

Trainspotting



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF IRVINE WELSH

Irvine Welsh was born in Leith, a port area in northern Edinburgh, Scotland, that serves as the setting for many of his works. He grew up in public housing, and his mother worked as a waitress while his father worked as a dock worker and died when Welsh was young. In the 1970s, Welsh moved to London and sang in punk bands. He returned to Edinburgh in the 1980s for his MBA. Soon after, he began publishing stories in small, independent journals; eventually these stories would become part of *Trainspotting*. The full novel came out in 1993 and was an immediate success, with the 1996 film adaptation bringing even greater attention to Welsh's work. While his debut remains his best-known work, Welsh has also received acclaim for his other works, which include over dozen novels, several short story collections, and a few plays and screenplays. A newspaper article published shortly before the wide release of the film *Trainspotting* called some aspects of Welsh's early biography into question, suggesting in particular that a police report listed his birth year as 1951, not 1958. Welsh currently lives in London and Edinburgh, spending winters in Miami Beach.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The novel is inspired partly by Welsh's own experiences growing up in Leith and moving back in the 1980s. During that time, Scotland experienced high unemployment. The sometimes-contentious history between Scotland and England serves as a backdrop for much of the novel. During the early Middle Ages, Scotland was an independent kingdom. When England invaded in 1296, Scotland fought for independence in wars that lasted for several decades. Eventually, however, England and Scotland united to become Great Britain in 1706. More recently, some have called for Scotland to become independent again, starting in the 19th century and continuing to the present day.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

With its focus on psychology and shocking subject matter, *Trainspotting* resembles modernist novels of the late 19th and early 20th century. Welsh has listed Fyodor Dostoyevsky's [Crime and Punishment](#) and James Joyce's [Ulysses](#) as two of his biggest inspirations. His novel also bears some similarities to Anthony Burgess's [A Clockwork Orange](#), which also makes heavy use of slang (albeit a fictional one) and focuses on reckless youth culture. *Trainspotting* references several albums,

including *Sunshine on Leith* by the Proclaimers, which is most famous for the song "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)" and focuses on the same time and place as Welsh's novel (late 1980s Leith, Edinburgh, Scotland).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Trainspotting
- **When Written:** Late 1980s and early 1990s
- **Where Written:** Edinburgh, Scotland
- **When Published:** 1993
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Story Collection, Dark Comedy
- **Setting:** Leith, Edinburgh, Scotland
- **Climax:** Rent Boy runs off with his friends' money.
- **Antagonist:** Begbie
- **Point of View:** The point of view shifts between first person (with different narrators) and third person.

EXTRA CREDIT

He Found His Calling. Irvine Welsh has said the strangest job he had before he became a writer was calling numbers for bingo. His uniform was a sequined shirt and sequined pants.

One Fear. Irvine Welsh's greatest fear used to be that he'd never see his favorite soccer team, Hibernian, win the Scottish Cup. After it happened in 2016, he changed his biggest fear to being trapped in a coma.



PLOT SUMMARY

In Leith (a port neighborhood of Edinburgh, Scotland) in the late 1980s, Rent Boy and Sick Boy begin experiencing **heroin** withdrawal symptoms. They go to see their dealer, Johnny Swan, a.k.a. "Mother Superior." At Johnny's place, Alison tells Rent Boy he should go see Kelly, who is feeling bad after having an abortion, but instead, Rent Boy just goes back and watches more Jean-Claude Van Damme.

Eventually, Rent Boy gets tired of managing his addiction and decides to try to go to a new apartment and quit cold turkey. The withdrawal symptoms get to be too much, however, and in his desperation to feel better, he ends up using opium suppositories, only to lose them in a fit of diarrhea and have to dig back through the toilet for them.

One day, while Rent Boy, Sick Boy, and several other characters are high, their friend Lesley comes in and announces that her

baby, Dawn, has died, seemingly of sudden infant death syndrome. The event shakes everyone, particularly Sick Boy, who likely was Dawn's father. Many of them promise to swear off heroin.

Second Prize and Tommy, two more of Rent Boy's friends, witness a scene in a pub where a man violently assaults a woman. When they try to intervene, however, they're shocked to hear the woman defending her abusive boyfriend. In a similarly violent pub scene, Rent Boy goes out with his "friend" Begbie (whom he actually despises) and their girlfriends, and Begbie impulsively throws a glass at a stranger's head to start a fight. Begbie often picks fights with strangers and seems disappointed whenever they don't fight back.

Although Rent Boy successfully kicks his heroin addiction for a while after Dawn's death, eventually he relapses. Soon after, Tommy comes to visit him and asks for some heroin. Tommy has just broken up with his girlfriend, Lizzy. Although Rent Boy is reluctant at first, he eventually gives Tommy some heroin, sending him down the path to heavy addiction.

Rent Boy and his friends continue to do drugs and act recklessly. In one situation, a desperate Rent Boy decides to go home with one of the last remaining women at a nightclub. As it turns out, however, the "woman" (Dianne) is actually a girl of about 14 who is still in school. On another occasion, Rent Boy and his sweet-natured friend Spud rob a bookstore to resell the merchandise but get caught. Rent Boy manages to talk his way out of jail time, but Spud goes away to prison for six months.

Partly due to his drug use, Rent Boy has a strained relationship with his family, and so when he hears that his brother Billy dies while fighting for the British army in Ireland, Billy doesn't feel any particular grief. He feels that his brother betrayed his Scottish identity by joining the British army, and partly as a result of these complicated feelings, he ends up having sex in a bathroom with his brother's very pregnant former girlfriend. Rent Boy has a complicated relationship with sexuality. Later, when he meets an older gay man in London named Gi, he feels simultaneous disgust and sympathy, inspiring him to consider his own potential bisexuality.

Rent Boy later learns that one of his old friends Matty has died from complications of HIV, after getting an infection from the feces of a kitten Matty spontaneously adopted. Rent Boy comes back from London to Leith for Matty's funeral and sees some of his old friends, many of whom he's grown apart from. Later, Rent Boy returns to Leith again and visits Tommy, who has contracted HIV from sharing needles and who seems likely to die soon. Rent Boy also goes out walking with Begbie at an abandoned **train** station where they run into a drunken old man who jokingly asks them if they're "trainspotting." Rent Boy later realizes that the man was Begbie's father. On their walk back from the train station, Begbie beats a man up, seemingly at random, and Rent Boy makes no move to stop him.

