, Elsie is quick to film it.

Going to bed and setting his alarm for two in the morning, he sits for a minute with May. They have a quiet moment, and she tells him she hopes he can get a long with Elsie and Schuyler, and that he needs to change his attitude or he will not get along with anyone even if he finishes his boat. He asks if she would like to make love, and she replies that she will when he gets back from the trip.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Another short chapter of only three pages, it is clear that Dick is unhappy about having cameras on their trip. He is difficult with Elsie when she asks him to explain what is happening for the camera, and Elsie asks if he is going to be this way during the entire trip. His wife, May, holds back sex when he asks her, and she says that she hopes he will be able to get along with the new people better than he has with people in the past, as they present a possibility of new relationships for them both. He replies that he is not going on the trip as a social event.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

As they put out to sea, Dick asks Elsie to get stations on the radio so they can plot their position. After that, he asks her to get breakfast, and he explains next he wants to tell her and Schuyler the name of every item on board so they will know it if he asks for help.

Elsie does as she is told, and then Dick shows her how to use the radar to plot their position, and then explains they need to have a variety of ways to plot where they are in case one fails.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Dick takes control, and Elsie becomes the employee. Dick is shown for the first time to be a leader and well qualified to be in charge of a large boat at sea. He commands respect in this situation and it is clear that he is capable of captaining a boat of this type and size.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Dick goes to the crow's nest and observes the perfectly calm waters, the only variance being their own wake. When Elsie comes up an hour later, she films the waters in front and behind the boat. Dick explains to Elsie how they find swordfish. If there is a warm sun, the fish surface to let the warmth kill the worms on them. You can often see their fins and sometimes their whole bodies just below the surface. The boat pulls slowly to the fish, and then a barb called a lily is harpooned into the fish. It has a line attached to a beer keg. There is no line from the boat to the fish then, so they follow the beer keg in the water to track the fish. When the fish begins to die, they pull up alongside it and gaff it and bring it on board. The fish's sword can be very dangerous. It is how the swordfish kills its prey. It shakes its sword in the middle of a school of fish, and returns to eat those he has killed.

Dick sees something unusual out of the side of his eye, and, focusing on it he sees it is a fish. Too black to be a swordfish, but they begin to steer the boat toward it anyway. As they get near, Dick sees it is a black marlin and is finally able to throw the harpoon into it. As the fish swims away, it is followed by the beer keg that bobs on the surface attached to the lily. They follow in the boat until Dick can get a loop around its tail, and then he hoists it aboard, some eighty pounds of fish. Dick steps on its bill, hits it once with a club, and kills the fish.

Dick cleans the fish and puts it on ice. It is not good to sell, but they know some of its meat might make a good meal or two. After cleaning the deck, they continue looking for swordfish, this time accompanied by the spotter plane. Later in the day the boat begins to roll in the ocean swells that have picked up, and Dick can see that Elsie is seasick. He tells her to go below and lie on her bunk, but before she can leave she bends over the rail and throws up, her vomit catching the wind and trailing across the wheelhouse windshield. Dick grabs her tightly with both arms, and finally helps her down the ladder. He feels sorry for her, and at the same time is aroused by the closeness of their bodies. By the time he gets her settled, the sun is too low to continue their search for swordfish.

At around two in the morning they set the lobster pots and begin heading back to where they left off looking for swordfish. Dick takes the wheel alone, and looks at Elsie, still curled up on the deck, just as the moon begins to rise. Elsie wakes briefly and puts on a sweater, and as Dick watches her he lets the boat slip off course briefly, and has to correct her course. This reminds him why women are best left on shore.



## Chapter 9 Analysis

The author explains in detail how swordfish are located through sighting from the crow's nest and through the use of a spotter plane. Elsie is also the vehicle used for Dick to explain how the harpoon works and how they catch the fish.

The presence of Elsie creates a desire in Dick that he does not anticipate, and it takes some of his concentration from the task of fishing. Dick feels a closeness to her, which is brought on by her brief illness, and his feelings somehow expand into desire.

A sense of life aboard a fishing boat is described, and it includes undesirable meals, surprising weather changes, hard work at all hours of the day and night, but interspersed with periods of beauty and solitude



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

The next day they spot no swordfish, even with the help of a spotter plane and get very few lobsters and red crab. Dick sees a variety of mistakes they have made, and makes mental notes of changes in his plans for his own boat.

At the end of the day when the spotter plane leaves for the last time, it suddenly returns and begins making tight circles. As Parker gets the boat to the spot where the plane has indicated, they see a large fish sunning itself three or four feet below the surface. When Dick harpoons it, he strikes it too far back behind the fin, and is scared the fish will get away. Nonetheless, as they begin to follow the keg, they realize the lily has held, but the fish is not slowed too much by the keg it pulls behind and above it.

At that moment the plane begins another tight circle and they know it has spotted another fish. This creates a problem, as someone must follow the first fish with the dory while the boat goes after the second one. Since Dick and Parker are both needed on the larger boat, it leaves no one to follow the first fish in the dory. They finally ask Elsie if she can do it, and with a great deal of trepidation, Dick allows her to go in the dory. He reminds her to stay away from the fish if it dies as it will quickly draw sharks and create a very dangerous situation.

With Elsie following the first fish, Parker steers the boat toward where the plane is still circling. This time Dick gets a good shot at the fish and hits it squarely. After an hour the fish slows, and Dick realizes that they are a long way from Elsie. As he tries to get the fish into the boat, it still has too much fight, and even with Parker's help the fish is only half-stunned and continues to fight. When they finally get the fish on board, it continues to fight even with the gaff in it. While it struggles it catches Parker's shin with its bill and creates a gash, but they finally kill it and Parker limps back to the wheelhouse and heads the boat back in the direction of the first fish which the spotter plane is following.

When they get to the dory it is riding at an unusual angle. Dick realizes that the swordfish has gotten the line fouled in the outboard of the dory, and the sharks are beginning to attack the swordfish. He knows if a big enough shark attacks the swordfish it could pull the dory under with Elsie still in it. Parker gets the big boat close enough for Dick to throw Elsie a line, but she cannot pull herself to the boat, and is standing up, perilously close to falling into the ocean among the schooling sharks.

Dick finally is able to haul Elsie aboard, and he immediately hears the crack of a rifle. Not understanding what is happening, Parker appears to be shooting the sharks, and roars for Dick to get the sword fish before the sharks can eat it. Dick needs the tail gaff to bring the large fish aboard, and screams at Elsie to get it for him, but she is paralyzed with fear. Getting it himself, Parker appears at the same time and harpoons a shark that is just about to attack the swordfish as Dick pulls it up. He finally is able to get Elsie to



help him pull the fish onto the deck, and it looks to be over two hundred pounds. It has one bite taken out of its stomach by a shark, but they will be able to cover that up when they gut the fish.

When everything calms down, Schuyler asks if they can throw some guts overboard to get the sharks to return so he can film them better. Dick responds that he better help him get the dory back on board or they will possibly lose the camera that remains in it. After they get the dory secured, Dick realizes that the line will have to be replaced that caught in the propeller of the outboard, another forty dollars out of the profits. Then he goes to comfort Elsie, who is still shimmering in fear.

Parker brings out a bottle of bourbon that they all share. In the quiet, the sun drops below the horizon leaving lines of red and orange, and Dick is left to contemplate what his share of the profits will be.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter Ten is full of high drama as the fast action of harpooning the swordfish and getting them aboard and killed is followed with minute-by-minute action. There is a certain amount of fear felt by all the characters and that fear and tenseness is transferred to the reader. The hero of the chapter may be Elsie as she lends a hand in any way she can. If there is a villain it is Schuyler as he is more interested in shooting good footage for his film than he is of the safety of the people on the boat. When asked to go alone in the dory he refuses saying he needs to stay on the larger boat to take pictures.

Dick becomes more attracted to Elsie, and admits this fact to himself. He also reminds himself that women on board a fishing boat lead to trouble as they detract from the work at hand.

The character of Parker is shown in a more positive way, and is more admired, because he appears to be a hard-working fisherman, very aware of what is happening around him and able to give accurate orders when necessary. His original description as somewhat of a questionable character is diminished with his actions aboard his own boat.

As the story becomes more complex, so does the attainment of the money necessary for Dick to complete his boat. While he feels that there are sidetracks to his goal that he hadn't counted on, he is happy overall that he is making a great deal of progress. He will have four or five hundred dollars of profit from the trip plus marlin steaks for his family for the next six weeks.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

When Dick gets home he begins to work on his boat immediately. In one day he picks up the engine and gets it installed, and gets more lumber the next day and continues with his own work. He sees it will take more money to complete than he had estimated, what with radar, etc. He decides it is not yet time to have Joxer Goode look at his progress. Then it is time to see Parker again about another trip for Swordfish.

Dick takes ten dollars and goes to the Neptune. He finds Parker there, but Parker is not as friendly as Dick had thought he would be. He tells Dick that he may not be around all summer, and not to depend on him. He asks Dick to try to get some more pots for lobster and red crab from Goode. Then he says he cannot afford a spotter plane anymore unless Dick splits the cost. Dick says he won't, and then Parker asks to buy his skiff for two thousand dollars. Dick knows it is worth twice that, and tells Parker he is not interested.

Then Parker begins a lecture. He reminds Dick of his last several jobs when he was fired, because he could not get along with people. He tells Dick he satisfies his need to feel like he is in charge but at the same time he throws away opportunities to reach his real goal. Parker points out one example, as Dick does not give a counter price when Parker tried to buy his skiff. Instead, he notes how Dick just got mad and threw away the chance to sell it at a fair price. He tells Dick he is a non-player, who just complains about how bad things are instead of trying to make them better. Then he uses Schuyler as an example. Parker tells Dick that they both know he has no knowledge of the sea or fishing whatsoever. Instead of seeing him as weak, Parker sees him as a player, who takes what he can and uses it to leverage whatever it is he really wants. While he doesn't seem to be very successful, he has the locals in town thinking he is a major player and he is included in whatever is happening. Parker says Dick watches from the outside, because he has a reputation as a troublemaker.

Parker goes on to say that he learns things by listening and by putting two and two together. He has found out that Schuyler has had to borrow a great deal of money in order to pay off the mortgage on the Wedding Cake so he could buy Sawtooth Point.

Parker continues his lecture, telling Dick that he cannot depend on him to fund his boat by working their asses off fishing. He should look at leveraging some money by allowing a resort rental cabin to be built on his property. However, every suggestion Parker makes, Dick finds a reason why he won't do it that way. Finally, Dick feels that Parker knows more about his life than he does himself. Parker finishes by telling Dick that he cannot hope to make enough money by fall to finish his boat, and that maybe he should consider selling it like it is. Dick flatly refuses, and the two decide to go out the next day for swordfish again.



## Chapter 11 Analysis

In this chapter Parker continues the pretense that he understands Dick, and he points out all of Dick's poor qualities. This can be seen as a tool by Parker to get what he wants from Dick, particularly when Parker points out how Dick can turn his life around by being less conservative and more amiable. He also points out to Dick how he puts everybody in a good or bad category, instead of looking deeper to see what they can do for him.

This intensifies the struggle within Dick to be seen as someone who is knowledgeable and trustworthy. While he still wants to be seen as a person that cannot be bossed around, in his struggle to raise the money he needs to find a method of being self-sufficient that will allow him to ignore those who scorn him. So far, he cannot seem to combine the two struggles into a workable plan that can be successful.





# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

On the next trip out, Dick and Parker get no swordfish, but do fairly well with crabs. Dick gets four hundred dollars, which he uses for materials for the boat, and gives Eddie Wormsley half of the marlin that is left in return for a day and a half of work. When they finish there is nothing more to be done without more money.

The next day is Dick's birthday, and he sees Miss Perry coming to his house in her thirty year old station. It is in almost perfect condition, and still has the original wooden sides, which she keeps varnished beautifully. She has always been fond of Dick, and he assumes that she is being driven to his house by one of her cottage renters, but he finds Elsie in the driver's seat. It had become a ritual for her to arrive on Dick's birthday, but mostly to celebrate the two boys' birthdays, as she would present them each with a new book every year. By this time there is a unique collection of books in their little library, and it almost represents a history of New England.

