

The Van Study Guide

The Van by Roddy Doyle

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Plot Summary

The Van is the story of two friends, Jimmy Rabbitte, Sr. and Bimbo Reeves, who operate a chipper van on the outskirts of Dublin. Bimbo uses money he got when he was laid off from his job to buy the van and he invites his buddy, Jimmy Sr. to be his partner. They work very hard to get the van cleaned up and working. With the help (or leadership) of Maggie Reeves, Bimbo's wife, they work out their menu, which is basically fish and chips, burgers, and sausages, and, with the help of Veronica Rabbitte, Jimmy Sr.'s wife, learn how to cook it. They open and begin to catch on very well, but Jimmy Sr. soon feels that Bimbo and Maggie are making all the decisions and not listening to him. The friendship begins to falter, then goes completely off the rails. After one final and thoroughly nasty fight, Bimbo drives the van into the Irish Sea.

The book begins by introducing Jimmy Sr. and his family, and shows how he spends his days. Until Bimbo is laid off, Jimmy Sr. spends his days aimlessly visiting the library or playing Pitch and Putt golf. He is lonely and a little scared. After Bimbo is laid off, Jimmy Sr. at least has someone to hang out with. Bimbo is more ambitious and wants to find a new job, or something to do that would be more productive than just doing nothing. He notices that a chipper van that used to be outside their favorite pub, The Hikers, is no longer there. That gives him the idea of running a van. He tells their friend Bertie about it, and Bertie finds one that is available. Bimbo buys it and asks Jimmy Sr. to be his partner. They shake on it.

Through a lot of hard work they get the van ready to open for business. They tow it to The Hikers (the van has no engine), and right from the first night they begin doing good business. Bimbo's wife, Maggie, is an active participant. She keeps the books, helps them plan what to serve, finds out how to buy it, and gets them a license for a spot by a beach near where they live. Gradually, Jimmy Sr. begins to resent Maggie's involvement. When Bimbo tells Jimmy Sr. he is going to be paid a weekly wage, Jimmy really starts acting out. He purposely does things he knows will annoy Bimbo, and pushes him to the point where they begin to have serious fights.

After one such fight Jimmy Sr. says he is quitting and storms out of the van. Bimbo chases after him and begs him to come have a couple of pints. That is an invitation that Jimmy Sr. can never refuse, but he does continue to resist Bimbo's pleadings. Bimbo even offers to make Jimmy a partner and share everything fifty-fifty, but Jimmy Sr. will not take his hand. Finally, Bimbo, who by this time is pretty drunk from several rounds of pints, says he is going to kill the van. Taking Jimmy Sr. with him, Bimbo drives out to the beach and drives the van into the water until it will not go any farther.

Jimmy tries to pull Bimbo back out of the water, but Bimbo wants to keep watching the van. Jimmy Sr. walks home alone.



Pages 1-52

Pages 1-52 Summary

*Note: Page numbers refer to the Penguin Books paperback edition of *The Van* by Roddy Doyle.*

Jimmy Rabbitte, Sr. is trying to find a place to sit in his own house. At first he is in the kitchen, but his son, Darren, comes in looking for a place to study. Jimmy Sr. goes out and sits on the front step. Nothing happens. A car goes by: first up the street, then down; Jimmy Sr. does not recognize the driver. He counts the change in his pocket: one pound sevenpence.

Darren is in the kitchen trying to get into his homework. He thinks that his mother will be coming in shortly to make dinner and he will have to find another place.

Veronica, Darren's mother, is in her bedroom with the door locked. She is doing her homework as well.

Linda and Tracy, the twins, are in the living room experimenting with a cigarette. They think they hear someone on the stairs and stash the cigarette in a candy tin, but the door does not open. Linda is also practicing Veronica's signature so she can make realistic looking "Please Excuse" notes.

At dinner the twins are pleading for a video player, but Veronica and Jimmy Sr. tell them there is no money for things like that. Jimmy Sr. brings out the swear box when they protest. The swear box was Jimmy Sr.'s idea to force him to clean up his speech in front of the baby, Gina. Gina is at the age where she imitates everything she hears, even to calling for the 'Starebock' when Jimmy Sr. is on the verge of letting a coarse word cross his lips. Jimmy Sr. cannot figure out why Darren does not seem to enter into conversations with him the way he once did, but when he starts making fun of the twins' geography teacher, who has asked the class to put up a sheet of paper in the bathroom so that family members can make a checkmark when they flush the toilet, he notices Darren is beginning to grin. Jimmy Sr. forges ahead, even though Veronica is trying to change the subject. Gina has been playing with her chips, spilling them on the dog, Larrygogan. She begins to wail when Sharon tries to control her, so Jimmy Sr. gets up and goes through a funny song and dance to distract her.

Jimmy Sr. is enjoying being at the ILAC library. He watches television for a bit. There is no sound on. The other three fellows watching all have earphones, but Jimmy Sr. does not see any other headphones around. He thinks of asking the young girl behind the desk, but hesitates. She might be busy, and he is not sure they are free. Anyway, it just seems to be a play or something. He is thrilled to be here. There is a lot more to do than just look at books; there is a language resource center, a music room, a computer room—he's consulting the brochure—where one can enhance one's computer literacy skills,



even a reading machine if one has sight problems. He thinks that would be a great idea for when he comes home drunk—although he does not do much drinking anymore, just a few pints twice a week.

Jimmy Sr. is sure he is going to join the library. He has the application cards the young girl gave him. She asked if he was a householder, and he said it wasn't for himself that he was asking. She gave him the cards and said he'd have to get a householder to sign the back of them. The problem is that he is not sure; is renting enough? He is worried that he will feel foolish if it turns out he has to own the home. He decides he will get Bimbo to sign it, to be on the safe side. There is a sign on the desk that advertises an Action Pack for the Unemployed, but there are none on the desk. He figures he will get one next time.

Veronica and Jimmy Sr. are sitting on the bed in their bedroom. They are going over the list of people they have to buy Christmas presents for, as well as who they can skip. There is no money for presents, but they come down to having to get something for the twins and for Gina, and something small for Darren and Sharon. Veronica is getting dressed to go to her class; she is taking night classes. Jimmy says he will just stay here and read one of his books. After Veronica leaves, Jimmy Sr. picks up one of the books: *The Man in the Iron Mask* by Alexandre Dumas. He draws his thumbnail across the plastic cover and enjoys the grooves it makes, and the sound—same as when he was a kid. He decides he will make himself a cup of tea and then get going. He will read fifty pages before Veronica gets home.

Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo are at a Saturday soccer match—Barrytown under 18—the team on which Darren plays. It is a very easy match for them, and Darren stars. As the game ends, the kids pile into the car being driven by Bimbo. There are four kids in back, and two more in front. Jimmy Sr. stops them on the way out of the lot and asks the two kids in the front to go with one of the other cars so he can get in the car. They kid Darren about his girl and kid about where they will go tonight to celebrate. Darren is working at The Hikers, a pub popular with Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo. Their coach, Billy, urges the boys to be sure to come to practice on Tuesday. Even with all the kidding, there is admiration for Darren for having a girlfriend.

The following Monday, Jimmy Sr. is reading to Gina. Both Sharon and Veronica make excuses about how they cannot take care of her, so Jimmy Sr. says he will. He finishes a fairy story for Gina then picks up his own book, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. He hates it, but does not want to appear to his family as not being able to read it. Jimmy Jr. shows up with his laundry. Jimmy Sr. kids him about his girl not doing it for him, but it does not seem to matter to Jimmy Jr. Before he leaves, he slips Jimmy Sr. a five pound note.

Sharon returns home to find Jimmy Sr. standing alone in his bedroom, where he has been ever since Jimmy Jr. left. Jimmy Sr. is having a moment of extreme anxiety. Sharon thinks her father looks small and beaten.

Jimmy Sr. has young Jimmy Jr.'s fiver and a couple of pounds more that Veronica has given him. He is on his way to The Hikers. He calculates that if only Bimbo and Bertie



are there, he can buy a round with the fiver and sip. It's now quarter past ten, time enough for three or four pints, but late enough so he will not have to buy more than the one round. He had been pleased when Jimmy Jr. gave him the fiver, but upon thinking it over, he becomes annoyed.

He finds Bimbo and Bertie at the bar. Bimbo orders him a pint. They notice some strangers, three couples in a corner, and have a serious discussion about them. They talk about whether just anybody should be allowed in the bar. They take their pints to a table and settle in for a thorough analysis of the topic. Jimmy Sr. thinks that what he most likes about this ritual is not the pints but the friendship. While he is deep in thought he barely notices that Bimbo has slipped over to the bar to order another round—the round for which Jimmy Sr. planned to pay. He stands up and yells at Bimbo to stop him, but then apologizes. The discussion about who should be allowed in a bar evolves to a ragging of Bimbo when it comes out that years ago he visited a disco in Limerick.

Later that night, after Jimmy Sr. has returned home, he has trouble untying a knot in his shoelaces. He is trying to do it without losing his balance and without waking Veronica. Veronica does wake up and offers to help him. He puts his foot in her lap and she gets the knot undone quickly. Jimmy Sr. has a sudden impulse to kick her stomach because of the way she spoke to him earlier, but he does not do it. He is happy that Veronica is taking care of him.

Jimmy Sr. gets up in the morning with the rest of the family even though he has no place to go. He prides himself on seeing the kids off to school. He sneaks Gina out of Sharon's room without waking Sharon. Veronica sticks her head into the twins' room and tells them loudly that it's time to get up. Gina follows Jimmy Sr. and jumps on the twins until they get up. Jimmy Sr. backs unobtrusively out of the room because he knows it embarrasses the twins if he is there when they get out from under the blankets. He checks on Darren, who has to sleep on the couch in the living room. At breakfast everyone joins the discussion of whether the twins are allowed to wear eye shadow. Naturally, only the twins think it should be permissible. Linda asks Jimmy Sr. to sign her homework journal, but begs him not to look at it. He takes a quick look and sees all kinds of negative comments. Tracy's journal is in school because the teacher kept it. Jimmy Sr. grounds both of them on general principles and for being careless about their homework.

Jimmy Sr. and Veronica are Christmas shopping. There are three weeks to go so the shopping center is not yet crowded. Without saying it, they are looking for things that look good but cost next to nothing. They are looking at a very cheap thing like a computer that can be attached to a television for game playing. Veronica decides that the twins or Darren would hate such a gift, and that the only one in the family who would play with it would be Jimmy Sr.

Jimmy Sr. is outside of Sharon's room. He has left his book there; he hears her crying and wants to go in, but cannot. Quietly, he goes back down to the kitchen.



Veronica has been up to Darren's room, so now it is Jimmy Sr.'s turn. He grasps the handle and goes in. Miranda is there with Darren. Darren introduces her. Jimmy Sr. says he is looking for Gina. They all agree that Gina is not there, so Jimmy Sr. withdraws. Veronica says Miranda is lovely, but "women always say that other women are lovely even when they aren't."

Pages 1-52 Analysis

This section introduces the main characters of the novel, Jimmy Rabbitte, Sr., his family, and his closest friend, Brendan "Bimbo" Reeves.

Jimmy Sr., as he is always called, is on the dole. He spends his days trying to keep out of the way of the other members of his family. Their house is very small for the number of people who live there. Darren, Jimmy Sr.'s son who is studying hard for his "Leaving" exams, seems to have commandeered the living room although there is a reference to him being in 'his' room. The twins, Tracy and Linda, have their own room. Wife Veronica, besides doing all the housework, is taking two courses herself, and so needs some privacy for studying. An older daughter, Sharon, shares her bedroom with Gina, her toddler—presumably around eighteen to twenty-four months old.