Several characters including Rent Boy, Sick Boy, Begbie, Spud, and Second Prize take a bus to London for one big heroin deal. Despite tensions within the group, the deal succeeds, and they make a lot of money. While they're all out celebrating, however, Rent Boy walks off with the money for himself and books a flight to Amsterdam. While Rent Boy is nervous about starting a new life and has some regrets about hurting Spud by taking his share of the money, he is excited about getting a second chance in life.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Rent Boy – Rent Boy, whose real name is Mark Renton and who also goes by Rents, lives in Leith and is friends with a group that includes Sick Boy, Spud, Begbie, and Second Prize. Like many of his friends, Rent Boy is a sometime **heroin** user who goes through cycles of heavy usage followed by attempts to kick his habit (often by taking a **train** to London to stay with friends). Rent Boy has a strained relationship with his family, partly due to his drug use and partly due to how his brother Billy was a bully to Rent Boy as kids. Out of all his friends, Rent Boy is the most well-read. He is also arguably the most cynical, partly due to his chronic depression, which gets worse during periods of heroin withdrawal. Rent Boy finds "mainstream" society like politics and the workforce unbearable, and he mostly survives by obtaining money through petty scams and crimes. Rent Boy struggles both in his relationships with women and with understanding his own seeming bisexuality, and this reflects his larger struggle to connect with other people in general. At the end of the novel, Rent Boy betrays all his friends, stealing the money they from a heroin deal and running away to start a new life in Amsterdam. Rent Boy's final actions show how he has grown apart from his old life and needs to move on. Rent Boy's conflicted feelings at the end of the novel reflect his conflicted feelings about Scotland—while he is excited about starting a new life, he regrets having to leave behind certain parts of his old one.

Begbie – Begbie, whose real name is Francis Begbie and who also sometimes goes by "the Beggar," is part of Rent Boy's friend group, although no one in the group likes him very much. Begbie is a violent bully, always looking for an excuse for a fight and often disappointed when the other person backs down from his challenge. He has a child with his ex-girlfriend June but refuses to get involved and act like a father. This represents the continuation of a cycle—Begbie's own father is a frequently drunk old man who hangs out by Leith's abandoned **train** station. Although Begbie is one of the few characters in the group who doesn't use **heroin**, his behavior is even more erratic than theirs (partly due to his heavy drinking). During crimes and schemes, Begbie is extremely paranoid, although even he doesn't realize at the end of the novel that Rent Boy is planning

to betray him during a heroin deal and walk off with the money. Begbie represents the violent dark side of life in working-class Edinburgh, and his constant presence in the friend group, despite everyone's dislike of him, represents how difficult it is to avoid this dark side.

Sick Boy – Simon “Sick Boy” Williamson (sometimes also called “Simone” as a joke) is one of Rent Boy's closest friends, although the two joke about being enemies then grow apart for real over the course of the novel. Rent Boy claims that Sick Boy's nickname originally meant *sick* in the sense of *twisted* but it takes on new meaning after Sick Boy starts doing **heroin** and gets sick during withdrawal periods. Among his friends, Sick Boy has a reputation for having sex with almost any woman he wants, including Lesley, whose son Dawn is implied to be Sick Boy's. After Dawn's death, seemingly of sudden infant death syndrome while Sick Boy and Lesley are high, Sick Boy starts controlling his drug use, although he continues to have casual sex and often uses sex as an excuse to scam women out of money. Sick Boy views relationships as transactional and eventually starts his own informal business of managing local sex workers, many of whom use heroin. Near the end of the novel, Sick Boy has grown so distant from Rent Boy that he considers cutting off their friendship, but Rent Boy beats him to it by running off with the money on their last heroin deal. Sick Boy represents how addiction—both drug addiction and other addictions like sex—can take over a person's life and cause them to manipulate other people and compromise on their personal morals.

Spud – Daniel “Spud” Murphy is perhaps the most agreeable member of Rent Boy's friend group, but his somewhat innocent personality causes the other group members to take advantage of him. His nickname “Spud” (like a potato) reflects his essentially passive personality and how both his friends and his **heroin** addiction control his life. Spud lives off of unemployment benefits, and Rent Boy coaches him how to fail job interviews so that he can continue to receive benefits. But even Rent Boy's advice isn't enough to keep Spud out of jail after the two of them get caught stealing from a bookstore with a plan to resell the books later. At the end of the book when Rent Boy betrays all his friends, Spud is the only one he regrets hurting. Nevertheless, Rent Boy carries out the theft anyway, symbolizing how in the tough life of working-class Edinburgh, easygoing characters like Spud make themselves a target for more predatory or amoral characters.

Davie Mitchell – Davie Mitchell is a resident of Leith who is friends with Tommy and peripherally knows Rent Boy and some of his other friends. Davie Mitchell doesn't use **heroin**, and perhaps as a result, the sections of the novel he narrates are often more self-contained than some of the other sections. Despite abstaining from heroin, Davie still lives a fairly reckless life, at one point getting blackout drunk and creating a huge mess at his girlfriend Gail's house. Later, Davie contracts HIV,

leading him to enact a long revenge plot against Venters, the man who indirectly gave Davie HIV. Davie seems like a respectable man on the surface, and so his shocking stories represent the dark side lurking underneath polite Scottish society.

Tommy – Tommy is an old friend of Rent Boy's and also a friend of Davie Mitchell. At the beginning of the story, he does almost every drug but stays away from heroin. He and his girlfriend Lizzy split up after Tommy turns down seeing a movie with her to go to an Iggy Pop concert instead. Depressed after the breakup, Tommy asks Rent Boy for some **heroin**. Somewhat reluctantly, Rent Boy gives it to him, and Tommy soon becomes addicted. By the end of the story, Tommy is HIV positive and seems unlikely to last through the winter. Tommy's situation represents the consequences of heroin use and causes Rent Boy to reconsider both his own actions and the nature of his relationships with his friends.

Second Prize – Rab McLaughlin (a.k.a. Second Prize or Secks for short) is a member of Rent Boy's friend group. Like Begbie, Second Prize doesn't use **heroin**, but he drinks so much that his own struggles with addiction are similar to a heroin user's. After a brief but promising career in soccer, Second Prize got deeper and deeper into drinking. He often picks and loses fights in pubs, which is how he got the nickname Second Prize, and his nickname perhaps also signifies his lower standing within the friend group. Second Prize represents how heroin is not the only thing controlling the lives of the characters and how other addictions can be just as damaging.