Part of the yearly ritual is to go fishing in the salt pond, and this year the group consists of Tom and Charlie, Miss Perry, Elsie, and Dick. They catch a few fish, and Miss Perry catches a sea robin. As the fishing slows, they all lounge in their seats, and Miss Perry notes that they look like a daddy longlegs spider with their fishing poles hanging outside the boat and their lines dangling into the water. Elsie lays back and comments that fishing like this for flounder is dumb. With that, Miss Perry hits Elsie's pole making it feel to Elsie that there is a big fish on it, and she quickly reels the line all the way in until they can all see the bait. Elsie comments with a laugh, "Now, *that's* dumb." They all have a laugh at Elsie's expense.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Miss Perry enters into the story. She is a wealthy older lady that is fond of Dick and his boys. They have a long history of associations with her, and her father and Dick's great uncle had some business dealings that were profitable. There have been suggestions by several people that Dick try to get her to finance his boat, but he likes her too much to be able to ask.

Elsie reappears, and Dick can't help but notice her, even though his boys and Miss Perry are with them.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

When they get back to Dick's house, May begins to cook the cleaned fish, and Dick gets himself a beer and goes to see if Elsie wants one also. He cannot find Elsie or Tom. He finally looks in the boathouse that he built two years ago to house his materials and his tools, and also to keep anyone from being able to see that he is trying to build a boat. He finds Tom showing Elsie the boat, and is very upset, as the boys are not to let anybody near his project. Tom quickly leaves Dick and Elsie alone, and Elsie admires the boat as one would admire a work of art, running her hand along its side. Then May comes in and tells them it is time for supper. Dick is startled, but Elsie goes on about the boat and Dick asks her not to tell anyone about it. Elsie agrees, but asks when it will be finished. With that May laughs and walks on ahead of them. May continues that the boat is a hole in outer space to the rest of the family. Dick is upset by this, but is able to hold his temper much better than he thought he would. He even decides to take May and the boys to the theater later on his way to the Neptune, and to pick them up on the way home.

At supper, they begin talking of the Indians and their history here. Miss Perry tells them that wampum was not real money, but instead, a method of recording events the tribes experienced. Wampum were made of strings of beautiful shells that were strung together artfully. She also notes that the Indians did not feel they owned the land here, but each tribe merely governed different parts of it

Then, cakes are brought in for the boys and as everyone sings, Dick has thoughts to himself that the people who founded the area will soon be all gone, just as the Indians are gone. Those relatives he followed will only be remembered in the history books.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

May's unusual belittling of Dick's boat is unusual, and hurts Dick, particularly since it is in front of Elsie. Her name for it of "Miss Black Hole" may be an indication of what is to come. While Elsie sees his boat as Dick sees it, he is confused as to what the real meaning of May's outburst is, and also how Elsie can see a work of art in an object meant for physical work. This makes his time at home somewhat unpleasant.

A lecture by Miss Perry on some of the local Indian lore points out a parallel to Dick between the Indians who left little behind them except history, and his family who is also being slowly forced from the land and may leave little but history. Dick thinks that these women in his life represent his anger, envy, and regret. Anger at his family for not supporting him more, envy at the money being made on the point from the tourists, and regret that there are large expensive houses on the hill he cannot afford.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

Joxer Goode comes to take a look at Dick's boat, and goes over it thoroughly, including the plans and specs for the engine. He mentions that he once thought of having this very boat built, but that Captain Texeira ended up providing his two boats instead. When Dick notes that he has heard the Captain is retiring, Goode tells Dick that his two boats are still going to be working for him.

When Goode asks if the boat is to belong to Dick alone, Dick says that it is, and that he has no loans against it. Goode promptly implies he knows that Dick couldn't get a loan, but instead of lashing out at him for the statement Dick remains calm and says that bankers don't know boats. Goode says that Dick obviously knows his work is good. Since that isn't what he wanted Goode to see, he asks Dick straight out what he did want him to look at the boat for. When Dick says he wants Goode to lend him ten thousand dollars to complete the boat, Goode tells him that he has partners who will not take an unfinished boat as collateral on a loan. Dick is amazed and encouraged that Goode didn't say no immediately, so he mentions some other things he can add as collateral. Goode dismisses them all, and asks if there is a way he could mortgage his house and land or use it as collateral. Dick says that he has already done that to get as far as he is with the project. Goode tells him the only way to get the money is to get someone with ready assets to cosign a note for him.

Goode continues his offer. He will try to get the money from his company if Dick will sign a three-year agreement to bring a certain amount of red crab. Dick asks if that is all, and Goode, says of course not, he will still need a cosigner. However, at least he will have a contract. Then, he asks if Dick has thought of Miss Perry as a cosigner.

Dick is not willing to commit, and indicates the meeting is over. Goode tells him to bring some crabs back from his next trip, and they will talk again. As Dick takes the Mamzelle out, he is still thinking about his options.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Dick Pierce is learning from his mistakes, and from what Parker has told him. He becomes more patient, and allows what Joxer Goode tells him to sink in without getting so visibly upset. He is patient in his discussion with Goode, listens to him, but makes it clear that some of the options Goode offers him to finance the completion of his boat are unacceptable.

The choices hanging over Dick's head are dark ones. He has two viable options for getting Goode to finance the completion of his boat. First, he can somehow come up with more money from his house and land, but that goes completely against what he feels his goals are. Second, he can go to Miss Perry, but two things stop him. He is too



proud and knows her too well to lower himself to that level, and also he feels the loan of money on a boat should be between business partners who understand the day to day dealings of fishing, not with a widow who has no knowledge of what the business is about.

Goode leaves the meeting with Dick on a positive note. He mentions that Dick obviously knows where to find crabs and that he is glad they talked, leaving the pathway open for Dick to return with another offer.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Their next trip out gets a respectable amount of crabs, and one decent swordfish on the way back. Parker lets the college kid, who is working for them, take over the helm while he and Dick have a beer. Parker asks unusual questions about how to get to and from Mary Scanlon's restaurant. Dick answers his questions, but it seems that Parker is more interested in how well he could get back using a remote route to the West. Dick answers, all the way to New York if you had a little canoe. Dick doesn't think much more about the conversation. He is too focused on a cosigner that Goode might have come up with.

When they get to Goode's dock, nothing is as it should be. Skippers are yelling, there is a good deal of confusion, and Captain Texeira is heading back out to sea with his crabs still on board. They find that Goode's refrigeration system is down and he cannot buy any crabs at all. It comes to light that Goode has found a way for Texeira to deliver to someone else. Goode has a number of excuses why his backup refrigeration plan will not work either.

Dick begins to think like a businessman. He knows how much crab will be wasted without refrigeration, and he also thinks that all the red crab fishermen will now go farther out after lobster. He sees the larger picture. The whole of Galilee is dependent on Goode's business. This will be a very major blow to its entire economy. And, he realizes, Goode sure as hell won't lend him ten thousand dollars at this point.

After he arrives home he showers and makes love to May. Then he takes two five-dollar bills and heads for the Neptune. May doesn't seem too impressed with his lovemaking or his compliment that the gardening she is doing has helped her figure.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

Just as the fishing seems like it will get profitable for Dick, at least for a short time, the whole plan is halted as Goode's ability to buy the crabs is halted. Two factors are affected by this situation. One, the entire town will be hurt by the lack of work this will mean for various people, and, second, it means that Dick will have to look at other means to fund his boat's completion.

Dick thinks like a businessman. He sees the entire picture, and subconsciously asks himself how the crab catch could be saved, but comes up with no answer. Feeling like he understands the situation better than he would have in the past, he makes love to his wife, expecting her to be more supportive of his knowledge. However, she remains distant and somewhat uncaring.

Dick goes back to the Neptune with more money than usual, and the Neptune becomes a symbol both of escape for Dick and also as a source of knowledge.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

After an hour or so at the Neptune, Dick has had a third shot of whiskey with beer chasers. When Parker comes in, he tells Dick that they will have to go offshore tomorrow and dump the crabs before they spoil. Dick is outraged and wants to go right now. When Parker says that Dick's boat will wait as he only has enough money for one coat of paint, Dick is silent.

Parker tells Dick they need a change of luck, not an angry wrong decision. He asks Dick to put his small skiff on board tomorrow, and they will go dump the crabs. Dick gets angry and wants to know why Parker needs his small skiff. Parker accuses Dick of being drunk and tells him to just do it and they will discuss it tomorrow.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

The chapter is barely one page but has a great deal of significance. As Dick is somewhat rejected by his wife, he goes to the Neptune and gets drunk. There he finds that he and Parker must return to sea to dump their catch and clean the hold. Parker seems to accept this, but Dick has an uncontrollable need to get it over with right then and to get on with finding a way to get money for his boat. As Parker settles him down, Dick seems to be unaware that Parker has plans for something other than fishing, and that Dick will play a major part in the plan, whether he likes it or not.

The criminal side of Parker seen by May and Elsie begins to make another appearance. Tension mounts as additional plots becomes obvious, thus giving Dick more insecurity once more.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

Parker and Dick return to sea with a college boy named Keith to help. After they dump the crabs, Dick is in an especially foul mood. He has left his boys to put one coat of paint on his boat, and then there will be no more money in the near future.

The college boy wants to fish for tuna, so Parker trolls slowly for a couple hours while he tries his luck. Dick feels they are wasting their time, but Parker tells him that he will pay for a spotter plane if they get anything on this trip. About that time Keith, the college boy, gets a strike and ends up landing a bluefish. Dick goes up into the crow's nest to look for swordfish, enjoys the clear air away from the diesel engine, and looks down at Keith filleting the fish.

Early the next day they spot a buoy with an unidentified double orange pennant. Parker eases the boat up to it, and begins to haul it aboard amidst the complaints of Dick. Parker says that it is all right, that it was previously arranged. Then, as Parker takes a package out of the third pot, Dick looks at Keith and realizes he is also aware of what is happening already. Parker tries to calm Dick. "A long time ago," Parker said, "you swallowed hard and took a couple hundred bucks. Small. This is small. Small is the way to do it."

As they head toward shore, Dick holds his temper. He knows he has no money to work on his boat, Parker's boat pays him forty percent of their take of fish, and he continues to make some progress. He decides to keep quiet. When they get near shore, Parker tells Dick the plan. He and Dick are to take Dick's skiff to shore by Mary Scanlon's restaurant where a man will meet them with a truck. They give whelks they have packed with coke to the man, and then come back to the boat by another route. Dick gets five thousand dollars. Dick knows that this is not small. He and Parker discuss it, and Dick realizes the five thousand is half of the remainder of his boat. Parker seals the deal by agreeing to pay for a spotter plane two days every week for a month. Parker says he knows they can get some fish. He tells Dick they can even take out Schuyler and Dick's "girlfriend" to make more movies, and they will get two fish at a time. He finished by reminding Dick that his boat will be in the water by Labor Day, and calls him Captain Pierce.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

Parker continues to be able to get Dick to do what he wants by using the leverage of Dick's unfinished boat. When he tells Dick that they will go out for swordfish after they complete the drug delivery, he goes so far as to tell Dick that he can bring out his "girlfriend," and also addresses him as "Captain Pierce."





Parker continues to be one step ahead of Dick in the thinking process. He has planned his course of action carefully, and knows Dick will not be able to resist the lure of money to complete his boat. He also knows, probably more than Dick, about his attraction for Elsie.

Dick is torn between his two struggles once more. He wants to complete his boat, but he wants to do it on his own terms. However, he realizes more and more that his way is not working, and that Parker's schemes are bringing in good money. He remembers the lecture by Parker that he has to be a "player" and gamble a little bit to be successful.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

At high tide Dick takes Parker to shore with almost no moon overhead. They skiff through the tricky salt marsh with almost no light. Dick drops Parker off near the parking lot of the restaurant with a basket, and then spits into the water to measure the receding tide. A few minutes later, he hears a motor start. At the same time, Parker returns with the basket, which is still full. A boat without lights begins to chase them as they leave the shore. Dick finds another pond and they pull the skiff out of the water and hide it in the tall spartina, trying to cover their trail. The other boat, still without lights, continues to circle the pond slowly, trying to figure out where the skiff is. Parker tells Dick that there was a car in the parking lot that didn't seem to belong there, so he left.

As Dick and Parker lay in the mud, the Boston Whaler that has been tailing them comes closer, and they hear the voices of three people. They hear two men and a woman. The woman is Elsie. Dick pulls the boat up onto the beach, and the two begin to drag and carry it the two hundred yards across the sandy hill toward another pond on the other side. Just as they get to the water and begin to put the boat in, a spotlight begins to play off the shore a half-mile away. They get the skiff going, and, after rowing for a few minutes, they start the engine and head toward where they hope to find Keith in Mamzelle. Parker's wonders aloud if all the coast guard was after them, or if they just hit an unlucky night, or if perhaps an informer tricked them. Parker states that right now the itty-bitty skiff with the itty-bitty basket is worth more than the Mamzelle.