There is no mention in the story of Gina's father—Sharon's husband. This allows for speculation on the facts. It seems quite possible that there has never been a husband, though there certainly was a father.

Jimmy Sr. and Veronica have two older children, Leslie and Jimmy Jr., neither of whom live with them. Jimmy, Jr. lives in the same general area—on the outskirts of Dublin, down where Dublin Bay flows into the Irish Sea. Jimmy Jr. lives with his woman, Aoife (pronounced Ee-fay). Jimmy Jr. stops around on occasion to visit Jimmy Sr. and Veronica. He has been known to slip Jimmy Sr. some money on occasion.

After one visit by Jimmy Jr. in which he gave his father ?5, Sharon comes home to find Jimmy Sr. standing alone in his bedroom. He has been there since Jimmy Jr. left. Sharon thinks he looks small and defeated. He is having an attack of extreme anxiety. She tries to ask Jimmy Sr. what is bothering him, but he yells at her to get off his back. She leaves the room, slamming the door so hard it splits.

When he has a few pounds Jimmy Sr. feels free to join his friends at The Hikers. When he times things right he can buy a round close enough to closing time so that he will not have to buy more than one.



Pages 53-112

Pages 53-112 Summary

Jimmy Sr. feels like he has some pressure on him that will not go away. It reminds him of when he was a kid and had done something bad. His mother would say, "You wait 'til your father hears about this." Jimmy Sr. knew that meant he would be punished with his father's belt. His father didn't wear a belt, but just kept one for strapping Jimmy Sr. and his brothers. Jimmy would go through the whole day scared to death, waiting for his father to come home, praying that he'd go for a pint first or get knocked down by a car or fall into a machine at work or have a heart attack, anything that would delay the strapping he knew was coming. He feels the same sort of apprehension now, and doesn't know why.

Jimmy Sr. asks Veronica if she has read *David Copperfield*. He marvels at the size of it; he congratulates himself for giving up *The Man in the Iron Mask*. Veronica says she has never read it. He asks if she wants to read it after him, and she says "Okay," but only because she knows that is what he wants her to say. She asks if he wants to read her book. They agree. Jimmy Sr. says he'll go upstairs and get a few more chapters read before tea.

Jimmy Sr. is annoyed that they have gotten some Christmas cards from people just around the corner. They argue about whether Veronica has said it is his fault that they have no money. She says she didn't say it. Jimmy Sr. says he can see that is what she thinks.

Jimmy Sr. is at Bimbo's feeling very uncomfortable. He has a new shirt on and his tie is making him very uncomfortable. It is Christmas morning and this is a Christmas tradition that they get together with their friends for a Christmas drink. Jimmy Sr. thinks this might have been their year to host the event, but Bimbo has spoken up. Bertie and his wife, Vera, come in. Bertie says that maybe Bimbo's mother-in-law has died or has done one in her pants. He calls Bimbo over. Bimbo cannot smell anything out of the ordinary. Jimmy Sr. is dying laughing and holding it in. Vera tells Jimmy Sr. that Bertie did the same thing yesterday to his brother. Bimbo finally catches on that he's being had. Jimmy Sr. has to excuse himself and go upstairs to the bathroom to get control of himself.

Jimmy Sr. dries his hands. He notices that Bimbo has two electric razors; one is small and yellow. He checks it out. It says Girl Care on it, so it must be Maggie's. Jimmy Sr. shaves a bit of his leg. He feels like a sneak, like someone has caught him. He unlocks the door and goes back downstairs.

Christmas Day Night. Jimmy Sr. and Veronica are in their bed; they have just made love. Jimmy Sr. feels her legs to see if they are shaved. Young Jimmy had come for dinner. Aoife, Jimmy Jr.'s woman, gave Jimmy Sr. some cigars. Leslie, who is nineteen,



has not gotten in touch. Leslie has progressed from trespassing on the tracks to robbing church poor boxes. The twins are disappointed to get clothes for Christmas. Jimmy Sr. has gotten *David Copperfield* for Darren, who is pleased. They have eaten the turkey that Jimmy Sr. won at the Pitch and Putt. Jimmy Sr. gave Veronica a towel with "Italia 90" on it. He caught her using it to dry the dishes, and said he thought it might be saved for some special occasion. Veronica said that Christmas was a special occasion. She gave it to him to use. They had a good laugh. It has been a good day.

Jimmy Sr. is getting used to not having any work. It isn't so bad except the part about not having any money—and having to appear stingy to his children. He knows the twins are going to come home one day soon and ask to go on the school trip to Scotland, and he (or Veronica) will have to say no. Veronica is better at it than he is. Jimmy Sr. finds it is easier to not think about things like getting work. One day he takes Gina with him to the Pitch and Putt and some idiot bounces a ball off the bar of her buggy. He wanders around town a good deal and figures there is money in the town; the young people have it.

He has read three Dickens books and thinks Dickens was brilliant. He is thinking of taking some 'Leaving Cert' courses next year like Veronica is doing. He reads the newspapers from cover to cover, mostly in the Raheny Library. He makes a list of things to do around the house and is doing one a week. Once the weather gets better he will do work in the garden. Everything is okay except for the money.

Bimbo is crying. He has been let go. He recalls the day he got his first paycheck. He ran all the way home. He was carrying a bag of cakes from the bakery where he worked and his sisters had been more excited about the cakes than about his paycheck. Bimbo and Jimmy Sr. are in The Hikers. Bimbo says that his sister Marie's little one has epilepsy. She's only six. Bimbo starts crying again. "What am I going to do, Jimmy?"

Another friend, Paddy, turns up. He asks Bimbo what they're going to give him as termination pay. Bimbo says a couple of thousand. Bertie says if he got a lump sum like that, he'd take it down to the Gem and wave it under Mandy's nose and die happy. Bertie asks them all—if they had a thousand quid, what would they do? He says he would go to the best looking woman he knew and ask if she would do him. Paddy corrects that by asking what the woman might do for half that amount.

Outside they watch while Bimbo gets sick. They're all a little drunk. The plan is to go down to the seafront with a couple of six packs. They start singing..."We come on the ship John B." Bimbo likes the song so he sings along. Jimmy Sr. asks where the chipper van has gone. There is always a van outside The Hikers, but it is not there tonight. They talk about going to the real chipper—down where the Bank of Ireland used to be, but that is a trip in the other direction from the seafront. They joke with a policeman in a patrol car who stops to make sure they're okay. Jimmy Sr. is uncomfortable joking with the police. He takes Bimbo's arm and leads him away from the place.

Jimmy Sr. enjoys the next couple of weeks, spending time with Bimbo. He takes Bimbo to the Raheny Library on a Saturday. On the following Monday, Jimmy Sr. calls for



Bimbo at nine o'clock and makes him come out for a game of pitch and putt. Tuesday it rains all day, and on Wednesday Jimmy Sr. brings Bimbo into town to go to the ILAC Centre where they watch a film about volcanoes. They go for coffee, although Bimbo insists on having tea. They do something nearly every day. They watch a snow shower, then the sun comes out and they watch the snow melt. One day Bimbo's termination check arrives. He gives it to Maggie, his wife, immediately. Bimbo puts a lot of it into his home; aluminum windows for the back, gas conversion, things like that. Jimmy Sr. helps him put up new paper in the kitchen. Veronica raises a question about that, so he has to promise to do their house. Bimbo gets two tickets to one of the World Cup warm-up matches—not tickets exactly; they are supposed to do some ushering, show people to their seat, and so forth. One of their assignments is to keep the crowd from going onto the field. That makes them miss a Penalty kick, but other than that, it is fun.

Bimbo wins a trophy at the Pitch and Putt, and they celebrate at The Hikers. While there, they go out to the parking lot to get some chips from the van, but the van is not there. Bimbo remembers that the van has not been there in some months. He says the van must have been a little gold mine.

Bimbo picks up the *Independent* each morning and looks for a job in the classifieds. Jimmy Sr. says he is crazy to think that he will ever find a job in the classifieds. He even catches Bimbo writing a letter to MacDonald's. He scoffs so much at the notion of Bimbo in a little paper hat that he convinces him to abandon the idea of writing the letter.

Bimbo beats Jimmy Sr. at the Pitch and Putt. As they walk home, Jimmy Sr. asks Bimbo again about the letter to MacDonald's. Bimbo says he thinks he will not bother and Jimmy Sr. is relieved. Jimmy Sr. gets to his house and realizes he's forgotten his keys. He knocks and knocks but no one comes. He's about to give up and go on back to Bimbo's when he hears Veronica coming.

Jimmy Jr. comes around with four cans of Carlsberg beer. He and Jimmy Sr. are watching soccer on the television. Jimmy Jr. tells his father he is getting married. Jimmy Sr. appears to ignore him. He repeats it. Jimmy Sr. says, "I heard you. Is she pregnant?" Jimmy Jr. says that is not the reason, that Aoife is not pregnant. Jimmy Sr. asks why Jimmy Jr. wants to tell him first. Jimmy Jr. says—I just did. He left to go tell Veronica.

The family is having dinner together. Jimmy Jr. has brought a bottle of wine and pours some for everybody, even the twins—a small glass apiece. Jimmy Sr. and Veronica want to know what Jimmy Jr.'s in-laws are like. Jimmy Sr. especially wants to know if Aoife's mother is pretty. Everybody wants to know why he cares about whether she is pretty. Darren asks him who is he to be asking, the shape he's in. Jimmy Sr. is not ready to take that kind of comment from Darren. He points his fork at him and tells him not to forget who paid for the dinner he is eating, Darren says, he knows who paid for it. It was the State. Jimmy Sr. excuses himself saying he has to go to the bathroom. Jimmy Jr. criticizes Darren for the comment. They hear Jimmy Sr. coming back down the stairs so they switch to an innocuous topic.



That evening Jimmy Sr. is at The Hikers. He has just splashed cold water on his face because he has a headache. He thinks about what Darren has said, and realizes that he meant no harm. He goes back to the table and picks up the argument he is having with Bimbo about who really won their Pitch and Putt match. Bertie offers to sell anyone a kettle jug at a really good price, but no one is interested. Bimbo asks Bertie if by any chance he had a chipper van to sell. Bertie says he could probably put his hand on a Mister Whippy, but Bimbo isn't interested. Bertie says he'll see what he can do.

Jimmy Sr. tells Veronica that Bimbo is talking about getting himself a chipper van. Veronica makes a joke.

Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo are sitting on Jimmy Sr.'s front step enjoying the sun while a group of girls walk up the street. They have different reactions. Bimbo sounds as if the girls are on their way home from school and going home to have tea. Jimmy Sr. has seen them before and knows they are a wild bunch of girls that work at the sewing factory. He is ashamed of the lascivious thoughts that come into his head. While they are there, Bertie appears at the front gate. He tells them to come with him—he has something to show them.

Pages 53-112 Analysis

Leslie, Veronica and Jimmy Sr.'s son who is nineteen at the time of the novel, began to get into little scrapes at quite a young age. He progressed to robbing collection boxes for a couple of pounds worth of coins. Leslie had left home suddenly after a police officer who knew him saw him robbing a collection box. He had spent a couple of nights with a sister of Veronica's but then had moved on. His parents think he is living in England, but they can't be sure because they never hear from him.

Jimmy Sr. has a number of things that he does to pass the time. He spends time in a couple of different libraries. One of them, the Central Library at the ILAC Centre, has a television where he can watch films. Jimmy Sr. also likes to play golf at the Pitch and Putt. He has become very good at it. He almost always beats his opponent.