Dawn – Dawn is the infant child of Lesley who dies of what seems to be sudden infant death syndrome while several characters (including Dawn's likely father, Sick Boy) are high on **heroin**. The incident weighs heavily on all of the characters, causing several of them to make pledges to give up their addictions, although many of these lofty plans fall through. Dawn's death represents the death of innocence, partly due to addiction, but perhaps even more due to random chance, providing evidence for the bleak and pessimistic worldview that many characters like Rent Boy share in the story.

Billy – Billy is one of Rent Boy's brothers (along with Davie Renton). He bullies Rent Boy as a child and has much more conservative, pro-British views than Rent Boy. When Billy dies serving the British army in Ireland, many hail him as a hero, but Rent Boy maintains that Billy was an idiot who didn't even know why he was fighting in Ireland in the first place. Billy forces Rent Boy to examine his own conflicted ideas about Scottish identity, since as much as Rent Boy hates the British nationalism that Billy embodies, Rent Boy also sees London as an escape from the bullying behavior of people like Billy in Leith.

Lesley – Lesley is an acquaintance of Rent Boy's who has a traumatic experience when her infant child Dawn dies while she and some friends are high on **heroin**. Although Matty

declares that Dawn died of sudden infant death syndrome, Lesley still feels guilty, and the incident also weighs heavily on Sick Boy, who was mostly likely Dawn's father. Lesley remains troubled for the rest of the novel, overdosing in an apparent suicide attempt and ending up on life support.

Johnny Swan – Johnny Swan is a dealer who earns the nickname “Mother Superior” due to how heroin users like Rent Boy and Sick Boy come to him to cure their withdrawal. Johnny falls so deep into his addiction that he recklessly shoots heroin into an artery and has to have his leg amputated as a result. Seeing Johnny with one leg, still addicted, helps convince Rent Boy that he needs to get out of Scotland and avoid becoming like Johnny.

Dianne – Dianne is a teenage girl who Rent Boy picks up at a nightclub and has sex with. Rent Boy didn't pay attention to her age because he was on speed and Dianne was wearing a lot of make-up, but after seeing her in the morning, he reconsiders his life choices, at least temporarily. The incident may be one of many factors in Rent Boy's decision to get out of Leith, although he continues to have a conflicted relationship with his own sexuality.

Stevie – Stevie is a friend of Rent Boy's who doesn't use **heroin**. After confessing his feelings to a woman named Stella, he waits nervously for her to get back to him with an answer on New Year's Eve. When she calls to say she loves him, he goes to meet her at the **train** station. Stevie lives in London, and the mostly happy ending of his story suggests that perhaps his move away from Leith helped him escape the fate of the other characters.

Matty – Matty is the first major character in Rent Boy's circle of friends to die during the timeline of the novel. He doesn't realize that he has HIV, and he gets a serious brain infection from the feces of a kitten he spontaneously adopts. Matty's seemingly random death illustrates how precarious life is in Leith and how death often comes prematurely to the novel's young characters.

Hazel – Hazel is Rent Boy's longtime on-again, off-again girlfriend at the beginning of the novel. She and Rent Boy rarely have sex because her father sexually abused her as a child, and she seemingly suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. After four years, Rent Boy splits up with Hazel, and she mostly disappears from the novel, illustrating how casually many of the male characters in the story treat the female characters.

Davie Renton – Davie Renton was Rent Boy and Billy's brother; he was fully paralyzed and died before the events of the novel. Other kids made fun of Davie's condition, and they made fun of Rent Boy and Billy as a result. Davie's paralyzed condition has strong parallels to Rent Boy's own condition while high, particularly during the “Junk Dilemmas” interludes in the book.

Gi – Gi (short for Giovanni) is a gay older man from Italy who meets Rent Boy at an all-night pornography theater in London.

Gi had to leave Italy when word got out that he had a secret lover: his wife's younger brother. The male members of his wife's family beat up both Gi and the younger brother, and the younger brother later killed himself. Rent Boy has mixed feelings toward Gi, sometimes feeling sympathy and other times feeling disgust, perhaps reflecting Rent Boy's own conflicted feelings about his possible bisexuality.

Venters – Venters is an HIV-positive man in Davie Mitchell's support group. Despite his diagnosis, Venters lives recklessly and soon ends up in hospice care. Davie pretends to be Venters's friend, but really, he is plotting revenge on Venters because Venters raped a woman who went on to accidentally give Mitchell HIV. Mitchell pretends to brutally murder Venters's son Kevin then murders Venters for real with a pillow. While Venters is undeniably a despicable character, his story raises questions about to what extent Davie Mitchell's also-extreme actions might or might not be justified.

Kelly – Kelly is a friend of Rent Boy's who works as a bartender. She likes him at the beginning of the story, and for a brief period of time they have a relationship, but it ends when Rent Boy goes to London. Over the course of the story, Kelly experiences catcalling and rude treatment from men. While the novel largely portrays a male perspective, Kelly helps expand the perspective and reveal some aspects of Leith life to which many of the male characters are oblivious.

Alison – Alison is a member of Rent Boy's friend group, although she remains antagonistic toward Rent Boy himself most of the time. She is particularly good friends with Kelly. She has sex with Sick Boy and Spud, although like Rent Boy, she has conflicted feelings about her friends and sometimes seems to dislike them. Like Kelly, Alison helps balance the male-dominated perspective of the book.

Sharon – Sharon is Billy's girlfriend who is pregnant with his child when Billy dies serving in the army. Billy beat her, but she still felt loyal to him and wanted to change him. Sharon and Rent Boy have sex in the bathroom at Billy's funeral, and while Rent Boy initially enjoys doing something taboo, he is later horrified at the thought that he might not be as different from his brother as he thought.

Kevin – Kevin is the son of Venters and Frances, and he's the only person that the cruel Venters really cares about. To get back at Venters, Davie Mitchell stages photos that make it look like he brutally tortured and murdered Kevin. The whole experience makes Davie wonder if he went too far in his revenge, but Kevin doesn't seem too affected by the experience, and Davie goes on with his life.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Lizzy – Lizzy is Tommy's strong-willed girlfriend. They break up after he chooses to go to an Iggy Pop concert instead of a movie with her, setting off Tommy's descent into **heroin** addiction.

June – June is Begbie’s on-again, off-again girlfriend who gets pregnant with their child. After Begbie refuses to get involved as a father, June must raise the child largely on her own, showing how conservative gender roles influence life in Leith.

Nina – Nina is a young woman who dresses like a goth. On two separate occasions, one of her male cousins flirts with her at a funeral (Geoff and Rent Boy).

Uncle Andy – Uncle Andy is Nina’s uncle who dies of a heart problem. Nina thinks for a moment he’s still alive, but it turns out to just be an electric blanket warming his corpse.