They finally meet with Keith and Mamzelle, and get the skiff and its cargo of the basket safely on the boat.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

Another chapter of high drama and fast action, Parker's expertise and luck seem to have come to an end. It is only Dick's knowledge of the salt ponds and skill at maneuvering his son's skiff that saves them. Dick is finally put into a position of control for the first time, and it dawns on him that this is not the direction he wanted his control to take.

Dick and Elsie are perhaps the most skilled at finding their way around in between the spartina, and they are the two who have the most roots in the area. The author pits Elsie on the right side of the law, however, she appears to be working for either the Coast Guard or a drug enforcement agency also. Dick, on the other hand, is on the wrong side of the law, and he is working for a larger operation too.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

Next morning they try to decide what to do. Dick wants to take his five thousand dollars and go to work on his boat, but Parker shows him the whelks and tells him that's where his five thousand is. Dick reminds Parker that he was working on a job, not on a percentage. Dick thinks of rowing in with the skiff and leaving Parker, but even if he gets in safe it will be fingering Parker, and he is not ready to turn on him yet.

They all contribute plans, none of which seems very good to them all. Finally Parker takes control, and revises a plan that Keith mapped out. They will pour bait over the whelps which contain the dope, leave them in plain sight on the deck, then Parker will get his station wagon and load the whelp with a couple lobster and his gear.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

After they all get settled and have time to think, they begin to argue about what to do next. Dick wants to dump the whelp, take the five thousand he believes he is owed, and go to work on his boat. Parker makes it clear there will be no five thousand until the deal is completed. Dick continues to think more about the consequences to himself and his family if he has to go to prison for smuggling cocaine.

Dick has not made a clear enough deal with Parker to be certain he is owed the money, but in his mind he feels cheated. Parker vetoes Keith's plan that puts himself in charge of the dope, but they all have a say in what they are to do, and eventually agree how it will be handled.



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

When they dock, they are boarded by plainclothes cops and one has a dope sniffing dog. After they search, the boat one looks at the harpoons and notes he thought they were fired out of guns, but Dick tells him that is for whales and these are for swordfish.

They are finally released, and take Mamzelle to her slip. On the shore are Parker's gear and the basket of whelps. Parker and Dick sneak glances at it near the two cops.

Keith makes like he wants to leave quickly, but Parker sends him back to the boat on an errand. On shore, the patrolmen get the dog out again and it rubs up against the smelly whelp, while its handler tells the dog to get away or it will stink up their car. When asked what it is, Dick says it is whelp, and that Italians eat them.

Leaving in Parker's station wagon, Parker has a big laugh at the irony of what Dick said to the cop, "Italians eat 'em'." The cop is obviously Italian, but Dick didn't realize that. As Dick waits while Parker makes a phone call, the station wagon begins to smell up with the whelp.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

There is a great deal of irony when the relatively innocent Dick tells the cop that the mess on the dock is whelp, and that Italian's eat them. By the name badge on the officer Parker realizes he is Italian. The irony continues when the dog wants to rub against the smelly whelp instead of sniffing it for the cocaine, and the handler tells it to get away or it will smell up the patrol car. As Dick waits for Parker, the same whelk containing the dope smells up their car.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

Parker goes right to the Wedding Cake and finds Schuyler loading a U-Haul trailer. He has just come in from a swim and is nude except for a towel across his shoulders. Schuyler says that he and his wife are moving into one of the cottages. He mentions that he filmed a group of college kids a couple nights before, and there may have been some unusual scenes. Parker goes to the car to get the whelps, and Dick wanders around the property and remembers his father.

His father had seemed disappointed in Dick that he didn't seem to accomplish much. Dick's father lost his boat in a hurricane, while Texeira's boat was saved.

Eventually, Dick's relatives moved away for one reason or another, leaving only Dick's father and mother. Dick's father tried to run a farm and make a living catching fish, but the death of his wife and the loss of the boat he had built finally caused him to die also.

Soon, Schuyler and Parker tell Dick that they are going to New York. Dick wants to ask what is going on, but doesn't seem to be included, so he remains quiet except to ask if this means the run is complete, but Parker says it is close, and calls him "Dicky-bird."

As he begins to make breakfast, Schuyler asks his wife, Marie, what she wants. When she says that she just wants juice and coffee, Schuyler calls it the "whore's breakfast." With that he explains to Dick that he has tried to film prostitutes and college kids, and even homosexuals, with little luck. He also mentions to Marie that he has been given another twelve thousand dollars to complete the film they are working on that Dick and Parker appear in. As they begin to get ready to go, Schuyler tells Marie that he will call Elsie from New York.

Dick goes home in Parker's car and showers. May is glad to see him home and they make love while the rain pounds against the window.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

The setting moves ashore. There are glimpses of the new construction and landscaping planted, and the Wedding Cake doesn't seem to be much like it was when Dick was little.

There is a question of whether or not Schuyler and Marie are moving out of necessity to save money, and it appears they have had a filming party with some college kids that was less than moral. When Schuyler refers to Marie indirectly as a whore, she is apparently used to his references to prostitutes, as he has some experience with them and homosexuals as well.



Schuyler appears as an accomplice to Parker, and there is even a hint that Elsie might be involved also. Dick is left out of the preparations to go to New York, and called "Dickey-bird," by Parker as he does when he sees Dick as an underling. Schuyler refers to money coming in from "no where" to Marie, but implies that he works for it in ways she doesn't understand.

A strong parallel appears between Dick and his deceased father. Both tried to make a living with a large boat, and both seem to fail, with Captain Texeira somehow involved in their failures. Dick's father had the same hopes of salvaging the land from tourism development even then. Dick wonders if his father's unhappiness had to do with his own failure or that of Dick himself.

Dick also sees a parallel between the relationship between himself and May, and between Schuyler and Marie, and even in the relationship between himself and Parker. He sees that they all want something, and he had always assumed they each wanted something different, but now he is beginning to see that everyone has pretty much the same goal. He also sees the parallel of projects and ideals slipping away just as mud that goes into the ocean disappears.



# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary

The next day Dick runs into Eddie Wormsley and they are able to buy some inexpensive wire and other materials at a salvage-warehouse. On the way home he picks up Elsie on her bike, and gives her a ride. She begins rattling on and on about having to spend the previous night shuttling some cops in the Whaler. She mentions that there was a coast-wide alert for drug smugglers, but all she found was a couple of kids who got away into one of the marshes.

They arrive at Elsie's house, and Dick is surprised to learn she has recently bought a tip of land from Miss Perry, and it has a house which looks almost like a tool shed. The house consists of one long room with a kitchen and a fireplace at one end, and some shiny material screens off the other end. Elsie disappears behind the material and comes out wearing a terry cloth robe, and announces she is going for a quick swim and invites Dick to join her. He indicates that he does not want to go just then, and she climbs down a spiral staircase that leads to a greenhouse directly on the water. As Dick watches her swiftly step onto a stone, drop the robe, and dive into the water he is not sure she has on a bathing suit.

Dick then tries to use the bathroom, but it is a chemical style that he can't quite figure out how to flush. Elsie comes in and tells him it is used to turn waste into compost so that it doesn't foul the water in the pond.

As Dick picks through some more items on the shelves, Elsie tells him that he is welcome to play with anything he wants, but not to straighten anything up. The two have a long talk that comes easily for them both. They have a surprisingly number of things in common, and both tell each other a little of their past that is very personal and not often discussed with others. They abruptly end the conversation by going through the curtain to Elsie's bed.

## Chapter 22 Analysis

Dick and Elsie find that they have a great deal in common. She represents the law, but, on the other hand, she also represents what Dick sees as his past and his future coming together. Elsie sees Dick as someone in whom she can confide, and someone who has been through the same struggles for the same reason she has. Both need someone to talk with. Both need someone to help them both put aside the confusion of reality and harshness. Elsie's comment that Dick can play with anything he wants has unique sexual undertones.



# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

As Dick and Elsie begin to see each other regularly, she talks of her earlier sex life, and admits that she noticed when Dick looked at her thighs at the clambake. He feels uncomfortable thinking about that and also about how his son looked at her thighs also.

But, in general, he enjoys their talks and their lazy afternoons together at her house. His only feelings of discomfort come when she seems to be able to pull things out of Dick that he wished he could keep to himself.

Dick slacks up on the boat work with other things now keeping him busy. He finds that Joxer Goode is still not buying crabs, but that he is finally installing the new refrigeration units in his warehouse. Joxer now talks to Dick almost as an equal, but Dick knows he hasn't risen in status. Joxer has had his status lowered. Joxer still wants Dick to come to see him as soon as his boat is completed.

At home May's garden is flourishing. Everything in it is blooming except for May. Dick thinks she still looks like a bleak winter day. When she tells him he needs to ask anyone he can for money, including Elsie, he feels an inner shame at what he is really thinking. In the end he just wants to get out to sea.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

Dick's experience with Elsie causes him some jealousy when she talks freely of sex with others. He would like to have her on a more personal level. His wife seems to almost know that something is going on, but Dick realizes he may be just imagining it.

Dick is uncomfortable with his relation with Elsie, especially realizing how his son might feel about her.

May urges Dick to look for money anywhere or anyway he can. She lets it be known that if Dick is unhappy the rest of the family will be also, and hints that she will not take another winter of his foul moods.





# Chapter 24

## Chapter 24 Summary

Dick's relationship with Elsie continues, and becomes much more frank than Dick feels comfortable with. He begins having to concentrate on the lies he tells May and also to Eddie so that he keeps them from questioning where he is all the time.

As he talks more openly with Elsie, she mentions that Aggie Bigelow and her father had an affair. Aggie's husband, Timmy, didn't find out for years. He found out when some burglars broke into their house, and tied Timmy and Aggie up, and opened a box they thought was her jewelry. It contained love letters from Elsie's father to Aggie, and Timmy had to lie there tied to his wife while they both read the letters that had been strewn about.

## Chapter 24 Analysis

There is a great deal of guilt on Dick's part as Elsie pours out her inner feelings to him. He understands her more when he learns that her father had an affair with their neighbor next door. When Elsie tells him to go home to his secure wife and family while she stays at her house hiding their secret, he feels like she is telling him to leave her alone. In fact, she is trying to arouse him. Elsie is more sexually aroused during arguments or fantasies.



# Chapter 25

## Chapter 25 Summary

Dick begins to think about the lobster pots that have gone unattended, and he knows there can be a loss of the fish and a loss of equipment if he doesn't get back out to empty them. When he calls for Keith, he can't be found, so he decides to go to the Neptune, but on the way he turns off at Elsie's. During their conversation she tells Dick that she thinks she could get her brother-in-law, Jack, to invest in his boat. When she says that Jack will do anything for her, Dicks gets upset and tight. Elsie suggests they go to the Neptune, but Dick laughs at that and says it is a fisherman's bar.

To get Dick out of his foul mood, she suggests they get the blue canoe from the Wedding Cake. As they ride it into the darkness, Elsie relates the story she once read of a boy and a girl together on the bank of the ocean, kissing as the tide comes in. The boy rises up until he and the girl are both almost supported by the rising tide. He puts himself into her mouth and lets the tide gently move them both until he explodes and she loses her fear. Dick thinks the story is stupid. Elsie begins to move away from him, and he tips the canoe so that she loses her jeans she has taken off to go swimming. They both tumble into the thick, black mud and end up making love almost submerged in the muck. Afterwards, they have no key to put the boat back into the shed at the Wedding Cake, and no key for Elsie's car, so they have to walk all the way to her house. She wearing only a sweatshirt, Dick wearing clothes completely saturated with the black mud.

## Chapter 25 Analysis

While Dick's mind isn't always on Elsie, when he does have some free time he automatically goes to her. While he is there this time, he gets jealous that her wealthy brother-in-law will do "anything" for her.

They go for a moonlight ride in the canoe, and Elsie relays an erotic story she once read where a couple makes love in the ocean surf. Elsie gets excited thinking about stories like this with a lot of fantasy, but Dick thinks they are stupid. However, he doesn't realize how this affects him, and he takes Elsie in the mud much as the lovers in her story did.



# Chapter 26

## Chapter 26 Summary

Dick finally finds Keith and they make plans to go empty the lobster pots and agree to take Charlie along. May absolutely refuses to let Tom go along also. Not the three of them and not on Parker's boat.