Bimbo is laid off. He is devastated. Jimmy Sr. is sympathetic, but secretly glad to have someone to spend days with. Bimbo doesn't take to unemployment the way Jimmy Sr. has done. He sends out dozens of letters. Bimbo is a baker by trade and has held a job since he was in his teens. He is even moved to respond to an advertisement by MacDonald's looking for people to become Managers. Jimmy Sr. scoffs at the notion of anybody selling out to the point of working for such a place. He convinces Bimbo that he would be wasting his time applying. Even if he did get accepted, they would just exploit him, and besides, he would look foolish in a polyester uniform and little cap.

Having a couple of pints is an important part of Jimmy Sr.'s and Bimbo's lives. They have a favorite place, The Hikers. Darren works there part time. Other friends of Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo hang out there. The most prominent of the friends is Bertie. Bertie is kind



of a wheeler-dealer. If someone is looking to buy something, he can often find just the right item at the right price.

One evening as they are coming out of The Hikers, Bimbo notices that a chipper van that used to be parked there is no longer there, and he is dying for some fish and chips. He mentions this in passing to Bertie and not long after Bertie says he has something to show him. He takes Bimbo to the back yard of a near deserted house in the neighborhood. Lo and behold, there sits a decrepit chipper van.



Pages 112-152

Pages 112-152 Summary

The van that Bertie shows them is filthy. Jimmy Sr. has never seen anything so bad. It is horrible to think that people had eaten chips and out of it. Bimbo is looking underneath; he sees that the van has no wheels; it is up on blocks. Bertie appears from behind the van rolling a wheel. He says there were three more like it. Bimbo is disappointed at the condition of the van but still excited and, he says he'll have to go get Maggie to come and see it.

Jimmy Sr. and Bertie are waiting. Jimmy Sr. has passed this house many times, but had never really noticed it. Now in the back yard he sees that everything is a terrible mess. Jimmy Sr. comments on the mess, wondering how "they" can live that way. Bertie corrects him; "It's not 'they', it's just 'him'. His wife left him and took the kids." Jimmy Sr. is sure that Maggie will never let Bimbo buy it. Bertie says it has only been off the road for a year. He challenges Jimmy Sr. for accusing him of selling junk. Maggie and Bimbo come back. Maggie asks about the engine, but there is no engine. After going back and forth for a while, they put their heads together and then tell Bertie that they will buy it.

Jimmy Sr. helps Bimbo push it home. They get it to Bimbo's house. They put a couple of bricks behind the wheels to keep it from rolling away, pretend (for the kids' sake) to lock the van up, and go up to The Hikers for a couple of beers. Bimbo asks Jimmy Sr. if he will be his partner. Jimmy Sr. is dumbfounded by the idea, but after a bit they shake on it.

They start the cleanup. Bimbo sets the date of the World Cup as their deadline for getting the van in operation. That gives them just under four weeks. Bimbo turns the hose on the van, but the dirt stays. They start to scrape and begin to make some progress.

Veronica gives Jimmy Sr. cooking lessons. Jimmy Sr. tells Sharon she can work in the van when they get it working. Bimbo has a funny reaction to this. He is, on the one hand, pleased to have Sharon there to help, but he says it is the sort of decision that should be arrived at jointly.

Maggie begins taking care of the business details, licenses, and so forth.

They finish cleaning the outside. Bimbo says that now they have to concentrate on the inside. Jimmy Sr. utters an obscenity.

The four of them get together in Bimbo and Maggie's kitchen. Maggie says they have to finalize the menu. At first, Jimmy Sr. can't understand what she is talking about. Maggie has some burger samples for them to taste; they agree on one and call it "Champion Burger." That's Item number 1. Then they go on to Spice-burger, Fresh cod-in-batter,



then Smoked cod-in-batter. The four of them have a grand time tasting everything and deciding what to include on the menu.

Cleaning the inside of the van with the World Cup—their target date—only a little over two weeks away is backbreaking work. They enlist two of Bimbo's kids to work on the inside. Together, all of them feel they are doing a great job.

Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo are finishing up cleaning the inside. There is a sink, but no water, so they can't figure out what it was ever used for. Jimmy Sr. opens the hatch and it falls off. Maggie shows them some ready-made burgers. She says all that has to be done is throw them in the microwave. Bimbo points out that they don't have any electricity. Jimmy Sr. shows Bimbo and Maggie and Veronica how to make batter with pineapple, an idea of his own; the others are impressed by him.

They load the van up with the food and head for The Hikers, where everyone is watching the World Cup on television. It's a tough trip. There are no brakes in the van, so every time Bimbo stops his car, which is pulling the van, the van runs into him. When they get there and get the bricks placed behind the wheels, they discover that there is a lot of water on the floor. The bin where they had stowed some of the food has slopped over and there is a lot of stuff on the floor. They have to throw some of it out; the spice-burgers are the worst, but they are able to salvage most of the fish. They wash it off, except when it is just too dirty, and put it back with the supply.

Pages 112-152 Analysis

Jimmy Sr., thinks he's never seen anything quite as filthy as the van. He can't imagine anyone eating anything that came out of it.

After the excitement of looking the van over and the decision by Bimbo and Maggie to go ahead and buy it, the two friends are ready for a couple of pints. Bimbo goes to considerable lengths to persuade Jimmy Sr. to join him as his partner. He even at one point in the discussion says he has talked it over with Maggie. He finally persuades Jimmy Sr. and they shake on it.

Veronica and Jimmy Sr. are giddy with excitement as she teaches him some of the basics of cooking. She has him peeling potatoes for frying and he scrapes his wrist with the scraper. They laugh hysterically over the idea of someone trying to commit suicide by scraping one wrist until they hit an artery, then trying to quickly scrape the other one before they pass out.

Bimbo is more organized and more of a planner than Jimmy Sr. The scene where Jimmy Sr. tells Bimbo about asking Sharon if she wants to work with them when the van is in business is revealing. Of course, Bimbo has no objection to including Sharon as a worker, but he makes the strong point that he and Jimmy Sr. should have discussed it before Jimmy Sr. went ahead and told Sharon. This scene reveals something about Jimmy Sr. that was not obvious before; he often acts spontaneously, without really considering the effect of what he is doing. Bimbo is more methodical. He is serious

about making a success of the van, and he is still scared from the shock of being unemployed. On the other hand, unemployment has come to be a natural part of life to Jimmy Sr.



Pages 152-204

Pages 152-204 Summary

Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo and other friends are in The Hikers. They're watching the World Cup on television—Ireland vs. England in an early round. Ireland scores and the place goes wild.

Bimbo says, "We'd better be going. They get the van fixed up for customers and open the hatch. There was no one outside. Jimmy Sr. was frying up some fries. Finally a kid shows up and asks for a Choc-ice. Sharon comes into the van just in time to hear her father telling the kid to bug off. A group of women are heading for the van, opening their purses. Jimmy Sr. dumps a bunch of fries into the deep-fat fryer in expectation. The grease spatters into his face. Bimbo gives him a water bottle to wash out his eyes. The women seem to take forever making up their minds, but then they start to order. Sharon drops the first bag of chips Jimmy Sr. hands her, but gradually they pull themselves together. They are just finishing up with the last of the women's orders when they see a mob coming out of The Hikers. The guys start ordering wildly. Jimmy Sr., Bimbo, and Sharon work for an hour until the crowd slacks off. Good thing it did, because they were almost out of food. It has been some day.

At home, Sharon notices she has a rash on her left cheek. Jimmy Sr. does, too, on his right. They figure it's the hot grease.

By the next Sunday they add sausages. Business is jumping. On Friday they stick up posters for a ?1 special, which turns out to be a huge hit. In a rest period, Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo are talking about improvements. They need an engine for the van, and also some kind of flue to let the smells out.

A day or so later a kid asks for a "Large and a Dunphy." Jimmy Sr. is puzzled and asks the kid what he means by "a Dunphy?" The kid says it's a sausage. He explains that since a sausage is like a prick and Eamon Dunphy is a prick, they call a sausage a Dunphy.

The name catches on. By Thursday of the second week the word *Sausage* has disappeared from the language. People are asking for "A Dunphy & chips."

Ireland has made it through to the knockout round. Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo are elated and brace for the business.

After the Holland game, Maggie buys them T-shirts with a picture of Niell Quinn, one of Ireland's star players. Under Quinn's picture she had them print, "His Mummy fed him on Bimbo's Burgers." But after two washes, Quinn's head disappeared, so the T-shirts do not make sense any more.



It is grand to have some money again. They treat the income in a very business-like way. Maggie keeps the books, pays their wages, and gives them a bonus on especially good weeks. Jimmy Sr. also has his dole. He buys a new shirt. Veronica had been complaining that his old clothes smell of grease.

The country has gone soccer mad. It is all anyone talks about. No cooking is done. The whole country is living on chips. Jimmy Sr. brought home 240 quid the second week. He and Veronica talk about getting a video. Veronica was going to say more...something nice, but just at that moment Germany got a penalty against Czechoslovakia and Veronica wants to see Lothar Matthaeus taking it; he is her favorite. Jimmy Sr. likes Schillace; he reminds him of their son Leslie, the same eyes.

Jimmy Sr. has been cleaning up the van, but it is hard work. His pants are wringing wet and his back is killing him. He finally says to Bimbo that cleaning every day is pointless because it just gets dirty again that evening. He suggests they let it build up for a few days until it gets hard. Then it will be a health hazard and they will have to get rid of it. Bimbo doesn't argue with him. He opens the hatch then gets out and goes round to the open hatch and looks in. He can't see the dirt from there, so he goes along with Jimmy Sr.'s suggestion.

All in all, it is probably the best day of Jimmy Sr.'s life. Time runs out in the soccer match with the score tied nothing to nothing so it comes down to penalty shots. It is still all tied when it comes down to the final penalty kicker...O'Leary. No one has ever heard of him. The watchers at The Hikers are all sure they're doomed, but O'Leary sinks the shot like he is playing in the Little League. In the pandemonium that follows, Jimmy Sr. is trapped by Mickah Wallace, a pal of Jimmy Jr., who is telling him some story about swiping a record twenty years ago of the English World Cup win. Jimmy Jr. rescues him, and they hug. "I love yeh, son," says Jimmy Sr. when they are letting go. Jimmy Jr. is kind of embarrassed, but Jimmy Sr. could tell it means something to him.

Bimbo taps Jimmy Sr. on the shoulder and reminds him that they have to go. The customers get extra large portions of everything that night, but still Bimbo and Jimmy Sr. make a small fortune. They sell everything they have on board. There is not even a Mars Bar left. They close up by ten, and have a few quiet pints. The Hikers is quiet now. Jimmy Sr. goes home. Veronica is in the kitchen. They cry about the game. Jimmy Sr. tells her about seeing Jimmy Jr. at the pub. She tells him he's an idiot.

The next match Ireland lost to the Italians so that brought an end to the euphoria.

By this time, the van has a new engine. Bimbo and Jimmy Sr. are driving it around. They drive out to Howth, head up to the Summit, but the van wont handle the hill, which doesn't really matter. They are just driving for the fun of it; they don't really need to go to Howth.

Maggie buys them a license for a space in Dollymount near the beach. It is a great location, but the weather is gray and cold. Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo sit in the van all day waiting for a customer to show up.