Auntie Alice – Auntie Alice is Uncle Andy’s wife and Nina’s aunt. Nina has good memories at their house, but it takes Nina a while to acknowledge that, as she tries to repress her grief over Uncle Andy’s sudden death.

Granty – Granty is a member of a poker club with Billy, Lenny, Jackie, and others. While Granty is holding the group’s money, he dies, and his girlfriend, Fiona, seemingly runs off with the money, causing conflict between his surviving friends.

Stella – Stella is a friend of Stevie’s. After he confesses his love to her, she calls him back on New Year’s Eve to say she loves him too. At the end of the story, the two of them live together in London.

Gail – Gail is briefly Davie Mitchell’s girlfriend. Her whole family gets a nasty surprise when Davie comes down to dinner with sheets full of his own vomit from the previous night and accidentally spills it all over Sunday breakfast.

Na Na – Na Na is Spud’s grandmother. She has several children with different men, with Dode being the youngest.

Lenny – Lenny is a friend of Billy’s who is part of his poker club. After the club loses all its money, they look for a scapegoat and beat up fellow member Jackie.

Jackie – Jackie is a friend of Billy’s who is part of his poker club. He gets accused of being part of a scheme to steal the group’s money, so all his friends beat him up on a stairwell.

Dode – Dode is Spud’s uncle. He is half West Indian, which earns him unwanted attention from Nazis on one occasion, but Dode seems to have built up his resilience to these threats.

Fiona – Fiona is the girlfriend of Granty who, after his death, seemingly finds and steals the money he’s holding for his poker group and uses it to take a vacation.

Gav – Gav is a minor friend of Rent Boy, Spud, and the others. He works at the unemployment office.

Frances – Frances is the ex-girlfriend of Venters who has a son, Kevin, with him. She becomes a key figure in Davie Mitchell’s revenge plot against Venters, although Davie never actually hurts her.

Planet of the Apes – Planet of the Apes is a pub patron who looks like an extra from the movie *Planet of the Apes*. He becomes an early customer in Sick Boy’s scheme to sell sexual

favors from women he knows.

Dr. Forbes – Dr. Forbes is Rent Boy’s psychiatrist for a short time and diagnoses that Rent Boy’s heroin addiction is connected to his relationship with his dead brother Davie Renton. While there seems to be truth to Dr. Forbes’s words, Rent Boy isn’t ready to acknowledge it.

Andreas – Andreas is a hotel owner who used to commit petty crimes with Sick Boy. Though he tried to distance himself from Sick Boy after becoming successful, he agrees to do one last big heroin deal with Sick Boy, and this motivates all the events in the novels’ final chapter.

Peter Gilbert – Peter Gilbert is a drug-dealing middleman that Andreas connects with Sick Boy and the others from Leith. His professionalism and detached attitude contrast with the more haphazard actions of the novel’s major characters.

Molly – Molly is an HIV-positive sex worker who likes Sick Boy. Sick Boy seems to like her in return, but he ends their conversation by asking to borrow money from her, showing how he continues to treat many of his relationships with women as transactional.

Raymie – Raymie is a minor friend of Rent Boy’s who is almost never seen in the same place as Spud, causing Sick Boy to jokingly theorize that they’re the same person.

Mel – Mel is Rent Boy’s friend in London that he is headed to see when he meets Gi.

Geoff – Geoff is a cousin of Nina’s who flirts with her at Uncle Andy’s funeral.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



ADDICTION AND SOCIETY

Most of the characters in Irvine Welsh’s novel *Trainspotting* struggle with some form of addiction, often a dependence on **heroin**. The novel explores drug culture in Scotland in the late 1980s, depicting elements of it with realism and specific details, but it also explores metaphorical addictions and how these are similar to and different from physical addictions. The novel portrays addiction as both a constant state and a cycle. Some of these cycles play out in the short term, like how Sick Boy’s name reflects that he (and the other heroin-using characters) experience extreme withdrawal—a literal sickness—if they go too long without using heroin. Other cycles play out over a longer time frame, like Rent Boy’s seemingly endless cycle of quitting heroin, trying to get

his life together, then relapsing again.

As Rent Boy sees it, however, addiction is often about more than drugs—rather, it’s an attempt to deal with the emptiness of the world they see around them. Unemployment is high in Scotland during the time when the story is set, and the jobs that are available are often so unfulfilling that Rent Boy and Spud learn how to specifically fail at job interviews in a way that will allow them to keep their unemployment benefits. Rent Boy’s depression (which gets worse during withdrawal periods) leads him to despise all politicians in all parties and reject consumerist culture around him, raising the question of whether Rent Boy’s drug use causes his dissatisfaction with society, or whether the pain of living in a flawed, dissatisfying society has contributed to his drug use. While other characters are generally less pessimistic than Rent Boy, they too often feel alienated from the mainstream, which they sometimes express through their alternative taste in clothes (the all-black-wearing Nina) and music (such as the musicians Lou Reed and Iggy Pop). *Trainspotting* offers a bleak depiction of drug addiction, but it also suggests that perhaps the most important part of drug culture is understanding the social conditions that make drugs seem like an appealing option in the first place.



SCOTTISH IDENTITY

Most of *Trainspotting* is set in Leith, a largely working-class neighborhood of Edinburgh. Welsh wrote most of the book in different varieties of Scottish English, which is how most of the characters in the story speak. This focus on Scottish identity helps convey pride in Scottish culture. One of the most significant elements of Scottish culture in the book is how Scotland differs from England. Although Scotland and England are both part of the UK, characters in the book like Rent Boy feel strongly that his Scottish identity is more important than his British identity, which Rent Boy rejects so strongly that he doesn’t even like it when a pub’s name in London changes to “the Britannia.” Not all Scottish characters feel the same way as Rent Boy, however. In fact, it’s Rent Boy’s own brother Billy who joins the British army to fight on behalf of Britain in Ireland, where he dies (perhaps without even appreciating the full context for the conflict). Billy died during the Troubles, a decades-long conflict between the largely Protestant British loyalists who wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom and largely Catholic republicans who wanted a unified and independent island of Ireland. For Rent Boy, the historical parallels between Scotland and republican Ireland are clear, since both have fought for independence from England, and so by joining the British army, Billy betrayed his own heritage.