When Dick stops to quickly tell Elsie of his plan, she immediately is disappointed that she cannot go with him. She tells him several times that she wished she would have known. Dick finally tells her that he's taking his son, but doesn't mention that Parker is not going. He is still in New York and no one has heard from him.

As Dick leaves Elsie's house he feels somewhat sad that Elsie has gotten so attached to him. He feels he will soon have to hurt her, but for now he feels that he deserves to play a little. He is aware that he is also beginning to understand himself more and also to see that those around him are not all without fear and failure. And the fact that he has put himself in the hands of others, Parker and Elsie particularly, he believes he can control his own destiny more than when he was more isolated.

## Chapter 26 Analysis

While Elsie has seemed to be the one in control more often than Dick, she appears to be more in need of him when he decides to go back out to sea for a few days. It is somewhat ironic that he cannot take her, because his son will be with him. When Dick has work to do he can put Elsie behind him, but when he has free time he needs her security, companionship, and the sex he has become accustomed to.

The author begins to show more of Elsie's true character through the eyes of Dick, and it is apparent she has more weakness than was evident when she was in uniform.



# Chapter 27

## Chapter 27 Summary

After the pots are emptied, Dick follows the variances in the water temperature looking for swordfish in the sixty four to sixty eight degree tongues of water. Charlie sees the first one, and they barely have it onboard when he spots another. They are successful in getting that one also, and just miss another due to darkness. Dick says they will stay out one more day, and tells Charlie to radio the Fisherman's Co-op to call his mother. When asked what he will say, Charlie jokingly tells him that he'll say they're in a mess of swordfish and are staying out. Dick explodes at his son for being so open over the radio about what they have found, but Charlie is hurt and tell his dad it is a joke.

They get another swordfish the next morning and one in the late afternoon. Dick compliments Charlie on having good eyes. He also reminds him to continue being careful. As Dick goes below, he sits in the dim light and remembers how May was many years ago. Solid and dependable. He thinks that she will not leave him now even if she finds out about his infidelity. She may leave for a while, but she will not go far. She will make him pay in other ways.

## Chapter 27 Analysis

Dick's skill in locating swordfish is noted once again. It is also apparent that the skill is being passed on to his son, Charlie. Dick and Charlie have a quality talk and understand each other a little more. Dick recalls a time when he made a mistake in front of a number of fishermen on Teixeira's boat. He tells Charlie never to blame anyone in front of others for something that goes wrong. At the same time Dick thinks about his infidelity to May, and, while he is not ashamed, he remembers her telling him that he will not get his boat in the water by working Parker's boat. He understands that a lot of people are telling him the same thing.



# Chapter 28

## Chapter 28 Summary

Back ashore, Dick lets Charlie go pick up the money. He wants Charlie to learn how little there is left for the crew, and the owner gets a large share without even being on the trip. When they get home Charlie is very proud and tells his mother everything they did. May is happier than Dick has seen her in months, and listens to her excitement from the shower as Charlie continues to tell her of their good fortune.

Dick doesn't understand why he is in such a dark mood. Everything seems to be going his way and he is closer than ever to getting his boat completed. After they eat, Dick tells May that he is going to go talk to Miss Perry about money, and May is surprised and asks him if he has thought how to discuss it with her. Dick tells May that he is going to do something that she wants him to, and not to interfere with the way he plans to do it.

When Dick gets to Miss Perry's, he sees Elsie's Volvo is there. Without thinking, he rings the doorbell, too eager to think about anything more than his unpleasant task. Elsie answers, and tells Dick that Miss Perry is having her yearly depression, and that Elsie and her doctor have been trying to get her to take some medicine and that has upset Miss Perry a great deal. Dick says that he is there to ask her for money, but then Elsie also mentions that Captain Texeira is also on his way over. She shoos Dick away and tells him to wait at her house, that there are some complications she needs to talk to him about.

Dick waits at Elsie's, and begins to think how closely his life is tied to hers, from his great uncle's dealings down through his father, and not only himself now, but also the way that Charlie must think of her. When she comes in the door she kisses him briefly and immediately asks where he has been, that he was supposed to be home two days ago. He tells her that he got into a lot of fish, assuming that she would understand. However, she waits for more explanation, just as a wife would wait. Dick feels uncomfortable and does not know how to handle the situation.

Elsie becomes verbally abusive that he didn't find a way to let her know he would be delayed. She seems to feel it is something she deserved, and Dick can't quite understand her concern. She uses Captain Texeira as an example of how he treats Miss Perry, calling her and getting flowers for her if he is to be held up.

Dick is angry and explains to her that he has had good luck recently, but that it is not enough to get the boat. May wanted him to give it up before, but now she realizes that he will never be happy unless he finishes it, and she is right. He must do it now if he ever is to do it, and that is how he got up the courage to go to Miss Perry for a loan.



He goes on to tell her that he feels he has screwed everything up. Elsie tells him that every time they get cozy and talk seriously, they don't have good sex. However, she wants him to tell her exactly how he feels, and so they sit down to have a serious talk about his feelings. With that, Elsie soothes him and tells him that everything will be all right. He assumes she is just calming him, but he is willing to let her. Then she explains that she has talked to Miss Perry and she is going to lend him ten thousand, and that Elsie has gotten a thousand from her bother-in-law for him. Miss Perry has checked with Texeira about the investment and feels it is sound, but, more than that, she wants to give him a chance to keep his family there owning the property and carrying on the family tradition.

Dick becomes enraged within himself. He is not exactly sure why, but when Elsie explains to him why she thinks he is mad, he realizes that she is perfectly correct. As he looks at her he cannot believe he has slept with her so intimately. Dick wants to distance himself from Elsie, but all he can say is that he has to go along with her plan, as he has no choice.

## Chapter 28 Analysis

Chapter twenty-eight is very complex and touches on all aspects of the novel. Dick begins by feeling happy for Charlie in his excitement, but feels a need to tone his mood down somewhat. Later, when he thinks of Charlie's likely feelings toward Elsie, he becomes very defensive. He realizes things are going his way, and have never been better even though it is not completely as he had outlined. He also understands that he is not in line with the completion of his boat the way he is going. With that he tries to appease his wife for the guilt he feels by following her suggestion of looking toward Miss Perry for a loan.

He becomes more confused when he finds out how much concern Elsie has had for him when he was late returning from sea. He doesn't look at her as someone he has to include in his overall daily plans as she does of him. And she wants a little recognition on the side that she feels he owes her. In arranging the loan with Miss Perry, Dick sees the two of them beginning to take control of his life. That is the thing he has feared most and has resisted most throughout the novel. To make matters worse still, the thought of Elsie flaunting in front of her brother-in-law before asking for a loan to give Dick makes him furious once more, almost to the point of completely losing his temper. Looking at her uniform beside her swimsuit and party clothes he has a hard time trying to understand who she really is.



# Chapter 29

## Chapter 29 Summary

Dick goes to Miss Perry's house to thank her for her loan. When he gets there, however, she is very ill, and rambles on to herself about how she feels low and dark, and that she is unhappy to be seen that way. Dick listens to her with a great deal of sympathy, but only tells her he is sorry for the way she is feeling before she asks him to leave. He leaves with a feeling that she is sorry he came.

## Chapter 29 Analysis

Miss Perry's health deteriorates and the deterioration is met with a sense of foreboding. It is reflected for Dick in the walking sticks he sees as objects of evilness and fear. He remembers that he did not thank her for the loan.



# Chapter 30

## Chapter 30 Summary

Dick returns home to tell May that the loan is complete, and that Elsie will lend him another thousand. He is extremely confused that he is not ecstatic about the situation, but he feels a let down. May comforts him and reminds him that he will pay it back and he is deserving of the money.

Dick wonders why he feels so let down. The boat had been a major part of his life and everything it has stood for, but now that completion is almost certain he feels detached from it. He wonders if his affair with Elsie has anything to do with it.

## Chapter 30 Analysis

Though less than two pages, Chapter Thirty is significant. In Dick's mind, the loan represents his failure to complete the boat in his own way without help from anyone. His enthusiasm diminishes, as does the health of Miss Perry. The walking sticks by her door symbolize the fear that both Miss Perry and Dick have for a future in which it is evident that someone else will have more control over them than is wanted. Miss Perry must give up some of her control of herself and the circumstances that surround her, while Dick must give up some of his independence in his acceptance of help from both Miss Perry and Elsie.





# Chapter 31

## Chapter 31 Summary

Dick and Eddie Wormsley go together to purchase the last of the electronic equipment and antennas. Eddie helps with the final negotiations, and when they get the boatyard manager to Dick's house for an estimate of putting it into the water and he sees the boat, his first words are, "Jesus H. Christ!" Dick laughs, as those are the exact words he dreamed would be said to him when the manager and the other boat captains first see the boat. He agrees to put it into the water on the following Monday.

As they prepare to part until Monday, Eddie notes that Dick doesn't seem too happy. At least not as happy as Eddie supposed he would be. Dick just says that he is tired, and maybe once the boat is in the water he will feel better.

## Chapter 31 Analysis

Dick continues to have things go his way, but something bothers him. He feels he earned the boat, but that he has slacked off recently and has somehow had luck turn his way anyway. Eddie Wormsley steps in to assist Dick, and appears to be concerned about Dick's dark mood.



## Chapter 32

### Chapter 32 Summary

Dick is still feeling low. He snaps at his boys and his wife, and is in a mean mood as he drives to Elsie's to pick up the check. On the way there he feels the old sense of uncontrollable rage as he cuts off a station wagon that pulls up behind him and honks its horn. Going up Elsie's drive he is thinking to himself what an ass he has been lately. Now, he is leaving his family who has been supportive, going to Elsie's to get her money, and get satisfied sexually at the same time. He hopes he can leave this mood on shore, when the boat gets into the water.

### Chapter 32 Analysis

Dick is still in a foul mood and blames it on the fact that he wants to get rid of all the pent up frustration he feels before he puts his boat into the water. He feels guilty that he is borrowing Elsie's money, having sex with her just as an outlet, and doesn't think he really even cares much for her. He also is looking for Parker one last time to complete their deal that is still hanging over him.



# Chapter 33

## Chapter 33 Summary

When Dick gets to Elsie's, she has already started on a bottle of wine. She gives Dick the check before she can forget. She shares some advice from her brother-in-law. He says that he shouldn't go into business with Joxer Goode. Jack thinks that Joxer is not making it. Elsie's advice is to be more cheerful. They swim for a while and then dance nude in her living room. It is obvious that neither of them is in a festive mood. Elsie states that she is going to stop drinking for a week to take care of Miss Perry, then her leave will be over, and she will have to return to work.

At that time, a car's headlights appear in the driveway. As the doorbell rings, Elsie is just getting dressed, and she turns on the lights and lets Mary Scanlon into the living room. Mary is dressed all in black and announces that her father has just died. Elsie brings her in and gives her a glass of whiskey, and Dick has one also with a beer chaser. As the whiskey loosens up Mary, she begins telling funny stories about her father, mostly about his youth. She ends up spending the night at Elsie's, and Elsie and Dick have a quiet talk after she goes to bed.

Dick wants to let Elsie know that he will not be seeing her anymore. She doesn't really agree, but instead says that they will wait and see what happens. Dick feels that something has turned around his resolve to stop seeing her, and he is somewhat uncomfortable that he doesn't seem to have full control of his life.

Dick stops his pickup before it leaves Elsie's drive and walks back toward the house to continue their discussion for just a few more minutes. Approaching it with caution, he hears Elsie and Mary talking quietly. He is finally able to make out what they are saying. It is obvious that Elsie is pregnant. He continues to listen as she and Mary talk about options for Elsie. Elsie thinks she will stay with her mother in Boston for the last five months. She doesn't want Dick to feel uncomfortable with the situation and definitely doesn't want him to leave his wife and marry her. Dick feels the check in his pocket, and feels like Elsie and her family have bought his sperm. As he continues listening he understands that Elsie and Mary are planning to live together and give the child a good home. There is also some reference that Mary will soon manage a new restaurant Jack is building.

## Chapter 33 Analysis

Dick appears to be happier when things are not going well for him. Somehow he keeps getting himself into situations that make his life miserable. Finding out that Elsie is pregnant doesn't surprise him a whole lot, or even seem to put him into a bleak mood. Instead, he goes home and sleeps soundly all night, not even excited to get up for his boat's launching the next day.