One afternoon a young fellow on a pony stops by to ask if they have any rotten potatoes his horse could eat. They kid with him; asking how much his pony cost, and things like that. Jimmy Sr. asks him if the horse likes Twixes. "He does, yeah," says the young fellow, "—so do I". The young fellow's mate goes galloping by on his mule and the young fellow gets ready to go after him. They watch him gee up his horse and ride off down the causeway, his feet nearly scraping the road. That is the high point of that day.

Their biggest problem, though, is young punks messing with the van. There is a gang of them that hangs out in The Hikers parking lot, even in the rain. As soon as someone parks his car in the lot, the kids start messing with it—even before the driver gets into The Hikers. They do a lot of stuff like that, but they never seem to do anything for a laugh; they are like zombies. Jimmy Sr. calls them 'The Living Dead'. He always says they'll be dead before they're twenty. Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo can never really relax. The Living Dead will rock the van, three or four of them on each side. The oil pours out of the fryer, all the stuff is knocked to the floor. The cup for the grease under the hot plate tips over and the grease gets into the Mars Bars. It is hard to get out of the van when they are rocking it like that—and it is terrifying. Jimmy Sr. manages to catch one of them one time. He gives him a proper hiding. When he finishes the kid spits at him and walks away. One time, the kids took the bricks out from behind the wheels. The van rolled down the small hill and stopped. Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo had jumped, but Sharon was afraid to jump.

There are other young kids who pull a lot of the same tricks, but they are laughing the whole time. Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo almost like it. These kids like to hang around to look at Sharon. It would have been good for business, except they never had any money.

One day the bad kids started throwing rocks at the van. Jimmy Sr. realizes they were causing real damage, so he grabs one of the hatch bars and goes roaring after them. He can tell they are scared. Then he saw one of his twin daughters. He stopped and nearly fell over. The idea, his own daughter sending kids to fling stones at the van. He vowed to fix both of them.

He got the twins down to the van and gave them a proper dressing down. He made them clean the whole place. He even threatened to make them clean the ceiling. They protested some, but they did as he told them.

Bad weather continued well into July. They only brought the van out at night, except on Fridays at teatime with the ?1 Specials. They stick close to Barrytown but Maggie keeps an eye on the papers to see if there is some event like a concert that they should go for. One night Maggie is looking over the paper and asks if anybody has heard of a group called simply 'The.' Jimmy Sr. says that Darren thinks they are good, but he isn't sure how many people they might draw. Maggie says, "It's a Saturday night. You'll be letting down your regulars." She says, "On Saturday night we always do all right outside The Hikers. Jimmy Sr. wonders to himself who she means by "We" because she's never been inside the van. Maggie points out a concert in Thurles in Tipperary. Bimbo says no way. He says they would stick to Dublin, and he asked Jimmy Sr. if he agrees. That



makes Jimmy Sr. feel better; he was beginning to think that Bimbo and Maggie rehearsed these meetings beforehand.

Sharon can't work nights any more. She has a new boyfriend. Jimmy Sr. says he'll recruit Darren. Darren says he's a vegetarian. They make a deal where Darren will not be required to deal with burgers.

They're out at Dollymount about half-past three one afternoon when the weather is nice. Sharon is with them. When they get there they find there is a Mister Whippy in their place. Jimmy Sr. takes the permit that shows the space is theirs and goes up to talk to Mr. Whippy. After he threatens to ram him with their van, Mr. Whippy moves around to the other side of the circle. The weather stays nice and they take to spending afternoons down there. It is pretty easy business, except that sand gets into everything

One evening Jimmy Sr. and Darren are in the van. Darren is driving Jimmy Sr. a little crazy with his refusing to even turn over a burger. Darren also objects to the fact that the Dunphys are fried in the same fat as the fish. Jimmy Sr. blows up at him and tosses a Dunphy into the fat in such a way as to splatter some grease on Darren. Darren storms out while Jimmy Sr. prays for him to come back in. He finally does come in and they exchange grudging "Sorry's."

Pages 152-204 Analysis

The van is now open for business. They are parked outside The Hikers waiting for the crowd to come out after watching the World Cup on the television. Sharon is with them. The first customer is a kid who gets chased off by Jimmy Sr. for ordering something they don't carry. A group of women come by and that's the start. Then the men come pouring out of The Hikers. For over an hour they are going crazy trying to keep up with the orders. Finally, the last of the crowd is served and they close up the hatch, exhausted.

They add sausages to the menu, and a ?1 special. Everything they do proves to be a huge success. Maggie gets them a permit for a space out at the beach. In the beginning the weather is too cool for swimming, so they spend a lot of time just sitting around waiting for customers. Eventually the weather warms up and the combination of days at the beach and evenings outside The Hikers come to be their routine.

When they are at The Hikers they run into a constant problem with kids throwing rocks at the van and with four kids on each side rocking the van, to the point where Jimmy Sr., Bimbo, and Sharon are afraid it will turn over.

Jimmy Sr. acts like the enforcer to keep the kids in line, One day while he is out chasing after a kid he spots one of his own twin daughters slinking around a corner. He is furious to see that his own kids are among the ones trying to destroy the business.



Pages 204-254

Pages 204-254 Summary

On the hottest day yet, they are all set to pull out for their spot by the beach, but have to wait for Sharon. When she gets there she has Gina with her because she couldn't find anyone to take care of her. Jimmy Sr. protests that it is dangerous to have the infant in the van. Bimbo drives at a crawl but Gina nearly falls into the fryer. Jimmy Sr. goes off into the dunes and finds a plank that he uses to sort of pen Gina in. Jimmy Sr. turns around to fill a kid's order and finds Sharon changing Gina's diaper. He blasts her, saying that if the Health Inspector sees that, they will be out of business. While he is filling the order for the kid, a man about his age shows up and orders fish and chips. Sharon finishes up the kid's order and gives it to him. Jimmy Sr. puts the man's order together. The kid keeps saying his Ma was just coming. A pregnant woman shows up with six small children. While they are trying to deal with the woman and all the kids, the man comes back, mad as hell. He's yelling at Jimmy Sr. and waving his brown bag around, yelling his head off about some problem with his order. Jimmy Sr. can't imagine what the problem is, but it turns out that instead of getting a piece of cod, the man got a diaper, deep-fried, but still a diaper. After determining that the diaper was not a used one, Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo try to buy the man off with increasingly generous bribes, but the man is not to be consoled. They finally get the van started and drive home by a circuitous route. They decide to steer clear of the beach for a while.

Maggie keeps coming up with ideas. She has flyers printed and has her kids distribute them, suggesting that Bimbo's Burgers can cook their dinner for them, even for a special time like a wedding anniversary or a birthday.

Jimmy Sr. has his doubts and raises a few questions, but they begin to get some business that way and work out the problems as they come to them. Bimbo is the waiter inside the client's house. Maggie gets him a waiter's jacket, white with gold buttons. Jimmy Sr. thinks it is the stupidest thing he has ever seen, but it does not bother Bimbo.

The first customers they have for a dinner are the O'Rourkes, Larry and Mona. At one point Bimbo comes out and says they are having an awful row inside. Larry O'Rourke comes storming out, cursing them and their food. He heads in the direction of The Hikers. Jimmy Sr. goes into the house to see what is going on. He stays for what seems like a long time and comes out with two \$10 notes and a pound tip for Bimbo. The row has been about Larry's pigeons dirtying Mona's wash.

Even though they keep trying new ways to sell their food, closing time outside The Hikers remains their best place. The beach is fine on a sunny day, but if the weather is not sunny they spend the whole day sitting. One evening they come back to Bimbo's and Maggie has another idea—selling rasher sandwiches in the mornings on the Malahide Road to people on their way to work. Jimmy Sr. thinks she is crazy. Bimbo thinks they might do better on the airport road where they will get people coming from



farther away, who would be more likely to be hungry for a rasher sandwich. Once they settle on the spot, Jimmy Sr. goes along with Bimbo. There isn't much else he can do.

They park on the airport road and give it a try, but the cars just drive on by. Jimmy Sr. asks Bimbo if he wants to get up every morning before the seagulls to do this. Bimbo says no.

They give it a try, and they make three rasher sandwiches, but Jimmy Sr. eats two and Bimbo eats the other one. No one stops. The cars keep whizzing past, but nobody stops. They go back home and report to Maggie

Jimmy Sr. recognizes that Bimbo and Maggie are in charge. Not just Maggie—both of them together.

They do not order him about or anything like that, but he feels they have the day's tactics all worked out before he even shows up. He feels a little left out. When Maggie announces the Dinners for Two idea, for example, Jimmy Sr. has the feeling that Bimbo knows all about it. He does not ask a single question.

Another time, Jimmy Sr. is going to play Pitch and Putt against Sinbad McCabe. McCabe is the secretary of the club and they are going to play for a cup named for him. Jimmy Sr. hates McCabe and wants to beat him. He is telling Veronica and Sharon his strategy for beating McCabe when Bimbo comes in and starts to hurry Jimmy Sr. along. Maggie and he have looked out the window and seen it is a bright sunny day. They have loaded the van and Bimbo is anxious to get out by the beach. They seem to expect Jimmy Sr. to get hopping even though he had no idea of this plan. It upsets him, but he still manages to beat McCabe.

Jimmy Sr. recalls that Bimbo bought the van and paid for it from his termination pay. He thinks maybe it would have been a good idea if he had given Bimbo half the money. He decides he'll have to check with Veronica some time about being bothered by that. Bimbo used the word *partners* that day in *The Hikers*, and they shook on it. He wonders if it is time to remind Bimbo about that, but he doesn't want to hurt his feelings, or Maggie's either.

Jimmy Sr. is getting used to the idea of having a little money and really enjoys it. He buys himself a new suit that Veronica likes. Bimbo does not say anything about it, but the next week he is wearing a new suit, so Jimmy Sr. knows he must have been impressed. They all go for an outing at the zoo, except for Darren and the twins. Jimmy Jr. and his woman, Aiofe, come along. Everybody laughs and has a great time. Afterwards they have drinks in the Park Lodge Hotel and return home by taxi. Jimmy Jr. offers to split the taxi fare with him, but Jimmy Sr. refuses to accept it. He reminds Jimmy Jr. that when he was broke, Jimmy Jr. helped him out.

It is a very busy night. They are sliding all over the place, but they have gotten somewhat used to that. Sharon is with them and is sweating through her clothes because they are so busy. Jimmy Sr. decides that this is when he will talk to Bimbo. Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo are at the fryer and the hotplate when Jimmy Sr. suggests, with a



half-chuckle, that the van should be called Bimbo and Jimmy's Burgers. Bimbo immediately says the name is too long, and that it wouldn't sound right. Jimmy Sr. says that he is not really serious. Bimbo says he understands.

Veronica reminds Jimmy Sr. that he and Bimbo have been best friends for years.

Jimmy Sr. agrees. That is true, and they still are. Veronica cautions him to make sure things stay that way. Jimmy assures her that they will, but then goes on to say that it is not so much Bimbo that is getting to him, but Maggie. Veronica doesn't comment.

Another very busy night in the van commences with dozens of screaming kids outside. Darren is supposed to be there, but he is off getting some water from Mrs. Flemming, who is beginning to get tired of letting them come to her for water. Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo keep bumping into each other, and they are getting close to having a fight. Jimmy Sr. is at the hatch and Bimbo is at the hotplate and fryer, although usually it is the other way around. Jimmy Sr. feels it is about time Bimbo did a bit of real work. One kid orders food that totals two pounds fivepence, but he said he only had two pounds. Jimmy Sr. takes a bite out of the kid's batter burger and collects the two pounds.