Still, Rent Boy also has mixed feelings about Scotland. On the one hand, he believes that patriotism in general is bad, a belief he puts into action when he leaves Scotland for good at the end of the novel. Rent Boy says that the main reason he leaves is

violent, sexist Begbie, who stands for everything bad about Scotland that Rent Boy can’t escape while he’s there, namely his drug addiction. Yet Rent Boy can’t help feeling loyal to him. Ultimately, Rent Boy realizes that his loyalty to Begbie is holding him back, just as his environment in Scotland was holding him back by encouraging him to stay in cycles of addiction. The empty **train** station in Leith symbolizes how Rent Boy’s surroundings keep him from moving on. *Trainspotting* thus depicts a nuanced view of Scottish identity, using the specific culture of working-class Edinburgh to dramatize the nation’s larger struggle to reconcile its position as part of the UK with the desire of many of its residents to obtain greater autonomy and ability to self-govern, similar to how Rent Boy and the other characters seek greater control over their own lives.



FRIENDSHIP

Most of the characters in Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* are part of the same loosely defined friend group. They follow a mostly unspoken code of conduct where loyalty to friends is one of the most important virtues, although not all of the characters can live up to this standard. Many of the characters genuinely like each other, at least some of the time, and their trips to pubs or concerts can be joyous. Other times, however, characters have ulterior reasons for maintaining friendships. Rent Boy’s relationship with dealers like Johnny Swan and Mike Forrester, for example, is mostly transactional, since Rent Boy just uses them to fuel his heroin addiction—in fact, he doesn’t even like Forrester as a person.

Many events in the story test the limits of friendship, questioning where the limit should be. Rent Boy, for example, gives Tommy heroin when Tommy requests it for the first time after his breakup with Lizzy, which ultimately starts a chain of events that leads to Tommy getting HIV. Rent Boy wonders how much guilt he bears for what happens to Tommy and whether it was his responsibility as a friend to set limits for Tommy or whether Tommy is simply suffering the consequences of his own decisions. Begbie, meanwhile, remains friends with most of the main characters in the story despite the fact that most of them don’t like him and make fun of him behind his back. Begbie is more violent than Rent Boy, Sick Boy, Spud, and the others, but they only occasionally try to stop him and more often are complicit in his violence. Begbie takes advantage of their loyalty, pushing the whole group to do things that make them uncomfortable. Ultimately, the only way Rent Boy can imagine escaping Begbie’s influence is by leaving Scotland for good, which he does at the very end of the novel. *Trainspotting* depicts the power of friendship and how it can help people endure hardship but also how loyalty to friends can be harmful and force people to do things they wouldn’t otherwise do.



SEX, LIBIDO, AND GENDER NORMS

Though characters frequently put **heroin** above all else, sex is often nearly as important to them. Sick Boy is notorious for his ability to have sex with

almost any woman, whereas Rent Boy and particularly Spud tend to be less successful in their attempts—and constantly anguish over it. Sex is so important to Johnny Swan that it's the first thing on his mind even after he gets his leg amputated. Many sections of the novel take place in pubs, where the characters all try to find a sexual partner before the end of the night, further emphasizing the central role that sex plays in their lives.

In addition, the sexual encounters in the novel often highlight the unequal relationship between male and female characters. When Begbie impregnates June, she's the one who has to care for their child. Meanwhile, Lesley largely takes the blame for the seemingly accidental death of her young child, Dawn, even though Sick Boy was likely the father but took no responsibility for the child. Kelly deals with catcalling and harassment from men throughout the novel, Tommy and Second Prize witness a man violently beating a woman in a crowded pub, and Gi, a gay man, also suffers due to ideas about masculinity in his home country of Italy. The experiences of all these characters show how ingrained traditional gender roles are in their society—and how these norms have the potential to inflict harm on characters whose gender or sexual orientation places them on the margin of society. In addition, *Trainspotting* portrays the intensity and power of libido, particularly in young men, to show how sexual desire can have wide-ranging social consequences, helping to define and enforce gender role, often in negative ways.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



HEROIN

In *Trainspotting*, heroin represents the complex relationship between addiction, society, and the

conditions that draw people to addiction in the first place. Most of the main characters in *Trainspotting* use heroin, and for many of them, it becomes the central focus of their lives. Although the novel portrays the negative effects of heroin in great detail, heroin use doesn't exist in a vacuum and has a complex relationship with the broader Scottish society that the characters live in. The book shows how certain social conditions (like a lack of opportunity for upward mobility, political cynicism, and the prevalence of violence) can attract people to drugs as a form of escape—only to then worsen the consequences of the very same social ills they long to escape.

Furthermore, while heroin is perhaps the most visible force making lives worse for the characters, other factors like alcohol, aggression, and blind loyalty to one's friends or one's home play a similarly addictive role in the world of the novel, even for the characters that abstain from heroin.

Heroin, like these other factors, offers the promise of escape from a bleak world, and as Rent Boy tells Tommy at one point, the “kick” of heroin during a high is unparalleled. Nevertheless, this very same conversation sets off a chain of events that leads to Tommy contracting HIV, suggesting that no matter how powerful heroin's “kick” is, it can't justify its extraordinary cost. Throughout the book, the characters struggle to escape their addictions to heroin, just as they strain to overcome the social conditions that encourage them to use heroin in the first place. In both cases, however, the characters remain trapped in cycles by forces seemingly beyond their control.



TRAINS

In *Trainspotting*, trains represent hope, possibility, and new beginnings. Although trains feature

prominently in *Trainspotting*, offering an escape from the insular and often limiting environment of Leith, they are even more notable by their absence. The book's title comes from a quote by a drunken old man at an abandoned train station. He approaches Rent Boy and Begbie to ask if they're trainspotting (watching trains as a hobby), which is a joke because the station is abandoned and no trains run there anymore. A new supermarket will soon replace the abandoned station. Since a train station stands for travel and expanding horizons, the arrival of the supermarket suggests that Leith has prioritized suburban convenience and respectability—the very thing Rent Boy dislikes most. The trains that do remain in the story, like the one that carries Rent Boy to London to get clean or the one that carries Stella to meet Stevie after they confess their love, signify hope and progress, making the absence of trains in the abandoned Leith station a bleak image. As it turns out, the drunken old man in the abandoned station isn't a stranger but Begbie's father. Without any trains to get out, he remains trapped to wander the station, just as so many characters in the story remain metaphorically trapped by **heroin**, alcohol, and other addictions.



QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the W. W. Norton & Company edition of *Trainspotting* published in 1996.

Kicking Quotes

☝☝ The sweat wis lashing oafay Sick Boy; he wis trembling. Ah wis jist sitting thair, focusing oan the telly, tryin no tae notice the cunt. He wis bringing me doon. Ah tried tae keep ma attention oan the Jean–Claude Van Damme video.