Elsie's brother-in-law, Jack, begins to play a more important role in Dick's life. Dick learns that he has enough knowledge to find that Joxer Goode is in trouble financially, and that Jack is most likely putting in a new restaurant in the area that Mary Scanlon will manage.



# Chapter 34

## Chapter 34 Summary

Other than ruining a large part of May's garden, the trip with Dick's boat to the boatyard goes without incident. Once there a crowd gathers to watch the christening and Parker shows up and says he wants to talk with Dick when he gets squared away. Dick feels a lot of uncertainty and mystery is in the air, and it takes some of his enjoyment out of the moment.

Mary has brought a bottle of champagne with a ribbon on it for the christening, and May breaks it on the bow with the name, Spartina-May. Finally Dick is in his boat as it floats on the water for the first time amid cheers from everybody.

## Chapter 34 Analysis

While the christening of the boat is not as exciting as it might have been for Dick, everyone is impressed with the boat. Even Captain Texeira and Parker watch with a feeling of admiration.

Charlie makes an unusual remark that Parker has a strange sense of humor, but it is almost unnoticed amongst the celebrations.



# Chapter 35

## Chapter 35 Summary

When Dick finally gets to start up the engine and go out just a little way Charlie and Parker are with him. As he and Parker get a moment alone, Dick explains that, the way he sees it, at least half the lobster pots are his. Parker tells him that his thinking is wrong, and then Dick brings up the fact that Parker owes him some money. Parker says that he does owe him a little, but that when Dick's first run wasn't successful Parker had to take on Schuyler as a partner and that cut into the profits of the drug deal. Dick says he is willing to take over all the pots and not take money from Parker and call it done.

Dick begins to negotiate, and gives Parker another option. Dick will take half the pots and the money Parker owes him. When Parker says that Schuyler got a large amount of the money, Dick turns it around and tells him that with Schuyler in the deal the pie got bigger not smaller, and in addition to that he knows that Parker has made a down payment on the charter boat he has wanted. Parker counters with a guess that Dick has made a deal with Joxer Goode and borrowed money from him with part of the deal being that Dick stay away from dealings with Parker. Dick knows his assumptions are more accurate than Parker's.

Dick leaves Parker off at his boat, and they have made a tentative deal that Dick will take the pots but give Parker the money from the last trip out. While he is there the harbor master tells Dick that there is a hurricane on the way, and that he might be wise to tie up locally rather than to try go get out to sea.

Dick goes to Joxer Goode's pier and finds Captain Texeira, who tells him that the storm is building fast and may be really severe. His concern is transferred to Dick, who notices how many boats are pulling out of the water and people piling sandbags and boarding up windows. Dick goes back to the boatyard manager and tells him he wants to have the Spartina-May hauled out of the water, but he is told there are too many boats ahead of him. Dick finally finds his insurance agent at home and tells him to increase the one hundred fifty thousand policy on his boat. His agent tells him that the initial coverage won't take affect for two days and five hours. Dick can't believe that if his boat is wrecked in less time than that, he'll get nothing, but if it is more than two days and five hours he will receive one hundred fifty thousand dollars of insurance money. He finds Captain Texeira and tells him that he wants to follow him out of the port, and to keep in radio contact.

## Chapter 35 Analysis

Dick and Parker negotiate about the money from the drug deal, the pots that Dick needs, and the money Dick owes Parker for the last trip out. For the first time, Dick seems to more than hold his own with Parker, and eventually is patient enough to get



his way. This is an important step for Dick and shows he has learned something in the last few months about how to control himself in order to be in a better frame of mind for negotiating. This is somehow ironic as Parker is the one largely responsible for the change.

When he learns that a hurricane is headed toward them, and then that he has no insurance yet, he has an immediate plan to make certain his insurance is in effect if his boat goes down at sea. It is well thought out, and he explains it to Captain Texeira, who understands that Dick feels his life is at stake more if he stays on shore than it will be if he risks it at sea.

The drama of the novel has increased substantially with the introduction of a new plot that has many consequences. Dick's goal is not to collect insurance money, but to first keep his boat safe and to be able to continue his dream of being successful on his own boat. However, his life is less important to him than what he feels will be slavery if he loses the boat without any insurance coverage. As with most of Dick's life in the past, unforeseen circumstances are threatening his personal freedom and he is once more losing control of the direction of his life.



# Chapter 36

## Chapter 36 Summary

Dick goes by his own house and leaves quick instructions for every member of his family. First and foremost, they are to get to Eddie's house before the storm hits. Charlie drops Dick off at Spartina-May and Dick goes by Goode's dock on the way out to sea where he is given an inflatable life raft. Teixeira has left word that it is a necessity for insurance purposes. Then he heads out to sea alone. After several hours the storm is apparent, and Dick tries to stay in touch with Teixeira's boat, the Lydia P. As Dick gets more confident in his boat, he suddenly realizes that the weak link in the cycle is himself. He curses himself for it. As he fights to keep his senses straight after the long difficult hours at the wheel without a rest, he sees that his boat is the strong one and that he is the one who might not perform. He becomes almost delirious with fatigue and fear, and parts of poems seem to repeat themselves in his head. Eventually the Spartina slides down the backside of a wave and rolls partially onto her side. A window in the pilothouse shatters and Dick is thrown to the floor and drenched with water.

Dick is aware enough to realize that the boat is on its side and that their lockers where the floor ought to be. The boat recovers gradually and rights itself once more. Dick is able to get the thermos and quickly empties it and then pees into the water at his feet.

He repairs the broken window as well as he can, and feels the storm subsiding slightly. He notices it just past midnight, and the time is passing exceedingly slow. Soon he hears a marching band playing Sousa. He is aware enough of what is going on around him to understand that he is exhausted and delirious. He hopes he will come around as it gets light, but he feels there is something wrong with the engine down below, and is worried as he cannot do anything but stay at the wheel. He knows he cannot go any longer, so he puts the sea anchor out and lashes himself inside the wheelhouse. As he allows himself to give in to the exhaustion he wonders if this is the wrong thing to be doing.

## Chapter 36 Analysis

With Dick's struggle against nature he feels he is testing his boat, and as the conditions worsen and the boat appears up to the task, Dick feels that he is the weak point in the order of things and he curses himself for not seeing that sooner.

The author describes the action and Dick Pierce in great detail. The reader is caught up in the battle with the three forces of the novel, Dick's inner self, the boat he has built, and the weather. As through most of the novel, Dick is powerless to have much affect on any of these forces, and, he once again feels he is out of control.





# Chapter 37

## Chapter 37 Summary

It is late afternoon when Dick finally wakes. He checks the boat and finds that everything is apparently in good order considering what it had just been through. He finds his position as well as he can with no working electronic instruments, starts the engine, and begins the slow trip home, feeling that he is not yet safe. When he finally gets near the boat yard, a Coast Guard tug hails him and warns him not to go any further. Dick can just see a seventy-foot boat resting on the highway as the light begins to push away the darkness.

Dick has a cup of coffee and casts off from the tug and heads towards Sawtooth Pond. Four things strike Dick immediately. First, there is not a twig of living grass, bush, or tree remaining anywhere he can see. Next, the opening to the pond has widened from fifteen yards across to fifty. In addition, not one single beach house or any remains of the trailer park are there, and yet, the Wedding Cake is relatively unharmed. Using binoculars and looking further inland, Dick can see the spartina is still brilliantly green against the browns and tans the storm left.

## Chapter 37 Analysis

Dick realizes the boat and he have both stood up to the storm. The significance of the Wedding Cake still standing and the patch of spartina are symbolic of the strong character of the New Englanders who came before Dick Pierce. He gets a small amount of satisfaction also from the crew on the Coast Guard tug that wonder at how he and his boat weathered the storm alone at sea. He reflects that not only has the beach and inland been swept clear of debris, he himself has also been cleansed of confusion.



# Chapter 38

## Chapter 38 Summary

The pressure is off and Dick is reunited with his family and Eddie, and Elsie meets him also with a hint that he should call her. They survey the damage to the boatyard, boats, docks, buildings, and the roads. Dick understands that he is still unharmed and that his boat has also passed the test, but he has some feelings of regret that he made the wrong choice even though it turned out to be safe. He mentions that he would not sign on with a skipper who put the boat before the lives of its crew. He also feels a change in himself. While he never lost his love for his family, he has a new understanding of their love and concern for him, and so he sees them in a new way.

He ends up in the safety of Eddie's house and his love for his family surrounds him.

## Chapter 38 Analysis

As the storm has changed the land, it has also changed Dick. He admits to himself that he was lucky it ended as it did, but that he made the wrong choice by putting his boat before the lives of his family, not of their safety, but of their possible loss of himself. He has also gained an insight into their love for him, and feels lucky to still hold their trust.



# Chapter 39

## Chapter 39 Summary

Dick spends the next day doing little but thinking. Eddie is enthusiastic that with the damage repair that is needed, he can become a general contractor and turn the corner into real profitability. He even tells Dick that the two of them can spend the winter repairing boats right in his yard. Dick, however, cannot seem to get excited about anything except surveying the damage to his boat. May reminds him that he better think about repairing his house. He drives by himself to his driveway, but can't get himself to stop. He makes the excuse that he will look at the damage to some other homes so he will have an idea how his fared compared to others. He sees the Wedding Cake sustained very little damage. In fact, there is already a truck spraying fresh water onto the grass to save it. At the Van der Hoevel's cabin he sees Parker's V W wagon, so he parks and begins to walk to the cabin. As he looks in, he sees Marie, and she seems to be crying. Dick watches a moment then decides to leave before she sees him.

He turns once more to look at her and realizes she is having sex. Not sex with Schuyler, but sex with Parker, and she is now sitting on top of him backward and laughing. Dick feels sick that he has seen this and has to hold the memory. His next thought is that he wants to return to the sea away from all this mess on land.

## Chapter 39 Analysis

Chapter Thirty Nine resets the mood Dick finds on land. It is never what it first appears to be, and he feels he has no choice but to allow it to manage his life. His discovery of Parker and Marie sickens him, in part because he sees himself in Parker and Elsie in Marie, and all four of them are out of control. He looks back toward the sea and his boat for the stability he doesn't feel on shore.



# Chapter 40

## Chapter 40 Summary

Dick surveys his house, even though he is not in the mood. At first it seems to be pretty much undamaged, but when he goes around to the windward side he sees that parts of the frame that held his boat have been driven through the house like spikes, and he is not sure it is repairable. Just when he sits and seems to be at his worst, he suddenly sees it differently. The house is insured and will be repaired. His wife and kids are all right as is his friend, Eddie. The boat did not sustain a great deal of damage, which is good, because it is not insured. He feels if he has to pay a price to the storm it might as well be right here where it did the least amount of eventual damage.

Dick checks his wharf on the creek and is surprised to find it undamaged. Then he understands that it has no vertical surface for the storm to hold on to. That is also what saved Spartina, as it is as round as a pumpkin seed. He decides he will tell May that things are not too bad, give her a drink to get her in a better mood, and they will go to bed together.

## Chapter 40 Analysis

The damage to Dick's house reflects the damage to himself. At first it doesn't seem to be too badly damaged, but on closer examination it appears to be almost irreparable. When looked at overall, however, the damage is covered by insurance and can be fully repaired. Dick's relationship with his family and particularly with May has gone through the same sequence, and is in the same shape.

There is some irony that the boat gets even with Dick's house by creating damage to it even though the house stays safely out of the storm that Spartina must cope with.



# Chapter 41

## Chapter 41 Summary

As Dick begins to walk toward his truck, he sees the narrow lights of a Jeep pull up into his drive. Elsie gets out and asks her partner to take the Jeep and she'll get a ride home. Going up to Dick, she falls into him and tells him how glad she is to see him, and chides him for not being more demonstrative with her. He admits he is glad to see her, and then she asks him to take her to the old causeway where she has seen something she wants to investigate.

They go to the beach and in the distance they see the blue canoe. When they walk up to it they realize it has hardly been damaged, and Elsie grabs Dick and begins to cry, telling him that the only times she has cried in ages have all been with him. She goes on to say that it is just memories of her sister, and, without thinking, Dick tells her that he thought she was going to tell him she is pregnant.