Darren recognizes the voice of one of the kids that is giving them a hard time; it is Nappies Harrison. Jimmy Sr. asks the crowd which one is Nappies Harrison, and the kids pick Nappies up and shove him through the hatch. He cannot stand up because of the oil on the floor, but they manage to get him out the door. Then come the rocks. They make a terrible racket and scare Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo, but they just have to sit it out. They keep as much out of view as possible.

A day or so later, Jimmy Sr. and Darren are practicing a juggling act to do in the van. To a recording of "I Got the Hippy Hippy Shake," they toss vinegar and sauce bottles back and forth. They are doing it in the living room and manage to get a few drops of each pretty much over everything, including the ceiling.

Veronica comes in to find out what they are doing. Darren catches his bottle, but Jimmy Sr. loses his concentration and drops both of his. Veronica chases them out of the house.

Veronica then goes to the kitchen and pretends to be working on something in the sink just so she can look out into the back yard and see what the two are up to. They begin to get the juggling thing down and Jimmy Sr. is fooling around. He notices Veronica at the kitchen window and he jumps up on the ledge to plant a big kiss on her with his face pressed against the kitchen window. Jimmy Sr. is getting even more suggestive and beginning to embarrass Darren. Darren points out that Mary Caprani from two doors down is staring at them. Jimmy Sr. drops his pants. Veronica is doubled over with laughter. Jimmy Sr. puts his hand under her skirt. Linda comes into the kitchen and sees them. "Jesus!" she shouts and runs. Jimmy Sr. pulls his hand back and Veronica runs, too.

Jimmy Sr. and Veronica are in bed. He is telling her about doing the juggling routine for Maggie and Bimbo, and how Maggie just turned and went back into the house. Jimmy



Sr. is annoyed with Maggie and says she cannot recognize a good marketing strategy. Jimmy Sr. tells Veronica that Maggie and Bimbo think he and Darren are just messing around. Veronica feels she has to say something. She basically agrees with Maggie on the matter, but for Jimmy Sr.'s sake she says, "I'm sure they didn't think that."

She tells Jimmy Sr. that he is working himself up again so that he will not be able to sleep. Jimmy Sr. protests, but Veronica has had enough of the discussion and pretends she has fallen asleep

Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo are in the van getting ready for the rush of customers who will come out of The Hikers.

Jimmy Sr. snarls at Bimbo to get out of his light.

He hears himself and realizes he is beginning to sound like the kind of person he has always hated. Bimbo is opening up bags and setting them on the counter.

Jimmy Sr. suggests to Bimbo that what they really need is a night on the town. Bimbo agrees, but with less enthusiasm that Jimmy Sr. likes. Jimmy Sr. presses him again. He is reassured when Bimbo agrees again and they have a laugh over the idea.

The two men are on the DART train, riding into town. Jimmy Sr. feels they are going to have a great evening. He is feeling good about Bimbo again, and feels that Bimbo likes him. Away from the van, the pressure, the rows and all the rest, they'll have their couple of pints and they'll be back to normal, the way they used to be; the way they'll stay.

They go first to Mulligans, which is said to have the best pints in town. They have three, and then Jimmy Sr. gets them up and out. They have pints in Doyle's and Bowe's and the Palace. These are new places to Bimbo. They are new to Jimmy Sr. too, for that matter, although he has walked by them a number of times. After Mulligans, Jimmy Sr. is looking for a place they can meet a couple of women, not that he feels he really needs a woman, but he just wants to have the feeling that he can get one if he wants to. No woman, however, gives them a break. Jimmy Sr. is leading from place to place and Bimbo is following. Jimmy Sr. has always been the boss. He tells Bimbo what they are going to do and Bimbo does it. He even planned a vacation wherein the two families had gone on a two week vacation together.

Pages 204-254 Analysis

Maggie comes up with the idea of offering ?1 specials. The idea goes over well. The readers are not told exactly what the customer gets for his ?1, but it was a whole dinner. Women stop by on their way home and buy several because it means they do not have to cook supper. Sometimes they go on home and send a kid back to pick up the ?1 specials. The record is twelve in one order.

Another sign of how well the van is catching on is the way the nickname "Dunphy" for a sausage spread comes about.



There is an interesting difference between the way Bimbo and Jimmy Sr. deal with customers. Bimbo is very business-like. Jimmy Sr. alternately kids with them and curses them.

The whole country is in a state of elation over the World Cup and the success that Ireland is having. That elation plays a role in the successful start that the van enjoys. They have more than one night when the crowd coming out of The Hikers cleans them out of all the food they have on board. The excitement of the event contributes to their success. By the time Ireland is eliminated they are established.

The novel does not explain in detail where the money comes from to get a motor for the van and to do other fix-up work, but it must be money set aside by Maggie before she gives Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo their weekly pay. It would never occur to Jimmy Sr. to take an interest in such business details.

Jimmy Sr. takes the lead in defending against the kids who periodically bombard the van with rocks or take the bricks out from behind the wheels. He roars after them, but seldom catches them. It is embarrassing for him to find that his own children, the twins, are with the kids who are doing the damage. He makes the twins clean the van.

When it becomes difficult for Sharon to continue working in the van because she has a new boyfriend, Jimmy Sr. tells Bimbo he will recruit Darren. He wants to recruit Darren before Maggie can come up with some bright idea. Darren is a vegetarian, but they work out a scheme where he will not have to handle any of the burgers or sausages.

The business continues to develop, but Jimmy Sr. is beginning to find more and more things that irritate him. Most of them involve Maggie. She pitches in and becomes an important member of the team, but Jimmy Sr. doesn't like that so much. He gets the feeling that Maggie and Bimbo work everything out between themselves and expect Jimmy Sr. to follow along. He gets to wondering if the time hasn't come when he should talk to Bimbo about how Bimbo had said they were partners and how they had shaken on it.

One busy night Jimmy Sr. decides to talk to Bimbo about one thing that has been bothering him. He suggests the name on the van should be Bimbo and Jimmy's Burgers. Bimbo disagrees and Jimmy Sr. makes it out as though he has only been joking.

Veronica is worried. She knows that Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo have been best friends for years and she begins to feel that there is a danger that the friendship is in trouble. Jimmy Sr. assures her that he is not mad at Bimbo, really; rather, it's Maggie who gets him, but he overlooks the fact that Maggie is an important part of the van team.

Darren and Jimmy Sr. practice a juggling routine with vinegar and sauce bottles. They think it's funny and entertaining. After they get pretty good at it they demonstrate it for Maggie and Bimbo. Maggie turns and walks back into the house without a word. In telling Veronica about it Jimmy Sr. says that Maggie and Bimbo think they are just

messing around. Veronica has pretty much the same view, but she says she's sure they didn't mean that.

Not long after that Jimmy Sr. snarls at Bimbo to get out of his light. He hears how he has been speaking and realizes he is getting to be the sort of person he has always hated. It's at that point that he suggests to Bimbo that they should take a night off and go have a night on the town. Bimbo says "okay," but he doesn't seem enthusiastic about the idea.



Pages 255-311

Pages 255-311 Summary

At one place Jimmy Sr. actually tries to begin a conversation with a pair of women. They say hello, but then go back into the crowd. Jimmy Sr. feels that at least it is a start. He is pleased at that. They strike out a couple of more times.

It's almost closing time, but Jimmy Sr. doesn't want them to go home. He suggests they find an after-hours pub. Bimbo goes along and they end up in a wine bar where they get to talking to two women, Anne Marie and Dawn. The place doesn't serve beer so they order a bottle of wine at \$23. Bimbo is talking to Anne Marie and they are smooching. Jimmy Sr. kind of has his arm around Dawn, but she isn't encouraging him particularly. A little bit, but not nearly as much as Anne Marie with Bimbo.

Bimbo needs to go to the men's room. Jimmy Sr. goes after him. When he gets in there he doesn't see Bimbo, or anyone, at the urinal, so he must be in one of the stalls. Jimmy Sr. finds him and kicks the door into his head. There's no great damage, but they start arguing. Jimmy Sr. is yelling at Bimbo for telling the women about the van, because he is trying to make out that they are in the catering business. In the course of the argument Bimbo points out that the van pays Jimmy Sr. his wages, and that if he doesn't want to work in it he can leave anytime. He says he is sick of Jimmy Sr.'s bullying.

Bimbo slumps, like he has nothing left to hold him up, and Jimmy Sr. puts his hand on Bimbo's back. They agree that it is the stupidest argument they'd ever had.

They leave the wine bar without even going back to the women. Jimmy Sr. starts to sing as they walk along. Bimbo, who is walking ahead, stops to let Jimmy Sr. catch up to him. He joins in the singing. They find a taxi to take them home and slump in their respective corners.

Jimmy Sr. wakes up with an awful hangover. There are loud noises coming from downstairs. He thinks maybe there has been an accident, but there is laughter, too.

He tries to get up, but falls back into the bed.

Veronica finds him there. She reports that Darren got his results and that he has gotten honors in all his courses. She tells him that she got her results, too; a C in Math and a B in Honors English.

Jimmy Sr. is too hungover to even think about going to work. He says Sharon will have to fill in for him.



He makes it back to the bed. Veronica closes the door quietly. Jimmy Sr. cannot sleep. He thinks about Darren going on to the University, and he thinks about what a sorry bastard he is after last night's trip to Dublin. He feels totally useless.

A day or so later Bimbo says that he is putting Jimmy Sr. on a weekly wage to be paid every Thursday. Jimmy Sr. is stunned, but says simply, "Okay."

Jimmy Sr. thinks he should have told Bimbo to shove it, but he realizes he needs the money. He is going to stick it out, but he decides he will not call him Bimbo any more. Veronica listens to all his complaints, and tries to make him feel better

Jimmy begins acting like a disgruntled employee; not like a friend.

Bimbo is at the hatch. He shouts a customer's order to Jimmy Sr. and then turns around to find that Jimmy Sr. is on his break. He is pouring himself a cup of tea and eating a sandwich. Bimbo goes over to the fryer and gets two pieces of cod for the customer, and fills two bags with chips. Jimmy Sr. raises his arm to the crowd outside and clenches his fist, but no one says anything. It is too cold and wet.

Some days later Jimmy Sr. and Veronica are talking. Jimmy Sr. says, "It's not too bad now." He tells Veronica that he is back to calling him Bimbo again. He had stopped as a sort of protest but Bimbo did not appear to notice. Veronica smiles. Jimmy Sr. has been telling her things like this for weeks now, but she does not mind. She feels he is entitled to feel sorry for himself.

Jimmy Sr. dreads climbing into the van, especially if it is at Bimbo's house. He hates having to go through the house to get to the shed. Maggie is always there.

He pays for everything he takes, just as an annoyance

He takes to asking Bimbo's permission to do everything; turn on the gas, take the chips out of the fryer, put the chips into the fryer. Bimbo remonstrates with him for all the stupid questions, but Jimmy Sr. gets the feeling that Bimbo enjoys being the boss.

Jimmy Sr. remembers seeing a picture in the paper. A man was standing in the dried out bottom of the reservoir. The article went on to explain that they were having the mildest September ever, but Jimmy Sr. is freezing and so is everyone else.

The weather is so cool the beach business is over, so Jimmy Sr. has the days to himself. He takes Gina for walks and tries to teach the dog to fetch. He gets a good wage on Thursdays, and in his self-imposed role, he has no management responsibilities. He believes himself to be a lucky man, but he can't understand why he feels so bad, why at least a couple of times a day he is close to crying. He decides he is mostly lonely.