Related Characters: Rent Boy (speaker), Sick Boy, Johnny Swan

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis


This is the book's opening passage. The narrator is Mark Renton, nicknamed Rent Boy, and the beginning of the novel establishes his distinctive way of speaking. Language in Scotland is a controversial topic, with linguists disagreeing about how to define the border between Scots (the indigenous language of Scotland) and British English (a term which often, although not always, refers to how English is spoken in England). What is clear is that the slang and pronunciation in Rent Boy's narration combines elements both of his regional Scottish identity as well as of his broader British identity, a distinction that becomes more important later in the story.

The opening lines of the book also introduce the concept of heroin withdrawal, showing how going without heroin for too long can make a person sick, as it does here to the trembling Sick Boy. Also significant is the Jean–Claude Van Damme video. In addition to adding to the mix of cultures (Van Damme is a Belgian who mostly worked in the United States), Van Damme's movies are famously violent, hinting at how many of the story's male characters bond with one another through violence.

☝☝ The train was nearly twenty minutes late, an excellent performance by British Rail standards. Stevie wondered whether she'd be on it. Paranoia hit him. Waves of fear shuddered through his body. The stakes were high, the highest ever. He couldn't see her, couldn't even picture her in his mind's eye. Then she was almost upon him, different to how he thought of her, more real, even more beautiful. It was the smile, the look of emotion reciprocated. He ran the short distance to her and held her in his arms. They kissed for a long time. When they stopped, the platform was deserted and the train was well on its way to Dundee.

Related Characters: Tommy, Stevie, Lizzy, Stella

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is the ending of the section titled “Victory on New Year's Day.” After confessing his love to Stella, Stevie waits all evening for a phone call with her reply, fearing the worst, but then she finally calls him to say that she's on her way to meet him. The train that brings Stella from London to Stevie is one of the first prominent trains in the novel, and it establishes early how trains symbolize hope and particularly new beginnings.

While the novel often has a dark, pessimistic tone (often balanced with humor), the reunion of Stevie and Stella is one of the few truly optimistic moments in the story. Stevie and Stella's relationship isn't the set-up for a future disaster, as Tommy and Lizzy's more troubled relationship is—by the end of the story Stevie and Stella are still together and seem happy. Notably, however, Stevie and Stella move to London at some point after their reunion, suggesting that in order to achieve their happy ending, they had to make a major change by getting out of Leith, something that many of the other characters in the novel cannot or will not do.

☝☝ Ah never wanted anything mair in ma life than fir her tae stoap screamin.— The bairn's away . . . the bairn's away . . . Dawn. . . oh my god. . . oh fuckin god, wis about aw ah could pick ootay the horrible sound. She collapses oantae the threadbare couch.

Related Characters: Rent Boy, Lesley (speaker), Sick Boy, Dawn

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes a pivotal moment in the story when Lesley discovers that her baby (“bairn,” which can also mean toddler or child) has died while everyone was high. Rent Boy narrates this section, and his storytelling style seamlessly blends Lesley's dialogue with his own thoughts. The name of

Lesley's baby was Dawn, a name that conjures up hope and new beginnings. The death of Dawn, therefore, suggests the death of hope for the future for many of the book's characters. Perhaps it also signifies how due to their heroin use and other self-destructive habits, the characters live in constant danger of death and not seeing the next dawn.


Dawn's death spurs many of the characters to try to kick their heroin habits (which is what gives this chapter its title, "Kicking," although the title has a dual meaning since a "kick" can also refer to the high of heroin). Sick Boy in particular succeeds in taming his addiction, perhaps in part because he was likely Dawn's father. Nevertheless, Sick Boy doesn't necessarily improve as a person after he stops using heroin, and the title of the next chapter ("Relapsing") suggests that the characters might not stick with their heroin-free pledges for long.

Relapsing Quotes

☝ Ah sing out, a twisting, pogo-ing mass of rubber. Iggy Pop looks right at me as he sings the line: 'America takes drugs in psychic defence'; only he changes 'America' for 'Scatlin', and defines us mair accurately in a single sentence than all the others have ever done.

Related Characters: Tommy (speaker), Lizzy

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, from one of the few stories that follows Tommy's perspective, describes the experience of being incredibly high at an Iggy Pop concert (not on heroin, which Tommy doesn't use at this point in the story). For this reason, it's unclear if what's happening is *really* happening or just a result of the drugs, but regardless, the moment deeply affects Tommy. Like many of his friends, Tommy idolizes the musicians of the 1960s and 1970s like Iggy Pop who experimented heavily with drugs and survived into the late 1980s (when the novel takes place). Tommy literally feels like Iggy is singing right at him when he says that "Scatlin" (Scotland) "takes drugs in psychic defence."

While taking heavy drugs can be a self-destructive choice, Tommy rationalizes it as a defensive one, believing that he and the rest of Scotland only take drugs as a way of


protecting his mental health and coping with the horrors of the world ("psychic defence"). There's certainly some truth to this idea, but Tommy's life soon takes a grim turn as a result of his addiction, raising the question of whether drugs are really the defense he imagines them to be or whether Tommy is simply glamorizing his addiction and buying into a false mythology. Moreover, Tommy's decision to prioritize drug use drives a wedge between him and his girlfriend Lizzy, further isolating him and only worsening his mental state.

☝ *Myth: Begbie's mates like him.*

Reality: Begbie's mates fear him.

Related Characters: Rent Boy (speaker), Begbie

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

This quote by is part of Rent Boy's internal monologue as he tries to understand his own relationship with Begbie, a violent and unpleasant man that Rent Boy doesn't even really like but who is nevertheless one of Rent Boy's "mates." Just as the previous quote explored the glamorous myth of drug use versus the less glamorous reality of addiction, this quote looks at Rent Boy's role in upholding the myth of Begbie's reputation. Despite being cerebral and well-read, Rent Boy often struggles to understand his own actions, and his behavior toward Begbie brings all of Rent Boy's contradictions to the forefront. As a fellow Leith resident, Rent Boy feels a natural kinship with Begbie, even as he disapproves of Begbie's violent actions. He fears criticizing Begbie (at least in public) not only because he fears Begbie's retaliation but because he fears that anything negative he says about Begbie will reflect back poorly on himself by association. And so, Rent Boy and the others continue to prop up Begbie's reputation, not out of love for him, but out of fear of what might happen if they ever stop.



☝ —It's also a fuckin good kick.


Tommy looks at us. —Gies a go. Gies a hit.

—Fuck off Tommy.

—Ye sais it's a good kick. Ah pure wantae try it.