Elsie goes stiff immediately. They both sit in the canoe facing each other, and Elsie tells Dick that she is glad he guessed. He doesn't tell her how he knows, and she continues to tell him that she is going to have the baby and that Mary is going to help her and that she has money and will probably be getting more and that she is glad Dick is the father and she goes on and on. She tells him she will keep the fact that Dick is the father a secret. As they continue to discuss the pregnancy, Elsie admits that it wasn't a total accident, and that she is upset she has turned his straight life away from the righteous path, and she is sorry, because she knows there is no right way to handle it with May. Finally, that she understands the baby will always have a claim on his thoughts. Dick mentions that she can just go to Boston and pretend to adopt a baby. With that, Elsie realizes that Dick knows more than he is telling her, so he admits he heard her and Mary talking.

Elsie tells Dick that she really likes hanging around with him, and suggests they just keep their secret and continue to see each other. Dick is guarded with his reply but notes how much work there is to do in repairing his house, and he must check his lobster pots. Elsie tells him she could go with him to sea. While Dick argues against the idea, he knows within himself he would miss seeing Elsie, and he can tell her things like about Marie and Parker that he would never tell May.

He goes to the boatyard to check on Spartina, and she seems to be doing all right at her mooring. On the way home he turns off the lights of the pickup and drives slowly in the moonlight, getting his stories for May straight. When he arrives she is happy to see him and the boys announce they have seen him on television. Then they go directly to bed.



## Chapter 41 Analysis

Elsie appears to be more attached to Dick than before, and he supposes it is the baby inside her that is changing the way she is emotionally. She isn't upset when she finds that Dick knows she is pregnant, but she is upset when she finds that Dick heard Mary and her talking about it.

Finding the canoe is one more significant item from the past that has outlasted the storm. Dick and May secure the past to some degree by storing it in her garage, and at the same time they seem to have an unstated agreement that they will continue to see each other. The question of how to handle May is left unanswered.

Dick begins to get into a routine of mentally reviewing what he can and cannot tell May, and also what he should not discuss with Elsie. Elsie's statement that she has turned Dick from the straight and narrow to a somewhat dubious man is strengthened when he realizes he is plotting to keep them both happy. The statement by his boys that they have seen him on television nips at the back of Dick's mind, but doesn't quite surface.



# Chapter 42

## Chapter 42 Summary

When Eddie gets to Dick's house with them he comforts May by telling her it is not as bad as it seems, and once they jack up the corner it will look a whole lot better. Dick goes to see the insurance man, and there is a long line. Dick is more than sixty people back, so he gets some sandpaper and paint and goes to Spartina. He feels happier than he can ever remember, just being on board with the things he knows and loves. His ribs are very sore from a fall during the storm and he falls asleep on the deck. When he wakes, Elsie is there and tells him that she likes him having a boat in the harbor, as she always knows where to find him. She tells Dick that she is to be given a promotion, a raise, and a leave of absence to take some classes, so she will be in Boston and get paid for it at the same time. She states that all the time she thought things were going to go really wrong for her and she was going to have to beg to get maternity leave, and everything, she is now on top and rising, even through all her mistakes. She also mentions that Schuyler is happy, because he has sold his documentary film and made some news footage also, some that includes Dick and even Spartina.

As they sit quietly in the sun Dick feels that life is treating him the same way it is Elsie. He seems to have made more mistakes than usual lately, but all of them seem to have turned out in his favor. He tells Elsie that he is pretty certain he is going to tell May but that he doesn't think she will leave him. His thought about her response even include her telling him that Elsie is nice, but just don't do it anymore.

Talk continues and Dick mentions Marie and Parker. When Elsie asks him what he is talking about, he thinks he already told her, but then remembers that he hasn't. She insists on hearing the entire story and all its details. Dick tells her and is somewhat surprised that she does not see it as funny as he does, but Elsie only feels sorry for Marie. Dick makes another mental note that he must keep better track of who he tells what. Dick is confused by Elsie and her changing moods and the differences in the directions her thoughts take her and in the way he tries to follow but is always behind.

## Chapter 42 Analysis

Dick is happy to be back on Spartina. It seems familiar to him and everything is in order where it should be and there are no surprises. When Elsie comes aboard his thoughts all seem to change. There is again confusion and uncertainty. Elsie reacts exactly opposite from what he expects to his news of Marie and Parker, and turns the story around to be a negative sign that Elsie and him mean nothing to each other and have no place in each other's lives.

Elsie also believes, as does Dick that she has worked hard and deserves to have something she wants, even if it may offend some people.



Dick also begins to make errors in his relation of what is happening when he mentions to Elsie things that he thought he had already told her, and he again seems to understand he is messing up the sequence of the facts.





# Chapter 43

## Chapter 43 Summary

After a while, Dick tries to calm Elsie by again saying that he did not mean their relationship is at all like that of Marie and Parker. Elsie becomes mad again and tells Dick that he is just realizing there is a little of Parker in him and that just maybe Dick got some cheap thrill from his sex with her. They continue to argue, and, as Elsie gets up she becomes dizzy and almost has to sit down again. She finally gets in the dingy to leave, but floats a moment beside Spartina and tells Dick she is sorry, she came out here to make it easier on him and somehow she didn't.

## Chapter 43 Analysis

Dick and Elsie share their desire to continue to see one another, however, Elsie's desire is more noticeable on the surface. While Dick agrees he wants to continue to see her, he tries to put it into the perspective of a friendship in order to satisfy his own conscience. He continually tells Elsie that he is going to tell May, and even tries to fool himself to think she will not be mad, but instead, just tell him not to do it anymore. He does not take advantage of the chance he has to talk to May. Rather, he likes to enjoy the peace they have created by living at Eddie's house.



# Chapter 44

## Chapter 44 Summary

Dick takes Keith and Charlie on Spartina to check the pots. He has lost many more than he feared, but he makes up for it somewhat as the price of lobster has risen, because so many boats are not able to go out at all. Parker brings a Vietnamese man named Tran, who Parker says will work for half share. He turns out to have some knowledge of boats, and can speak some English. Dick finds out that Parker has rented a truck and a warehouse with housing above it and has hired a Vietnamese family to make pots for him that he then sells and delivers. The family wants one of them to learn how they are used first hand on a boat. It turns out that Parker is not paying the family yet, but they are working only to purchase the tools and equipment Parker has lent them. Dick decides he wants no more dealings whatsoever with Parker except to buy as many pots from his as he can. He also decides to take on the Vietnamese boy, as he seems to like him for some reason.

Tran works out very well, but when the weather gets colder he has trouble handling it. When they come in after the first cold spell, Parker is there and sells Dick fifty more pots, much fewer that Dick needs, but Parker tells him the others he has are paid for at a higher price. As Parker pours himself a cup of coffee from Dick's thermos he remarks that they have changed the White Rock Girl again.

For some reason Dick is furious with Parker and the way he is treating the Vietnamese family and everything in general, but for some reason he can't help but like him. Dick asks Parker if he screwed Schuyler's wife, because Schuyler was too greedy in the take on the drug sale. Parker is surprised Dick knows about it, and assumes Marie has told him. When he finds that Dick heard the two of them, Parker tells Dick that it happened, because he told Marie that Schuyler had cheated him, and the more he talked about it, the more she got turned on. As they talk Dick begins to think about May, and, once more, his thoughts turn grey and the happiness he found at sea is replaced by gloom.

Dick gives Tran a ride to the barn where his family works and lives. They have a very efficient operation and are producing fairly good pots. Tran's father introduces himself in broken English, and Dick asks him how much Parker pays them for the pots. The old man will not answer directly, but smiles and tells Dick that Parker takes them from his family in the truck and sells them. Tran's father asks when Tran will get full share payment, and continues to hound Dick about it until Dick gets mad. When he leaves, he guns the truck and throws up gravel. In doing so he notices his truck is burning oil. He realizes that Tran reminds him a little of Elsie.



## Chapter 44 Analysis

Dick once again needs Parker's help, this time in replacing the lost pots. He begins to almost despise Parker for the way he treats the Vietnamese and how he takes advantage of every situation for his own benefit. On the other hand, Dick sees something in him he likes and realizes he still wants to remain friends.

Dick's time on shore creates more displeasure and gloom. His conversation with Elsie and the dealings with Parker put him in a foul mood. He also gets involved with the Vietnamese family, and feels they are trying to get more out of him than he is willing to give.



## Chapter 45

### Chapter 45 Summary

When Dick arrives home there is a surprise from May. She wants one hundred dollars to have a beauty treatment so she can learn how to make herself more attractive. She mentions that Eddie has a crush on a woman May has just met, but he won't get too far with her, because Eddie is too straight and predictable. May tells Dick that women want a little spice in their lives, sometimes a little uncertainty.

### Chapter 45 Analysis

Dick is confused by women once again when his wife begins to complain about Dick's moods, but then uses Eddie and a lady he has recently met as an example that women do not always want a man who is totally predictable. When May tells Dick to go shower, he is more confused than ever. Once again, Dick finds unrest while he is on land.



# Chapter 46

## Chapter 46 Summary

Dick and his family enjoy living with Eddie, and during the first months of winter Spartina proves profitable. Finally, in January, Dick tells May about his affair with Elsie. May is in the garden at their house and she and Dick begin talking of the bad things that happened the last few months, and how they had profited from them just enough to get the boat done. May asks if Schuyler was the reason that Elsie fell overboard from Parker's boat when they were filming. He says no, then mentions that Elsie is going to have a baby. May seems to know immediately what he is talking about, and says, "Is it your baby?" Dick tells her it is. Then, May asks how an upper class lady, who has gone to two colleges, could make the mistake of getting pregnant.

After they eat, May goes immediately to bed. When Dick comes in, she asks him what he is going to do about the baby. She tells him that even if he gets a divorce, he will have two women and three children to support. Dick tells her he has not thought of a divorce. She just tells him to get back on his boat and think about what he is going to do for his baby.

## Chapter 46 Analysis

The winter proves to be pleasant for Dick, his family and Eddie. Everything seems to be going quite well for them, and they are all happy. However, when Dick finally gets around to telling May about his affair and the baby that is due, May's only real response is to ask Dick what he is going to do for his new baby. Nothing Dick can say will make May think any other way, and she tells Dick that he sounds more and more like Parker and to go to his boat to think about it. There has been a hint of bad weather, and the relaxed, happy and secure mood the chapter began with is totally changed to gloom, once again.



# Chapter 47

## Chapter 47 Summary

Dick wakes up on the floor the next morning. He realizes he has two sensations, one of alarm, and one of satisfaction. May tells Dick that his crew has called wanting to know if they are going out. The weather has not improved, so Dick decides not to go out. Instead, he works in Eddie's basement on some pots. May doesn't talk to him, but she seems aloof and indifferent. She finally tells him that he can go to the Neptune if he wants.

## Chapter 47 Analysis

Chapter Forty Seven is another one-page chapter that sets the general mood of the story and of May specifically as one of waiting. May does not push Dick, but also does not appear to forgive him. It is winter and cold and cloudy outside, and the mood between Dick and May reflects that of the weather.



# Chapter 48

## Chapter 48 Summary

As Dick goes to check on Spartina there is a message for him at the Co-op. It is somewhat confusing, but he believes it is from Elsie telling him to go to the Neptune to watch a specific show on television that Schuyler has made. Dick gets to the Neptune and buys beers so they will change the channel to the documentary. Soon there is a crowd around Dick watching. The documentary is very uncomplimentary of the people in Galilee. It shows their poor living conditions and makes their work look like low-end factory jobs. Schuyler has put Dick's boat launching before any of the other footage, and it made it seem like the shots from Parker's boat took place on Spartina. The film shows more of the lobsters on the ocean floor and being pulled from the pots. Then it shows the boats leaving the harbor before the storm, the storm coming in, and then a sequence of boats being blown up onto land and rolling on the highway. There is a return to the boatyard as they launched Spartina-May. The men in the bar with Dick are mostly still without work due to the storm, and it appears that Dick took advantage of the situation to profit from it. This makes the men in the bar angry at Dick. They want to know how much he got paid and if the movie people loaned him the money to finish his boat.

## Chapter 48 Analysis

Schuyler's movie puts Dick in a very uncomplimentary light with the other fishermen in the Neptune. He looks to have profited from what everyone else sees as his own personal disaster. Once again, the time on shore puts Dick in an uncertain light, and Dick understands that, in some way, Elsie had a part in the creation of the film and was using it to get back at him for ignoring her. Dick realizes, however, that he cannot blame Elsie or Schuyler any more than he can blame his truck. Dick thinks to himself that he got his boat, and that is what he wanted. The hell with the others. Dick appears to have become like those he always despised at the bank and the boatyard when he worked there.