One afternoon during this time, he is up in his bedroom; he takes the little electric heater with him and tells the family he is going to read. It is about four in the afternoon and



getting gloomy. He opens the book but then begins to drift off. That is when he decides he is lonely. He smiles at having worked it out for himself.

His eyes fill. He can feel a tear come out of his right eye and run along his nose. He wipes his face, but he does not stop crying.

He is safe enough here in the bedroom.

Physically, he feels like he has a ball of hard air inside him. He cannot get at it or get rid of it. He knows there is nothing wrong with his health. He recognizes that he has felt this way before, but cannot remember exactly when

Jimmy Sr. continues to play games with Bimbo, doing things calculated to annoy him. The worst involves a letter he has gotten from a Restaurant Workers Union. He and Bimbo are in the van parked outside a Soccer stadium waiting for the game to end. Jimmy Sr. takes the letter out of his pocket and leaves it on the shelf when Bimbo is not looking. He figures if Bimbo sees it, fine; if he does not see it, Jimmy Sr. will put it back in his pocket and use it another time. He notices that Bimbo sees the letter. He could see the letterhead and the first line or two of the letter.

Bimbo asks Jimmy Sr. if he'd like to go in and watch the match. Jimmy Sr. says the players aren't very good. They are only those not good enough to play in England.

Bimbo asks Jimmy Sr. if he minds the waiting. Jimmy Sr. says it makes no difference to him as long as he gets paid.

Bimbo assures him he'll get paid, but then Jimmy goes on to say it should be double time for Sunday. That brings on a terrible argument

They argue more about the matter. Bimbo finally tells him that there'll be no job for him if he goes and joins the union. Bimbo is so angry he gets out of the van and goes for a stroll up and down the walk. Jimmy Sr. turns the page and stares at the paper.

Jimmy Sr. goes down to the shops and gets some sweets and ice cream to bring home to his family. He even gets a chocolate bar for the dog, who proceeds to throw up on the kitchen floor. Everybody laughs.

He and Veronica make love that night, and he says he is feeling fine.

He is being really nice to Bimbo, but it is a strain. Darren refuses to work for them any more because of the tension and bickering, but he does not come out and say it. Sharon does, though. When she works in the van she takes both Bimbo and Jimmy Sr. to task for bickering like two brats

Jimmy Sr. blames everything on Maggie. He can see that Bimbo is pretty much the same man he has always been, but Maggie is pushing him.



Jimmy Sr. complains about it to Bertie, who listens and draws more of the story out of him. Jimmy Sr. says he likes Bimbo and cannot understand how he can be one of the nicest people ever born one minute and a "tight-assed bastard" the next.

Bertie is good company, but he is a different sort; he is hard as a rock. He can talk and entertain all night, but he can never be a best friend. He does not need a best friend.

Jimmy never misses Bertie when he is not around, but he misses Bimbo, even though Bimbo might be standing right next to him.

A man, Des O'Callaghan, of the Eastern Health Board stops by the van. Jimmy Sr. turns him over to Bimbo. The man comes into the van and says he is there to do a health inspection. He finds dozens of things wrong, and says he could close them down tonight, but he ends up leaving a long list of things that need to be done and says he will come back again the next week to check on them. After O'Callaghan leaves, Bimbo and Jimmy Sr. get into a terrible fight. Naturally, the way Jimmy Sr. has been acting lately, Bimbo thinks he ratted them out to the Board of Health, which Jimmy Sr. has not done. They have a real brawl. Jimmy Sr. frees himself and gets out of the van. Bimbo comes after him, pleading with him to come back. They come close to continuing the fight, but end up going to The Hikers for a pint.

Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo are having their pints, but they are very wary of each other. When Jimmy Sr. sees Bimbo looking at him he looks back until Bimbo gives way. Jimmy Sr. orders two more pints and has the money out before Bimbo can beat him to it. Bimbo orders the next two pints.

Jimmy Sr. says he won't be going back. Bimbo says he's right, then he adds that he will pay Jimmy Sr. his redundancy money. Jimmy Sr. says he'll buy a chipper van with it.

They keep drinking. Finally, Bimbo asks, "What happened, Jimmy?" It takes Jimmy Sr. a moment to catch on, and then he tells Bimbo he has no time for a "What Happened" discussion. He shouts out an order for two more pints.

About a half dozen pints later Bimbo is looking demolished. He is trying to make up to Jimmy Sr. now. He extends his hand over the table, but Jimmy Sr. just lets him hold it there; he does not take it.

Bimbo finally pulls his hand back. Jimmy Sr. has no interest in trying to make Bimbo feel better. He feels he should have just gotten up and gone home, but he could not. Bimbo begins to get a little maudlin, and he is also getting very drunk. He tells Jimmy Sr. he's the best worker in the world. Suddenly, Bimbo comes up with an offer to split everything fifty-fifty. Jimmy Sr. refuses.

After more unsuccessful pleading, Bimbo says he'll kill the van. He staggers to his feet and tells Jimmy Sr. to come on out to the van.



Bimbo drives. He falls asleep twice, but he gets the van out to the beach at Dollymount. They get it through the soft sand and onto the hard sand. The tide is way out. Jimmy Sr. realizes what Bimbo is doing. He tells Bimbo he'll regret it, but Bimbo says he will not.

He heads for the water and drives the van in until the engine coughs and dies. They get out in about two feet of water. Jimmy Sr. finds Bimbo at the back of the van trying to push it farther in. He calls to Jimmy Sr. to give him a hand.

Jimmy Sr. wades over, puts his arms around Bimbo's waist and lifts him away from the van. Bimbo does not fight. Jimmy Sr. lets him down. They wade back toward the shore. Bimbo tries putting his arm around Jimmy Sr.'s shoulder, but Jimmy Sr. shrugs him away.

When he gets to the dry sand, Jimmy Sr. stops. He sees Bimbo is ten yards behind him. He had turned to look back sooner. He tells Bimbo that he'll be able to get it when the tide goes out again. Bimbo says nothing. Jimmy Sr. turns and walks away.

Veronica wakes up while Jimmy Sr. is getting his clothes off. She can smell the sea in his clothes. It is beginning to get light out. He begs Veronica to give him a hug.

Pages 255-311 Analysis

Their evening on the town comes down to getting very drunk and trying to pick up a couple of women. Jimmy Sr. is the leader of the whole undertaking. In talking to a couple of women at a bar Jimmy Sr. is trying to make what they do sound more elegant than running a chipper van. He is very mad at Bimbo for being—as he always is—completely honest with the women. In the course of the argument Bimbo says that he is sick of Jimmy Sr. bullying him. That's an interesting comment because there hasn't been anything that Jimmy Sr. has done that would come close to that level. He steers Bimbo around a lot, and takes the initiative about what they should do for fun, but that Bimbo should see that as bullying is surprising.

Jimmy Sr. is so hungover the next day that he can't properly react to the news that Darren has received seven honors in his seven subjects, and that Veronica passed both of her courses—one with a B. Jimmy Sr. can't even make it out of bed. He feels that after the night in Dublin he is really of no use to anybody.

A day or so later, in *The Hikers*, Bimbo tells him that he is putting him on a weekly wage. Jimmy Sr. doesn't trust himself to say anything except "Okay," and then allows himself to be persuaded to have another pint.

From that point on Jimmy Sr. becomes quite obnoxious toward Bimbo. He does everything he can think of to emphasize the fact that Bimbo is the boss and that he is just a workman. He calls Bimbo 'Sir' and takes breaks just when he is most needed. He leaves a letter he got from a union out where Bimbo can see what it is.



The beach season is over so Jimmy Sr.'s days are free, but he doesn't try to see if Bimbo wants to do anything with him, like have a round of Pitch and Putt. In the van he is distant from Bimbo. Darren refuses to work for them any more. He can't stand the tension. Sharon tells them they are behaving like a couple of brats.

Jimmy Sr. begins to spend some time with Bertie. He tells Bertie all his troubles with Bimbo and Maggie. But Bertie isn't a very satisfactory friend. Good company, but not really close with anyone.

The friendship continues to deteriorate. They argue, they fight. Bimbo makes an effort to patch things up, but Jimmy Sr. rejects it, even though he is not happy about doing so.

In the climactic scene where Bimbo drives the van into the sea, Jimmy Sr. is doing virtually nothing to stop him. He tells Bimbo that he'll regret what he's doing, but Bimbo is too drunk and in too much pain to pay any attention.

At the end, when Jimmy Sr. has made it back home and is begging Veronica to give him a hug, he really appears pathetic.



Characters

Jimmy Rabbitte, Sr.

Jimmy Rabbitte is the main character of the novel. Except in conversation, he is always referred to as Jimmy Sr. At the beginning of the story, Jimmy Sr., a plasterer by trade, is out of work and spends his days kind of drifting from one idle activity to another. He has a couple of libraries that he visits, not so much to take books out—he is not much of a reader—but to pass the time. The Rabbitte house is so filled with people that Jimmy Sr. sometimes finds himself sitting outside on the front steps just to have a place to sit down. We're told that he does quite a number of things to improve the house and yard, but the story begins a few weeks before Christmas and the weather doesn't permit outside work.

Jimmy Sr.'s best pal and neighbor is Bimbo Reeves. In fact, Bimbo owns the house in which the Rabbittes live. One thing that Jimmy Sr. is good at is Pitch and Putt golf. He and Bimbo often play together. Most times Jimmy wins, but they are pretty evenly matched.

Jimmy Sr. is impulsive and undisciplined. He will work very hard on a given assignment, for example, getting the van cleaned up, but then looks for ways to skirt the hard work of continuing to keep the van clean. He is not a planner. Indeed, one thinks he would have difficulty answering a question like—What do you see yourself doing five years from now?

Jimmy Sr.'s language is coarse, but filled with humor. He teases the customers, his friends, and his family. However, in spite of his cockiness, he is lonely and scared.

Veronica Rabbitte

Veronica Rabbitte is Jimmy Sr.'s wife, and she seems to understand Jimmy Sr. completely. She doesn't expect much from him. She pursues her own interests, taking courses leading to her high school diploma, and reading extensively. When Jimmy Sr. gets very playful as he does when he and Darren are fooling around with their juggling act, Veronica enjoys his foolishness. Veronica is very much aware of the risk Jimmy Sr. is running of losing the friendship of Bimbo. She listens to him complain about Maggie, and tries to warn him not to let his imagination run wild with his perceived problems.

Jimmy Rabbitte, Jr.

Jimmy Rabbitte, Jr. is the oldest son of Jimmy Sr. and Veronica. He lives in a place of his own near his parents; in fact, he still brings his laundry home for his mother to do. He lives with his girlfriend, Aoife. In the course of the story, he tells his father and mother that he and Aoife are getting married.



Leslie Rabbitte

Leslie is the second son of Jimmy Sr. and Veronica. He left home in his teens after getting into trouble with the law. He progressed from simple things like trespassing to taking money out of a poor box at the church while a policeman was watching him. After leaving home his parents learned that he was staying with one, then another, relative, but then he disappeared. They thought that he went to England, but they do not know for sure. He does not physically appear in the novel, but he is often in Jimmy Sr.'s thoughts.

Darren Rabbitte

Darren is in his senior year of school and is studying hard for his exams. Darren also works part time in The Hikers as a waiter/bus boy and has time to be a stand-out player on his soccer team. He is a little impatient with Jimmy Sr. and the fact that the dole money is not enough for the family to have any luxuries. Darren is a very good student. In spite of having to fight hard to find a good place to study in their crowded house, he passes all seven of his exams with honors.