Related Characters: Rent Boy, Tommy (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, which contains dialogue between Rent Boy and Tommy, describes a key moment in the story when Rent Boy introduces Tommy to heroin. While Tommy has gotten high on just about everything except heroin (most notably at the earlier Iggy Pop concert), he has yet to try heroin. When Tommy comes to Rent Boy asking about heroin, Rent Boy has mixed feelings. At first, Rent Boy turns Tommy down, suggesting that he wouldn't want to inflict his own fate on someone else. Nevertheless, as their conversation goes on, Tommy eventually wears Rent Boy down and gets him to give him some heroin.

Rent Boy's actions during the scene have ambiguous motivations, and it's possible Rent Boy himself doesn't fully understand his actions. Despite recognizing the dangers of heroin use, Rent Boy must admit that he himself keeps using it despite all the associated risks. He knows that Tommy's personality puts him at risk of heroin addiction, but ultimately, Rent Boy makes the call that what Tommy does with himself is his own responsibility, reflecting the individualist attitude that Rent Boy and the others often display throughout the novel.

☞ An unspoken contract was forged between them in a split-second. Jackie's screams reverberated around the stairwell, as they booted and dragged him from landing to landing. He vainly tried to protect himself and, through his fear and pain, hoped that there would be something left of him to move out of Leith, when the ordeal was over.

Related Characters: Rent Boy, Billy , Granty , Lenny , Jackie , Fiona

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes a group of poker players who, after losing a large chunk of money in unusual circumstances, turn against one of their own (Jackie) and start violently attacking him. Their friend Granty was holding the money

when he died suddenly, and now it appears that Granty's girlfriend Fiona found the money and used it to take a vacation. The story includes Rent Boy's brother Billy, who doesn't use heroin and looks down on Rent Boy and his friends for their heroin use. Yet despite Billy's feelings of superiority, the scene of Lenny, Billy, and others beating Jackie on a stairwell show that they all have their own addictions, namely money and violence.

Billy treated Rent Boy like a bully as kids, and this passage reveals that little has changed as Billy got older. The reference to Leith at the end of the story suggests that Billy and the others live in an environment (Leith) that tolerates and perhaps even encourages violent shows of force, even against friends like Jackie.

Kicking Again Quotes

☞ Ah chums Dode tae the hoospital. His wounds wir likesay no as bad as they looked. Ah goes intae see um lyin oan a trolley effir thuv, likes, patched um up.

Related Characters: Spud (speaker), Na Na , Dode

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis



In this quote, Spud describes his reaction to a group of white supremacists attacking him (since he was with his mixed-race uncle Dode). Most of the major characters in the novel are white, and so this scene with Dode hints at what life is like for people in Leith outside of the relatively homogenous main friend group. Spud sees Dode get beaten up pretty badly by the Nazis in the bar and assumes that Dode must be seriously injured. The suddenness and seeming randomness of the attack suggests that the Nazis despise Dode for even existing and that they either expect other people at the pub to go along with their attack or don't care about the consequences. All of this paints a bleak picture of life for people from minority populations in Leith, where they have to endure not only offensive comments but also sometimes physical violence.

Nevertheless, however, in this quote, Spud notes that Dode's wounds don't actually look so bad after he gets patched up. Spud's comment lends itself to two equally valid interpretations: either that Dode's prior experiences with racism have made him resilient, or that Spud, as a white person, struggles to recognize the true amount of pain

Dode is in.

Perhaps, he allowed himself to speculate, they had some perverse parental feelings for her. He had noted that with older people. They often try to control younger, more popular and vivacious people; usually due to the fact that they are jealous of the qualities the younger people have and they lack.

Related Characters: Rent Boy (speaker), Dianne

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Rent Boy's reaction after having sex with Dianne and sleeping on her couch, then waking up to the sight of two strangers who look about his age. His comment that the "older people" try to control their younger friends ends up being humorous later, when Rent Boy realizes that the two strangers are in fact the parents of Dianne, who is in her mid-teens. The whole episode with Dianne illustrates how limited Rent Boy's perception is—not only for the audience but for Rent Boy himself, who feels embarrassed about it. Rent Boy tries to position himself as superior to the older, controlling generation, but he has to face the fact that compared to someone like Dianne, he himself is part of that generation. Rent Boy and his friends value youth, but by having sex with Dianne, Rent Boy goes too far, refusing to recognize the ways that he himself has aged and the responsibilities that come with it.

Rents picks up a stane and flings it at the squirrel. Ah feel likes, sick, ma hert misses a beat as it whizzes past the wee gadge. He goes tae pick up another, laughin like a maniac, but a stoap um.

Related Characters: Spud (speaker), Rent Boy, Begbie, Sick Boy

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Spud (the passage's narrator) is out with Rent Boy and some others when suddenly Rent Boy throws a stone at a squirrel, seemingly at random. Spud's sympathy

for the squirrel compared with Rent Boy's desire to hurt it helps to illustrate an important contrast in their characters. While Rent Boy is arguably not quite as sadistic toward humans as he is toward squirrels, he nevertheless shows a similar carelessness and at times perhaps even cruelty that Spud doesn't have.

In the novel, aggression toward animals is often a sign of poor relationships with humans, and so it makes sense that in a different section, the highly manipulative Sick Boy finds an excuse to kill a dog for fun. As Spud later notes, it's somewhat hypocritical for Rent Boy to be a vegetarian and yet engage in random acts of violence against an innocent squirrel. This passage is one of many in the novel that suggests that despite how different Rent Boy and Sick Boy may appear from the oafish Begbie on the surface, at their core they all have a similar potential for violence.

Blowing It Quotes

Ah walk tae freedom; perr auld Spud gits taken doon.
A polisman gestures tae him tae move.
—Sorry mate, ah sais, feelin cuntish.

Related Characters: Rent Boy (speaker), Spud

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis



This passage, which Rent Boy narrates, describes what happens after he and Spud go to court over robbing a bookstore. Rent Boy manages to impress the judge by mentioning some of the books he's read and pretending to be remorseful, whereas Spud just tells the truth and ends up going to prison. The scene has strong parallels to an earlier scene where Spud and Rent Boy both try to fail job interviews in a way that will allow them to keep their unemployment benefits. But while that scene depicted them succeeding together, this scene depicts Spud being left behind, foreshadowing how the remainder of the book will deal with ever-growing fractures in the main friend group.