# Chapter 49

## Chapter 49 Summary

He goes back out to check his pots, and when he comes in there is a figure carving an "E" in the sand on the beach. Dick lets Tran and his new crewmember, Tony, go on shore, and he waits until Elsie gets to Spartina. She comes aboard and is all excited. She tells him things are going well at her mother's house in Boston, and then pulls up her sweater to show Dick her enlarged stomach. They eat at a restaurant and then go to the cabin where Elsie is staying. He asks about helping with some of the hospital expenses, but Elsie says that they have already talked about it, and she is doing fine financially. Dick explains that it is May's idea, and he thinks that probably May is right. It is somewhat Dick's responsibility. Elsie also tells Dick about the worth of the books Miss Perry has given to the boys. She checked in Boston and found that together they are worth over twenty thousand dollars. Dick is stunned.

They become quiet, and Dick again feels Elsie's swollen stomach. He slowly gets aroused until he finally can't stand it any longer and wants to make love. However, this time it is Elsie who stops it, and she tells Dick not to say anything, that he will be glad they didn't.

## Chapter 49 Analysis

Upon seeing Elsie again she and Dick get back into their old arguments, but he does let her know that he has told May. The news affects Elsie very little, but when Dick tells her that one thing May wants him to do is to provide support for the baby Elsie tells him she is taken care of. Elsie has put herself into a position of not needing the help but it appears it may be Dick's way of putting his guilt behind him.

It is ironic that, while Dick and his wife scraped and saved for over four years to get money to build the boat, their children had more worth in a few storybooks than the whole wealth of the rest of the family and their house.

Dick's act of trying to make love to Elsie again gives him the possible disruption of relaxation he has found in his life, and perhaps he unconsciously does this on purpose to create more challenges for himself. They somewhat exchange roles as Elsie tells Dick that he will be glad they did not have sex again.





# Chapter 50

## Chapter 50 Summary

They continue to talk late into the night. Finally Elsie tells Dick that when she talked to Miss Perry about the loan for Dick, Miss Perry was too far into her depression to be coherent, so Elsie borrowed the entire eleven thousand from her brother-in-law. She goes on to say that when Schuyler paid her, she was able to pay Jack back. Now, Dick only owes her.

Elsie falls asleep on the sofa, and Dick is left to his own thoughts. He realizes that his life is slipping into a routine. He sees himself doing the same thing day after day and year after year with only a few changes. He wonders how he can find new adventure if he continues to follow the same dull routine. Dick realizes to himself that the worst of his anger has left him, and he is calmer than ever before. He tries to understand why, but none of the reasons he comes up with seem to completely answer his questions.

Dick sees that he is becoming almost too congenial. He thinks of his friend, Eddie, and knows that he does not want to become that laid back. With Dick's new outlook on life, he understands he would not have been able to keep his own identity and probably not have the courage and drive to finish Spartina.

## Chapter 50 Analysis

The reader is taken back through various experiences and flashbacks Dick remembers while lying on the couch with Elsie. He sees his life as a small part of the much bigger picture in the overall order of things. He realizes that his problems drove him to complete the Spartina, and now those problems have been conquered. At first wondering what will be the new drive in his life, he feels that a new baby and another boat should parallel each other and be the new driving force.

He thinks that his life has been cleansed along with his fear and anger. He also thinks of Mary Scanlon and how she is a part of the lives of himself, Elsie, and the whole community, and that brings back memories of all the things he had been wrong about during the last year. His last thoughts reflect his feeling that everything will begin again.



# Characters

## Dick Pierce

Pierce is a forty-two year old fisherman, who lives on the shore near Galilee, Rhode Island. He is relatively poor, and his wife has to work to help support their two boys. Pierce has had many jobs, but has somewhat of a temper and prefers working for himself. While he worked at a boatyard he gained the skill to build boats, and he is in the process of building a fifty-footer for himself. His goal is to be the owner of a good boat by the age of forty.

Dick's family owned much of the land that has now been purchased as second homes by tourists. Dick remains proud and wants to isolate himself from becoming a low-class employee, answering to others' whims. Both his father and his grandfather lost most of their land, and Dick remains determined to make a living fishing and working without being under the influence of others.

As he comes closer and closer to achieving his dream, he becomes more and more remote to his family. He finally understands that his partial success is turning him into what he has always believed to be evil and uncaring, but even with that feeling he continues on the same track towards what he feels he deserves.

## May Pierce

May is Dick's wife. She is supportive for the most part, and has given up a good amount of the lifestyle she wants so that Dick can pursue his dream of finishing his fishing boat. She tires of his moods when he is not able to work on it for lack of funds, and feels that he will not be easy to live with until he can attain the status he feels the boat will provide him.

## Charlie Pierce

Dick's seventeen-year-old son is Charlie. He is small and somewhat shy, but very apt at spotting fish. Dick has a feeling that he has a crush on Elsie and he also knows that Charlie will not follow him as a fisherman

## Tom Pierce

Tom is Dick Pierce's son, who is eleven. He not interested in fishing the way Dick was when he was his son's age.



## Joxer Goode

Goode is an entrepreneur, who has begun a business of selling red crabs to restaurants. They are less expensive than lobsters and his business is doing very well. He needs more fishermen to supply the crabs, and Pierce wants to be one of them. He is a large man with an athletic build, who is out to make a million dollars. He pushes his employees very hard, but may not be as successful as he appears to be on the surface.

## Barbara Goode

Barbara Goode is Joxer's wife.

## Eddie Wormsley

Wormsley is Pierce's neighbor. He makes a living selling firewood and being a carpenter. They often go on wild adventures together and have since they were boys. When the chips are down, Eddie will do anything for Dick and his family. If Eddie has any one fault, it may be that he is too "homey" and predictable.

## Larry Parker

Parker is Pierce's friend. Parker has bad teeth with gray fillings, and is prone to be a bad influence on Pierce, doing things that are in contrast to Pierce's conscience. He has a job of moving boats from one place to another for various wealthy owners, but generally uses the opportunity to make a little money on the side for himself. Pierce sees him as doing things just slightly illegally, but nothing that really ever hurts anyone.

Parker seems to have a knack for seeing deep inside Pierce, and with that knack, he is generally successful in getting Dick to follow along on whatever scheme he has going.

## Elsie Buttrick

Elsie is from one of the wealthier families, and has become a game and fish warden. Dick remembers her when they were both sixteen, and how good she looked then. She still has the same good figure.

Elsie looks at the good side of things, and is successful at making things she wants happen. While she is somewhat of a naturalist and takes her job seriously, she also sympathizes with the long-time locals in their quest to make a living and she overlooks some of their illegal activities.

Elsie doesn't want the responsibility or ties that go along with marriage, but she secretly wishes she could adopt a baby. When she begins an affair with Dick Pierce, she finds a way to get the baby she has always wanted.



## Jack

Jack is Elsie's brother-in-law. He is wealthy and has hopes of becoming a politician. He is generous with Elsie and admires her a great deal.

## Marie and Schuyler van der Hoevel

Marie and Schuyler are two friends of Joxer Goode. Schuyler makes films and likes to come across as a successful businessman, but he seems to need more money than he makes and apparently gets it through unethical means. They have purchased The Wedding Cake that Dick's great uncle first built. Marie is thin, but good looking, and Schuyler keeps her dressed in nice clothes. He has curly locks and thin white legs. Both like to swim nude and have a somewhat "fast" way of living.

## Captain Ruy Texeira

Captain Texeira has two boats and supplies Goode with a good deal of his red crabs. He is one of the most admired captains in the harbor. Dick Pierce once worked for him, but was let go for being unable to take orders or get along with the others on board.

When Dick needs help, Texeira puts the past behind him and does what he can. He also has a close platonic relationship with Miss Perry.

## Miss Perry

Miss Perry is an older wealthy woman, who has always thought fondly of Dick. Her family has been in Rhode Island for generations, and she is one of the last of the original families there. Miss Perry has a bad spell of depression in late August of every year that she recognizes but refuses to treat with drugs.

## Keith

Keith is a college boy, who has been hired to help on Parker's boat. He is more interested in the exciting experience and perfecting his tan than he is in the money he will make.

## Mrs. Bigelow

Mrs. (Aggie) Bigelow was a neighbor of Elsie when they were growing up. Elsie found out that she was having an affair with her father.



# Objects/Places

## Spartina

An invasive grass that grows in saline conditions where other grasses cannot is called spartina. There are many types of this grass, but they all have the same stability in poor conditions. They have the ability to take water into their roots and filter out the salt. While some admire it, its invasiveness causes it to be despised by others.

## Dick's Skiff

The skiff Dick Pierce uses to fish for lobsters is eighteen-feet, and very light and narrow for its length. It has an outboard motor and oars, and an oarlock on the transom so he can

skull in shallow, narrow areas. The skiff has an extremely high prow that enables it to travel in moderate seas. Dick built the skiff himself.

## The Neptune

The Neptune is a bar where the local fishermen hang out. There are tables for gambling and televisions where sports programs are aired. Besides being a bar, it is the center for news and gossip among the sailors.

## Mamzelle

Mamzelle is what Dick calls Parker's boat that needs repair to the stuffing box. When Dick gets it repaired and in the ocean, it turns out to be seaworthy but has uncomfortable quarters and its ride is unpredictable.

## The Blue Canoe

Elsie, her sister, and a neighbor built the blue canoe more than twenty years ago. It has been refurbished to its original condition and holds many memories for Elsie.

## The Wedding Cake

The first building built in the area was called the Wedding Cake. Dick's great uncle built it. It represents what was once a small fishing village and the wealthy families that populated the area more than fifty years ago.



## Dick's Boat

Dick is building a fifty-foot boat in his backyard. His goal is to find a way to finance the materials he needs to complete the boat, but he must be willing to give up his pride and work for others to do so. The boat symbolizes his path to recognition and financial security, and is a way to become an equal with those who have benefited from the purchase of lands his great uncle started with. His father lost most of the land and his wealth due to poor health, poor investments, and a hurricane that sank the boat he had built. Dick sees his boat as a way to regain the respect his father once demanded.

## The Harpoon

The harpoon is a complex rig used for shooting fish. It consists of the lily, which is the point that contains the barb, the shaft that the lily is attached to, and a line that is also attached to the lily. When the lily sticks into a fish and attaches itself, it separates from the shaft, but the line follows the fish that is eventually attached to a beer keg. The beer keg, which floats on the surface and keeps the fish from diving too deep into the ocean, and allows the fish to be tracked by the boat.

## Miss Perry's Station Wagon

One of the first cars ever sold in the county thirty years ago is Miss Perry's station wagon. It still has the original wood siding that Miss Perry keeps in perfect condition.

The car always brings back memories of the families that first settled here and know its history.

## Library of Books

Dick and May keep a library of the books that Miss Perry has given the boys as presents each year on Dick's birthday. The library consists mostly of books by New England authors with the exception of a few of the first books they received of early children's books. The collection consists of a sort of history of New England, but it also covers many other parts of the world.

The books are kept neatly categorized, mainly because of the admiration the family has of Miss Perry. Only much later does Dick discover that many are first editions signed by the authors and are extremely valuable.

## The Boat Shed

Dick built the boat shed when he first began to build his boat. It is a large, ugly structure with a clear vinyl roof and torn and faded tarps covering the large entrance instead of



doors. He built it originally to keep his lumber and tools dry, and also to keep anyone from being able to see that he was building a boat. It is now an eyesore and Dick is troubled when he sees it in comparison to the natural beauty of the area.

## Wampum

Miss Perry explains to Dick's family and Elsie that wampum was not actually used by Indians as money, but, instead, it was symbolic of a series of events to them. Also, that the Indians didn't own land individually, but governed certain areas as a tribe. The wampum generally consisted of a series of shells strung together in a very artful pattern and was quite beautiful. Wampum is symbolic of what Dick sees as the remains of his family, and he hopes he can leave more than strings of history for his boys.

## Third Lobster Pot

Parker takes a package of illegal drugs from the third lobster pot that has been marked by a double orange pennant.

## Elsie's House

Dick is surprised to learn that Elsie has bought a small piece of land on Quondam Pond with a small house. It is on a grassy clearing, and from the road it looks like nothing more than a tool shed. There is one long room with a lot of glass looking out over the pond, and a small area at one end that serves as a kitchen with a stone fireplace. The wall at the end of the room is only a piece of material that changes color with the light. A spiral metal staircase leads downstairs to a greenhouse that opens out directly onto the pond.

Another wall contains shelves mostly filled with bird books, but there are also some photos and a couple of cameras. In addition there are tennis trophies filled with pennies and some shelves that contain plastic containers as one might ready for a yard sale.