Sharon Rabbitte

Sharon is a daughter of Jimmy Sr. and Veronica. She and her toddler daughter, Gina, live with Jimmy Sr. and Veronica. Sharon helps out on the van.

Linda and Tracy Rabbitte

Linda and Tracy are twin daughters of Jimmy Sr. and Veronica. They are in their early teens. They are thoroughly unlovable kids, whiny, deceitful, and terrible students.

Brendan "Bimbo" Reeves

Bimbo Reeves is Jimmy Sr.'s best friend. Early in the novel Bimbo is laid off from his job as a baker and is devastated. He does not take naturally to being unemployed as Jimmy Sr. does. When Bimbo is first laid off, Jimmy Sr. is delighted to realize that now he will have someone to share his empty days, but while Bimbo does tag along for a while doing things with Jimmy Sr., he actively looks for employment. Bimbo even considers applying for a job at MacDonald's until Jimmy Sr. shames him out of it.

It is Bimbo who comes up with the idea of getting a chipper van when he notices that a van that always used to be outside The Hikers is no longer there. He mentions it to Bertie, one of their drinking buddies. Bimbo is all excited when Bertie finds an old van he can buy. He runs home to get his wife, Maggie, so they can decide together. Just after buying it he tells Jimmy Sr. that he is to be a full partner in the van. They shake on



it, but Bimbo fails to ask Jimmy Sr. to put up any of the money, and Jimmy Sr. certainly doesn't volunteer any, so the whole investment is Bimbo's—with the consent of Maggie.

Like all of the men in the story, Bimbo likes his couple of pints. Their practice of having a couple of pints to celebrate almost anything is one of the strongest bonds between Bimbo and Jimmy Sr. Bimbo is very conscious of the fact that money is a problem for Jimmy Sr. He will quietly pay for a round when it is Jimmy Sr.'s turn; he and Maggie host a traditional Christmas morning get together, in spite of the fact that Jimmy Sr. thinks that is probably the year that he and Veronica should be hosting it at their house.

Maggie Reeves

Maggie is Bimbo's wife, and an important member of the management team of Bimbo's Burgers, the name they paint on the van. Maggie keeps the books and portions out wages to Bimbo and Jimmy Sr. She is constantly trying to come up with new ideas that will help build the business; most of them turn out to be successful, but some do not work. Jimmy Sr. reacts the same way to her good and not so good ideas; he questions all of them.

Bertie Gillespie

Bertie is one of the drinking buddies of Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo. Bertie turns the odd dollar by locating things for people who have expressed an interest in them. He is the one who comes up with the van after Bimbo asks him to keep an eye out for one. Bertie likes to know everything that is going on. When Jimmy Sr. has reached the point of breaking with Bimbo, he spends some time with Bertie. Bertie, for his part, seems to be intent on getting the whole story out of Jimmy Sr., rather than just giving him a friendly ear. He also is a practical joker as he demonstrates at the Christmas morning get together at the Reeves' house. He makes Bimbo believe that Maggie's ancient mother has either died in her chair or possibly moved her bowels in her pants. His wife, Vera, tells Jimmy Sr. that Bertie pulled the same joke at her brother's house.

Dawn and Anne Marie

Two women—teachers as it turns out, and married at that—whom Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo meet at a wine bar in their night on the town.



Objects/Places

The Van

The number one object of importance in this novel is the van itself. Of course, there are many objects that are part of the van, and these are mentioned frequently. For example, the deep fryer is a key piece of equipment. Jimmy Sr. is the one usually working at the fryer and the grill where they do the burgers. The van has a sink too, but nobody can figure out why, because they have no water. They have to send someone (usually Darren) off to Mrs. Flemming's to borrow a couple of bottles of water.

A Pint

If one considers a pint of beer to be an object, then there are plenty of those in the story.

The Swear Box

This is used by the Rabbittes at home to try to cut down on foul language. Any time a member of the family says a forbidden word, they have to put a coin in the Swear Box.

A Fiver

When Jimmy Jr. stops by the house to leave his laundry, he slips a five pound note in his father's shirt pocket. With it, and some money Veronica has given him, Jimmy Sr. can pay for a round for his buddies at The Hikers.

The Girl Care Electric Razor

When Jimmy Sr. goes up to the bathroom in the Reeves' house on Christmas morning, he notices the razor that is surely Maggie's. He tries it on his leg, and later sneaks a feel of Veronica's leg to see if she shaved her legs.

The DART

The DART is the rapid transit railroad that Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo use to get into Dublin and beyond

Larrygogan

Larrygogan is the Rabbitte's dog.



Barrytown

The author has located a number of his stories, including this one, in an imaginary community he calls Barrytown. Barrytown is located just outside of Dublin on the shore where Dublin Harbor empties into the Irish Sea. The town is close enough to Dublin to be on the route of the DART (Dublin Area Rapid Transit), which is the train Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo take for their night on the town in Dublin.

The Hikers

This is the favorite pub of Jimmy Sr. and his friends. It is located near enough to their homes that they can easily get there for an evening for a couple of pints.

The ILAC Library

Of the two libraries that Jimmy Sr. frequents, he likes the ILAC Library the best. Besides books, it is the one that has films that can be played on a TV and has quite a lot of help for someone looking for a job.

The Rabbitte home

This is a small place. The Rabbittes rent it from Bimbo Reeves. It seems to have four bedrooms because Jimmy Sr. and Veronica, Sharon and Gina, Darren, and the twins all have their own rooms.

The Reeves home

This is also small; in fact, it's a duplicate of the Rabbitte's home, but in better condition. Bimbo has consistently spent money and effort on improving the place. When he gets laid off, part of his redundancy check goes into improvements in the house.

Dollymount

This is a beach near where Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo live. Maggie arranged to get a license to a slot where they could park the van, right by where people gather to take the bus back home.

Dublin

This city is the locale of an extensive scene close to the end of the story. Jimmy Sr. talks Bimbo into going on a night on the town which means stopping at several pubs in town and ending up at a wine bar where they have an intimate conversation with two women.

Themes

The Despair of Unemployment

At the start of the novel, Jimmy Sr. is out of work. He is a plasterer who was laid off some time ago. Bimbo is a baker who has held the same job since he first began working in his teens. Early in the story, Bimbo is laid off. The difference between the reaction of the two characters toward their unemployment is interesting.

Jimmy Sr. is mainly concerned with finding ways to fill his days. He has two libraries that he goes to. He has been going to the Raheny library to read the papers, and has recently discovered the ILAC library. In addition to being part of a mall, the ILAC library has tapes, a language resource center, pamphlets and things aimed at helping one find a job, and a television set where one could watch films with earphones. Jimmy Sr. is reluctant to ask for things there. There are three young men watching a film on the television, but Jimmy Sr. doesn't see another pair of earphones, so he moves on to something else. He finds an application card, but doesn't fill it out because the woman at the desk has asked if he is a householder, and he doesn't know whether being a renter counts. He sees the sign on the counter advertising an Action Pack for the Unemployed, but there are none on the desk, and he is too unsure of himself to ask.

To sum it up, Jimmy Sr. spends his time aimlessly wandering through his idle days, not knowing how to organize himself to find work. He really hates being out of work, hates it when his son Darren makes a joke of their food coming from the dole, and he hates it when Jimmy Jr. slips him a fiver, even though it allows him to buy a round for his buddies at The Hikers. He feels small and ineffective, but cannot bring himself to do anything to change his situation. He is jealous of his son Darren who is working hard preparing for his exams, and he is jealous of his wife Veronica who is working hard to complete her high school certification.

Bimbo Reeves breaks down in tears when he has to tell his pals that he has been laid off. He has worked at the same place since he was a teenager and can still remember his excitement at bringing his first pay packet home from his job. He had run all the way with one hand in his pocket so no money could fall out of it. He tells Jimmy Sr. that now he is like him: a man of leisure.

Bimbo, though, is far more mature. He begins to read *The Independent* every day because that is the paper that has the best classified section. He turns most of his redundancy money over to Maggie. He sends out his rsumy. He even works on a letter to MacDonald's when he sees their full-page advertisement. He actually never sends the letter because Jimmy Sr. shames him out of it.



The Deterioration of a Friendship

A friendship passes through many stages: acquaintanceship, casual friendship, close friendship, intimacy. In *The Van*, Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo have already been through the earlier stages. They are best friends and constant companions. They enjoy each other's company. They compete against each other on the Pitch and Putt course, and they have a few pints together two or three times a week. With their families, they have gone on vacations together.

It is only natural that, when Bimbo buys a chipper van, he invites Jimmy Sr. to be his partner. They shake on it, which is a formal enough agreement for each of them.

In thinking about the friendship between Jimmy Sr. and Bimbo, it is important to remember that in all of their interactions, it has been Jimmy Sr. who has been the leader, the one who suggests what they do together. Now in the van, he becomes the follower, and Bimbo becomes the leader. Bimbo, particularly in combination with Maggie, is the one who looks at the van as a business. To Jimmy Sr. it is a lark. The only time Jimmy Sr. comes up with something he thinks will benefit the van, he gets slapped down. He thinks the juggling act that he and Darren worked out with the vinegar bottle and the catsup is a great marketing gimmick. Maggie is unimpressed, however, when they show her the routine. She thinks they are just being foolish and walks into the house. Bimbo doesn't argue with her about it. Of course, Veronica is not particularly impressed with it either. She is amused watching it—after she chased them out of the living room and into the yard—but she never thinks of the act as something that will help the business.

In moments of stress, such as when they are going through their first test of serving complete meals in people's homes, Jimmy forgets himself and complains about the staff with which he is saddled. Bimbo is astounded (and very annoyed) to hear Jimmy Sr. talk as though he is the boss. This is the first instance in the gradual erosion of their friendship. It foreshadows Bimbo's efforts to assert more control over the business and over Jimmy Sr.'s activities.

The night on the town that is suggested by Jimmy Sr. turns out to be not much fun for either of them. Jimmy Sr. is very much the boss of this adventure, but Bimbo really is not having a very good time. He is somewhat embarrassed to be out without his wife, and is certainly less intent on looking for women than Jimmy Sr., even though he ends up smooching with Anne Marie while Jimmy Sr. is striking out with Dawn. They have a terrible argument in the men's room of the wine bar. Jimmy Sr. berates Bimbo for being so candid in telling about their work. Bimbo yells at Jimmy Sr. for being ashamed about working in a chipper van. He points out that it pays Jimmy Sr.'s wages, and says if he does not want to work there he could leave. He said he was sick of Jimmy Sr.'s bullying. Then they stop and agree that it is the stupidest row they had ever had. They ride home without speaking, each slumped in his own corner of the taxi.

It is just after that night that Bimbo tells Jimmy Sr. that he is putting him on a weekly wage. He will be paid every Thursday.



From that point on Jimmy Sr. really acts childish. He does everything he can think of to annoy Bimbo. He calls him "sir", he takes breaks just when he is needed at the fryer. He leaves a letter from a union out where Bimbo can see who it is from, all kinds of petty, annoying things. Darren finds their constant bickering so upsetting that he quits. Sharon tells them they are acting like a couple of brats.

Jimmy Sr. is making himself physically sick with his behavior, and yet it seems he cannot change it. Veronica warns him, but she cannot get him to change. It reaches the point where he and Bimbo actually have a knock-down, drag-out fight after a health inspector pays them a visit. Bimbo is sure that Jimmy Sr. has reported them to the Eastern Health Board, although he has not. The fight ends with Jimmy Sr. walking out of the van saying he is through and will not come back.

Bimbo follows him, begging him to come back, but Jimmy Sr. refuses. Finally Bimbo suggests they go for a pint. Jimmy Sr. agrees to that.

In The Hikers, over pint after pint, Bimbo begs Jimmy Sr. to come back. Jimmy Sr. refuses, even spurning Bimbo's hand when Bimbo sticks it out for him to shake. At the end, Bimbo gets the idea that he will kill the van. He gets Jimmy Sr. to come with him and they drive to the beach and on into the water. The van is finished; the friendship is over.

Middle class people versus working class people

Readers are most aware of this theme in the book during Jimmy Sr.'s and Bimbo's night on the town. In their tour of pubs and a wine bar, they have some pointed comments about the people they encounter. Those people are more apt to be young professionals, office workers, teachers, Dubliners of a more elevated class than Jimmy Sr. the plasterer and Bimbo the baker.

Jimmy Sr. responds to this class distinction by pretending to be something he's not. In talking to the women they meet in the wine bar, Jimmy Sr. tells Dawn that they are in the catering business. Bimbo, who is much less conscious about being lower class and much more honest, has told the truth to Anne Marie. Jimmy Sr. is furious with him when he learns of it and tries to make it right by saying that they are planning to have a whole fleet of chipper vans.

Throughout the book there are several references to yuppies. One such reference is in Jimmy's response to Maggie's idea of serving rasher sandwiches on the Malahide Road to people on their way to work. Jimmy Sr. says that no yuppie would be caught dead eating a rasher sandwich on his way to work, that the people who would love a rasher sandwich on their way to work would be driving by on the bus.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written using a limited omniscient point of view. Jimmy Sr. is the character through whom all the action is seen. His thoughts and observations dominate.

The narration is dramatically objective and detached, simply reporting incidents as they unfold. An example is the visit that Jimmy Sr. pays to the bathroom during the Christmas morning get-together at the Reeves' house. He looks around as people sometimes do, and discovers that Bimbo has two electric razors. He picks up the thin yellow one and finds the name 'Girl Care' on it. He thinks it couldn't do much of a job but tries it out by shaving some of the hair on his leg. That night in bed with Veronica, she catches him feeling her legs to see if they were smooth, to see if she shaved them.

Aside from descriptions such as those, and simple scene-setting sentences, the story is told entirely in dialogue.

Setting

The story is set in present-day Ireland. It is located in an imaginary town called Barrytown. Barrytown is just outside of Dublin, down where Dublin harbor empties into the Irish Sea. It is not far from Howth.

The neighborhood where the story takes place is home to working-class families. Before they were laid off Jimmy Sr. was a plasterer by trade and Bimbo Reeves was a baker. Their homes are near each other. Both are owned by Bimbo. They are within walking distance of The Hikers, their favorite pub.

At the opening of the novel, the time is early December, about three weeks before Christmas. At the close, it is September.

Language and Meaning

The language is coarse and colloquial. Some of the words seem to be Irish slang, such as Jacks, meaning 'bathroom.' And mot, meaning 'woman,' as in "Jimmy Jr. and his mot, Aoife, lived in a bed-sit..." One might think that the coarse language, such as the extravagant use of the 'F' word would be used only by the men when they were together, but that is not the case; it is used almost as much at home and in mixed company. The one time when Jimmy Sr. seems to make an effort to clean up his language is at the Christmas morning get-together at the Reeves house, but even then it does come out occasionally. Actually, Bertie uses it more freely at that event than does Jimmy, Sr., but it is when the women, except for his wife, Vera, and Maggie's ancient mother, are in the kitchen.



Structure

The story is told from beginning to end in a single unit. In other words, there are no chapters. There are, however, scenes. Shifts from one scene to the next are indicated by three asterisks centered on a line. Scenes range in length from as few as three or four lines to several pages.

Time moves forward through the novel. There are only two instances of a scene going backward in time. Jimmy Sr. recalls how his father used to strap him with his belt. If he had done something bad, his mother would say, "Wait until your father gets home." And young Jimmy would spend the day getting more and more scared, hoping his father would be delayed, or perhaps killed in an accident on his way home. His father didn't wear a belt; he kept one in his closet only for the purpose of inflicting punishment on Jimmy and his other children. Then there was the recollection of Bimbo about running home with his first pay envelope, but that is more of a recollection than a flashback.

When one reads the book, it feels more like a screenplay than a novel. There is much more dialogue than there is description.

Some events are foreshadowed. One time when Sharon is changing Gina's diaper right in the kitchen of the van, Jimmy Sr. remonstrates her saying she will surely bring the Board of Health down on them. Later when the man from the Board of Health does come it is a critical point for the life of the van. The diaper-changing incident also foreshadows the time later that day when they served a man a deep-fried nappie instead of fish.



Quotes

Note: Page numbers refer to the Penguin Books paperback edition of *The Van* by Roddy Doyle, ISBN 0 14 01.7191 6.

"Jimmy Sr. left Darren in the kitchen and went out to the front step and sat on it. Christ, the step was cold; he'd end up with piles or the flu or something" (1).

"He walloped his leg with the book,

'The Man in the Iron F*cking Mask.'

Maybe he'd tell Veronica he's finished it (—He escaped, Veronica) and start one of the other ones he'd got out of the library. He was useless; couldn't even read a book properly" (28).

"He had young Jimmy's fiver and two more quid Veronica had given him so he could buy a round. If only Bimbo and Bertie were there the fiver would be enough and he'd be able to give Veronica her money back but if Paddy was there he'd need it. It was a quarter past ten, early enough to get thee or four pints inside him and late enough to make sure that his turn to put his hand in his pocket didn't come round again before closing time" (31).

""I'll have to get into bed with the f*ckin' shoe on; look.'

Veronica sat up and turned on the lamp beside her.

'What's wrong?' she said.

'Me shoe; look it.'

She looked.

'Can you not tie your laces properly yet?'

And she put his foot in her lap and go going on the knot. He nearly fell off the bed turning for her.

'You're useless,' she said. 'You really are.'

For a split second he was going to straighten his leg quick and put his foot in her stomach, the way she spoke to him like that; for a split second only. Not really.

'There.'

She had it done already.

It was nice as well sometimes, being mothered by Veronica.



'Thanks very much, he said'" (41).

"There was always a van outside The Hikers, not just at the weekends either; always.

It wasn't there tonight though. Bimbo looked up and down the road for it, and behind him" (82)..

"D'yeh want to be me partner, Jim?' said Bimbo.

'Wha's tha'?'

He'd heard Bimbo alright but he was confused.

'Would you think abou' becomin' me partner?' said Bimbo

He looked serious in a way that only Bimbo could look; deadly serious" (125).

"He didn't want to look too soon, to see how many were outside waiting.

There was no one" (158).

"And then he went home and Veronica was in the kitchen and she did a fry for him, and he cried again when he was telling her about the pub and the match and meeting Jimmy Jr. And she called him an eejit. It was the best day of his life" (183).

"Maggie had bought them a space in Dollymount, near the beach for the summer; she'd found out that you rented the patches from the Corporation and she'd gone in and done it. It was a brilliant idea, and a great patch" (185).

"Maggie took over from Bimbo.

'You'll be lettin' down your regulars.'

'There is tha' to consider,' said Bimbo. 'Yeah.'

'Wha' d'yeh mean?' said Jimmy Sr.

'It's on Saturday nigh',' said Maggie. 'We always do very well outside The Hikers on Saturday nights.'

What did she mean, We? She'd never been as much as inside the van in her—

'I see wha' yeh mean,' said Jimmy Sr. 'There could be thousands at this gig though'" (196).

"He's righ', Jimmy,' said Bimbo.'It's a Pamper; folded up. My God, that's shockin'.

'Shut up!' Jimmy Sr. hissed at him.



'I must have put it in the batter'

'Shut up!'

'What is it?' said Sharon.

The man wasn't angry-looking now; he looked like he needed comfort.

'Is it a used one?' Jimmy Sr. asked him" (212).

"'Jesus,' said Jimmy Sr.'What a staff; such a pair of f*ckin' wasters I' lumbered with.'

He turned to Bimbo and he was glaring at Jimmy Sr.; he didn't have time to change his face. It surprised Jimmy Sr." (221)..

"The dinners-for-two with candles and wine hardly paid for themselves. They did them for the crack more than anything else. Bimbo did them to please Maggie, because the idea had been her brainwave, and Jimmy Sr. went along with Bimbo.

Only she was always having brainwaves. Sometimes Jimmy Sr. felt like telling her to give her f*ckin' head a rest" (213).

"Bimbo and Maggie were the ones in charge; Jimmy Sr. couldn't help thinking that sometimes. Not just Maggie; the both of them" (226).

"'You've been great pals for years,' said Veronica.

Jimmy Sr. nodded.

That was true. Still was.

He nodded again.

'You should try to make sure that it stays that way,' said Veronica—The two of you.'

Jimmy Sr. kind of laughed.

'Don't worry, love,' he said. 'Anyway, it's not Bimbo really—I don't know. It's her.'

Veronica said nothing" (231).

"They'd only the one J-cloth, and it was lifting very little of the oil.

'This is crazy,' said Darren.

'It's disgraceful,' said Bimbo.

'D'yeh think so?' said Jimmy Sr.



The next thing either of them said could have started a fight, so they said nothing" (241).

"Get out o' me f*ckin' light, will yeh,' said Jimmy Sr.

Then he sort of saw himself, a narky little bollix, the type of little bollix he'd always hated" (249)

"Okay,' said Bimbo.'You're the boss.'

That's right, Jimmy Sr. thought while he waited for Bimbo to get the last of his pint into his mouth; I am the boss.

It had always been that way" (254).

"Not that he'd want to get off with her. Or anyone really. He was just messing; seeing if he could click with a woman if he wanted to" (256)

"What he wanted was to see if he could manage a young one or one of these glamorous, rich-looking, not-so-young ones. He'd back off once he know it was on the cards" (256).

"Veronica and Maggie. We're lucky f*ckin' man. But—they're wives. Am I makin' sense?'

'Yeah.'

'Those ones back there aren't. They might be married an' tha' but—they're more women than wives, eh....' .

'I know wha' yeh mean,' said Bimbo" (259).

"Bimbo had just told him that from now on he'd be paying Jimmy Sr. a wage. On Thursdays. Instead of the old way, the fifty-fifty arrangement" (278).

" Jimmy!' said Bimbo.'for God sake'

Jimmy Sr. put down the flask and screwed the top back on it. Then he took the sandwich out of his mouth.

'I'm on me break,' he told Bimbo" (279).

"There was a ball inside him, a ball of hard air, like a fart but too high up to get at. It nearly hurt sometime. It made him restless, all the time" (285).

"—I'll kill it,' said Bimbo.

—'Wha?' said Jimmy Sr.

—'Tha' poxy van,' said Bimbo" (309).

"—Give us a hug, Veronica, will yeh.—I need a hug" (311).



Topics for Discussion

- 1) Who is your favorite character in the novel? And why?
- 2) Describe Jimmy Sr.'s relationship with his children; with young people in general.
- 3) How does the novel shed light on the nature of friendship?
- 4) How does the novel illuminate issues involving marriage?
- 5) How does the novel bring out the question of employment as a feature of one's identity?
- 6) Discuss the social class issues raised by this novel.
- 7) How, if at all, does the culture of the characters in the novel differ from people you have met?
- 8) Translate a page of dialogue from the novel into modern English
- 9) Roddy Doyle's prose style has been called poetic. Do you agree? Discuss.
- 10) While this novel deals with serious themes, many people have found it wildly humorous. Discuss, using specific examples from the text.