## The Thermos Bottle

The evening before Dick is to launch his boat, Elsie gives him a thermos bottle she has made to look like a White Rock soda bottle. When he looks at it more closely, he sees that the White Rock girl is really Elsie, and that she is nude except for a filmy skirt and butterfly wings on her back. Elsie has created it herself, and when Dick sees what it really represents, he is hesitant to take it for fear Charlie or someone else might recognize her. Elsie finally convinces Dick that no one will see what it really is, and it will be safe for him to keep on his boat as a unique reminder of her.



# Themes

## Family Tradition

One of the driving themes of the novel is that of family tradition. Dick Pierce feels both his grandfather and his father failed to maintain the lifestyle they began. While it is true that both lost land and wealth due to illness and circumstances beyond their control, Dick blames them somewhat for letting so much go and leaving him so little. Never the less, he vows to continue life as it was introduced to him in the small Rhode Island fishing village.

To Dick, the family tradition he must carry on means providing for his family through an honest life of labor at sea. However, as the community becomes more dependent on tourism and absentee home ownership for subsistence, the values of the local people begin to change also. Therefore, Dick is unable to support his family without being able to make more income from his trade. To do that, he must have a larger boat. In his backyard he begins to build the boat of his dreams, but the lack of money keeps him from finishing it as he had planned.

His commitment to be sufficient without the help of tourists keeps him from being able to work for those who need help with their summer cabins, and he feels that would be lowering himself to be a wealthy person's laborer. To Dick Pierce, that is not family tradition.

Family tradition is also very evident in the characters of Miss Perry and Elsie. Both have managed to live up to the traditions their families began at least two generation before.

## Personal Fear

Personal fear is the theme that drives several of the story's characters. For Dick Pierce, the fear is not so much of failure as it is a fear of lowering his standards to achieve his goals. While he could find many ways to supplement his income, his fear of looking like a tourist's laborer keeps him focused on his fishing traditions to maintain the identity he feels he has created for himself. Whenever he believes his identity might be threatened, he lashes out with a short temper and gets a reputation for being difficult to deal with. Since Dick sees the way to achieve his goals is by being at sea, he subconsciously makes his life on shore complicated and difficult. These factors contribute to his feelings that finishing his boat and fishing in the open waters of the ocean are not only a way to financial security and solitude, but also a way in which he can maintain the dignity he fears losing.

Elsie Buttrick, the lady with whom Pierce has an affair, has fears of a very different type. She tries to maintain the status of a rich kid and to keep up with her sister, who married a successful businessman with aspirations of becoming a politician. Elsie becomes pregnant with Dick's child, and some of her fear is of putting shame on Dick and his





wife, as she subconsciously planned her pregnancy. She fears that she will not be able to maintain her status if it is known she had a relationship with a married man, so she decides to lie about it and pretend she has adopted a baby. She has additional fears that her lies will be disclosed.

## Virtue

The novel divides its characters into two groups, virtuous and evil. It is easy to see which characters are on each side of the issue. However, no single character with the exception of May and her boys can be wholly grouped in either side. Dick Pierce wants to be virtuous until forced to choose between raising money to complete his boat through illegal activities and watching his dreams fade away. He chooses to get the money any way he can, but uses the excuse that it isn't really hurting anyone so it is all right. When he begins his affair with Elsie he uses the excuse that he deserves the pleasure. She wants it as much as he does, so he is only hurting May and his boys. He justifies this by deciding to help with the baby financially.

Larry Parker is more on the side of evil and could be accused of being non-virtuous. His personality causes him to continually take advantage of every situation, and, unlike Pierce, many of his activities do in fact harm other people. However, his insight into Pierce's life and how it has overpowered him allow him to lecture Pierce, causing him some discomfort, but in the end he follows some of Parker's advice which frees him from his fears and inner rage. This helps put Parker at least slightly on the side of virtue.

Elsie is virtuous in that she is honest and tries to allow her virtue to rule her life. She does have a tremendous desire to have a child, but without the ties of a husband. Almost subconsciously she allows herself to get pregnant, pushing her toward the other side of the line from virtue. In the end of the story she heads back toward the virtuous side by

being determined to keep Dick's secret.

Schuyler appears to be the most overall evil of the chief characters. He does appear to have more skill at recording events on film than is at first supposed. However, it is clear that he doesn't care where the funding comes from or whom he hurts in the process of creating his art. There is essentially no virtuous act presented for him during the course of the story.

# Style

## Points of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view, largely from Dick Pierce's viewpoint. The reader sees the action through an objective point of view, although often siding and sympathizing with different characters. It is difficult not to feel some sense of despair when the story is seen through May's point of view.

The story follows the life of Dick Pierce as he struggles with his inner need to remain in charge of his own life. As the novel begins, Dick is seen as someone who is not in control of what is happening around him, largely due to his own stubbornness. As he begins to find ways to achieve his goals, he takes over the actions he is responsible for and then he sees others in a different light. Parker begins to deteriorate in Dick's eyes and continues this downward trend throughout the action. May, on the other hand, begins as a virtuous character and the reader's sympathy for her grows as Dick's actions go against what is supposedly right. By the end of the story Dick sees her differently and his love and affection have grown.

## Settings

There are many specific settings in the book. Dick's boat, Spartina-May, contains much of the action, as does Parker's boat, Mamzelle. Much also happens in both Dick's skiff and in the skiff Dick built for his boys. Dick's house and Elsie's house are also settings with a great deal of importance.

However, overall, there are two basic settings that cover the entire mood of the novel. These are sea and land. The sea is generally shown to be a place where piece of mind comes easily, even during a hurricane. Dick continues to yearn for being at sea when things get confusing and overwhelming while he is on land. While the sea represents labor and a gamble with weather, it is a place where things have a place and there is a sense of order even in tense moments. The colors of the sea also change from blues and greens to reds, yellows, and oranges but it is a planned and anticipated change.

By contrast, the action on land tends to be tense and disorderly. Time and again Dick feels frustrated by conditions created by others that he cannot control, and certainly doesn't understand. While at sea the action is straightforward, but on land the reader is sometimes confused by what actually happens to the characters, and it does not become clear for several paragraphs or even several chapters. At sea, not only is the action straightforward, but also the results of those actions are quickly realized. Colors described while on land include the mossy green of the spartina, and browns and tans of the seashore, less vibrant than those at sea.



## Language and Meaning

Very little identification of the language of a town on the shore of Rhode Island in the late 1980's is identifiable. Dick occasionally swears, but mostly when at sea and around other fishermen. The speech of Parker and Eddie is just slightly different and they may say, "ain't" or, "don't" instead of "doesn't," reflecting their lack of class in their upbringing and education. There is little speech used by other sailors or fishermen that would indicate the roughness of the lives.

The one exception is when the men in the Neptune watch Schuyler's documentary. The men around Dick begin to laugh among themselves and make jokes about Dick, Spartina, and even Elsie. The language briefly becomes vulgar and there is more use of slang than at any other point in the entire novel. This abrupt change is utilized by the author not only to show the environment inside the bar, but also to give a sense of Dick's discomfort with the way he is depicted in the film.

## Structure

The book contains fifty chapters, with a great deal of variance in their length. The chapters themselves are all in chronological order, however they are not numbered as such. There are many flashbacks, especially at the beginning of the story when the characters are introduced. There are also significant flashbacks in Chapter Fifty that are utilized to explain Dick's changes since his early adulthood and his discovery of where his life might lead from this point.

The story itself takes place during a time span of just under a year, however, the seasons have little affect on the plot or the characters other than in the way they act during the differences in temperature, etc. There is also a great deal of reference to many of the characters' families during the past two generations. The flow of the plots and subplots follow the three story lines that are all essential to its conclusion. The first is the successful completion of Spartina. This is not achieved exactly as Dick had imagined it, but it moves from mid-construction to completion smoothly. The second is the change and cleansing of Dick himself as he learns to control his temper, his actions, and, finally, the lives of others. This educational process continues basically in the same direction throughout the novel and is responsible for allowing Dick to mature. The last subplot follows the beginning of an affair with Elsie, her pregnancy, and the eventual understanding between her, Dick, and May. This process also follows a chronological sequence.



## Quotes

"If I had a boat it wouldn't be a question of risk, I could sign up with Joxer Goode and haul red crabs. There are boats not much bigger than mine bring in twenty thousand dollars' worth of red crabs two and three times a summer. Joxer Goode has contracts in Providence and Boston, pretty soon he'll be shipping to New York City." Chapter 1, p. 7

"You ever hear rich people talk about stocks and bonds? That's what they're looking for, is something undervalued. I could make something out of you. You could make something." Chapter 3, p. 19

"Don't ever pull that again," Elsie said. "Once was funny, twice would be a big fat fine." Chapter 6, p.38

That's right," Dick said. "I like the time out there. I hope having movie cameras along doesn't screw it up." Chapter 7 p. 52

"Maybe you'd like to take a nap too," he said. May stood up. "When you get back," she said. "Same as when you wanted supper." Chapter 7 p. 53

"There's a knack to how you look. You got to . . . unfocus your eyes. What you want to do is let as much come in as you can. You don't so much see a fish as you just get a feeling that something's different. You just feel a speck on your screen. Then you focus in. Most of the time it's a shadow of a wave, or seaweed or flotsam. You'd be surprised how much junk is out here." Chapter 8, p. 57

"Get the fish, asshole. Get the fish before they eat the goddamn thing." Chapter 10, p. 70

"There's more, but that's the pattern. You spend a lot of time dividing up the world into the idle rich and the true-blue salts. The unworthy and the worthy. And what do you get out of all this? You get to feel pissed off. Am I leaving something out? You get to feel salty as hell, but mainly pissed off. You also get to feel poor. Tonging quahogs in your eighteen-foot skiff." Chapter 11, p. 75

"Jesus you get noisy on a couple of drinks. And wrong too. I'll talk to your tomorrow, after we clean out the hold. Let's not rush anything. Let's just get in the right mood and get synchronized." Chapter 16, p. 100

"A long time ago," Parker said, "you swallowed hard and took a couple hundred bucks. This is small. Small is the way to do it." Chapter 17, p. 102

"That's right," Parker said. "We'll go first class again. Hell, we'll take your girlfriend and Schuyler along to make more movies. We get two fish at once, we'll put Keith in the skiff. And you'll get your boat in by Labor Day, Captain Pierce." Chapter 17, p.105



"You're as bad as my sister, she said. "If you want to play with something, fine. But don't go around straightening up." Chapter 22, p. 144

"I wasn't thinking of good conduct. I was thinking of my bad character. My secret, outlaw nature. *You'll* end up with good conduct again. *Won't* you?" Chapter 24, p. 171

"I told you why I was going to see Miss Perry. I can tell you too that I don't want to. I'm going 'cause it's rock bottom. It came to me this morning when I got in. This trip I did as good as I could hope for, I had as good luck as I could ask for, and it ain't enough. If it was just me, I'd give up, I'd salvage what I could from the goddamn boat and beg for a job. That's what May would have wanted a year ago. Now she wants the boat in the water because she says I'll be poison to her and the boys if I give up. And she's right. I could bring myself to sell off the boat, but I couldn't do it cheerfully. Even if I got fifty or sixty thousand for her, that money would evaporate. If I back off now, I won't ever get a boat. So I'm willing - just barely willing - to go begging to Miss Perry. I knew this morning, if I didn't do it that very minute, I wouldn't ever do it." Chapter 28, p 202

"There's two things I swore I'd never do. One is be caretaker for a summer house, the other is mess up my family." Chapter 33, p. 231

"One of my problems is that I like hanging around with you. What do you say we keep it a secret, keep on hanging out together?" Chapter 41, p. 301

"You better tell me some more. One thing you better tell me is how come an up-to-date woman, gone to college, gone to two colleges, how come she gets pregnant? Or was it out on Parker's boat? And she didn't . . ."Chapter 46, p. 339



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss how the changes in Galilee, Rhode Island, affect Dick Pierce.

Explain the significance of spartina grass, and how it relates to the characters, in general.

Relate what the symbolism of Dick's boat, Spartina, represents to him.

Identify the most significant factor in Dick Pierce's character that allows him to obtain the funds he needed to complete Spartina.

Discuss how the spartina grass and Dick's boat, Spartina, are alike.

Explain Dick's biggest fear, as the Spartina proves itself to be seaworthy during the hurricane.

Identify what Dick sees as his future goal, depicted in the final chapter.