As this passage notes, Rent Boy feels bad about leaving Spud behind and even apologizes, but shortly afterward, Rent Boy goes out to celebrate and no longer seems too haunted by his betrayal of Spud. On the one hand, this passage depicts Rent Boy's selfishness and his inability to help his friends, but at the same time, it also depicts the

limits of what Rent Boy can do to help someone like Spud, who doesn't have quite the same cunning as Rent Boy himself.

☞ Ah have an unresolved relationship wi ma deid brother, Davie, as ah huv been unable tae work oot or express ma feelings about his catatonic life and subsequent death.

Related Characters: Rent Boy (speaker), Davie Renton, Dr. Forbes

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis


In this quote, Rent Boy paraphrases his psychiatrist Dr. Forbes, perhaps with a slightly sarcastic tone. It is the first section of the book to mention Rent Boy's brother Davie Renton, who was almost fully paralyzed from birth and who died not long before the events of the novel start. The scenes with Rent Boy and Dr. Forbes walk a difficult line, on the one hand showing how Dr. Forbes's academic psychoanalytic theories might not fully apply to the real world but at the same time showing an undeniable connection between Rent Boy's heroin use and his troubled family life.

Rent Boy started using heroin not long after the death of his brother. Furthermore, the catatonic state that Rent Boy sometimes enters during a high has a strong resemblance to Davie's own paralyzed state. Rent Boy fears ending up paralyzed like Davie, not just literally, but in life in general. This fear seems to motivate his heroin use, which paradoxically keeps him trapped in a paralyzing cycle of addiction.

☞ Funny thing wis, jist before this, ah remembered boastin thit ah'd niver OD'd in ma puff. Thir's a first time fir everything. It wis Swanney's fault. His gear's normally cut tae fuck, so ye always bung that wee bit mair intae the cooking spoon tae compensate. Then whit does the cunt dae?

Related Characters: Rent Boy (speaker), Johnny Swan, Alison

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Rent Boy reacts to waking up in his childhood bedroom and slowly realizing that he just had his first overdose on heroin and that Johnny Swan and Alison must have taken him to the hospital. As the quote shows, Rent Boy's first reaction is to blame Johnny (perhaps jokingly) for having higher-quality heroin than before, which contributed to the overdose. What this passage really reveals, however, is that Rent Boy himself has gotten more and more reckless with his heroin dosing, perhaps feeling that his good luck from the past will lead to continued good luck in the future. Whether he's joking or not, Rent Boy seems reluctant to personally accept responsibility for his overdose, illustrating just how effectively Rent Boy has learned to rationalize his behavior. This passage foreshadows that Rent Boy is reaching a crucial point in his life where he can either finally make a change or continue with a lifestyle that has already claimed the lives of some of his friends.

☞ He wis ma felly. Ye eywis think it'll be different, thit ye kin change. Thum, thit ye kin make a difference.

Related Characters: Rent Boy, Sharon (speaker), Begbie, Tommy, Second Prize, Billy

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from Billy's pregnant girlfriend Sharon during a section Rent Boy narrates that takes place during Billy's funeral. Sharon's words sound very similar to the words of an anonymous woman in a pub that Second Prize and Tommy witnessed being beaten by her boyfriend; though her boyfriend beat her, the woman nevertheless continued to stand by him. Sharon also suffered domestic abuse from Billy, but she remained loyal to him and thought he might get better. Rent Boy's feelings toward Sharon alternate between attraction and disgust. Possibly, he sees some of himself in her, and so his ambivalent feelings toward her mirror his changing attitude toward himself. Rent Boy, like Sharon, remains loyal to people who don't

treat him very well—Begbie in particular. The code between “mates” in Leith is nearly as sacred as a bond of marriage (a different type of “mates”). This passage suggests that it might not be possible to change some people, especially not from the outside, and thus highlights the destructive potential of blind loyalty to one’s friends or associates.

Exile Quotes

☛☛ The pub sign is a new one, but its message is old. The Britannia. Rule Britannia. Ah’ve never felt British, because ah’m not. It’s ugly and artificial. Ah’ve never really felt Scottish either, though. Scotland the brave, ma arse; Scotland the shitein cunt.

Related Characters: Rent Boy (speaker), Billy

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 228



Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from a section that Rent Boy narrates shortly after the death of his brother Billy when he goes back to London to attempt to get clean (again). Rent Boy leaves his longtime hometown of Leith, hence this chapter’s title, “Exile.” At first, Rent Boy may seem like he’s overreacting to a small detail like a pub changing its name, but this minor name change triggers some much deeper feelings that Rent Boy has been grappling with, particularly since the death of Billy. Billy died fighting on for the British Army in Ireland, and Rent Boy disapproves of this since he values his regional Scottish identity more than his broader British identity, which he totally rejects.

Nevertheless, Rent Boy’s feelings have nuance, and his rejection of British culture doesn’t necessarily suggest an underlying support for Scottish independence. Furthermore, Rent Boy’s decision to keep coming back to London suggests that whatever philosophical or political opposition he has to Britain, he seems to like its capital city, perhaps even more than his hometown of Leith, revealing the contradicting parts of his personality that he struggles to reconcile.

☛☛ Anyway, ah widnae mind gaun aw the wey wi a gadge, if it felt right. Jist fir the experience. Problem is, ah only really fancy birds. Guys jist dinnae look sexy. It’s aw ahoot aesthetics, fuck all tae dae wi morality.

Related Characters: Rent Boy (speaker), Gi

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 234


Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Rent Boy describes his feelings in the aftermath of engaging in oral sex with a drag queen. The passage continues the theme of Rent Boy coming to terms with his identity during his “exile” from Leith in London. Rent Boy avoids describing his sexuality in absolute terms, saying he only really “fanc[ies] birds” (likes women) instead of using a defined label like “heterosexual.” This suggests that as much as Rent Boy is well-read on topics like the philosopher Kierkegaard, he lacks the vocabulary to discuss sex in the same level of detail. Rent Boy claims that he has no moral problem with homosexuality, and yet his insistence that he only likes women conflicts with many of his actions, including his fascination with the gay character Gi. As is often the case, Rent Boy remains an unreliable narrator and so the nature of his sexuality remains at least partly ambiguous.

☛☛ “I always find the term ‘opportunistic infection’ amusing. In our culture, it seems to invoke some admirable quality. I think of the ‘opportunism’ of the entrepreneur who spots a gap in the market, or that of the striker in the penalty box. Tricky buggers, those opportunistic infections.”

Related Characters: Davie Mitchell (speaker), Rent Boy, Tommy, Venters

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis



This quote comes at the beginning of a story that Davie Mitchell narrates. Davie Mitchell is a friend of Tommy’s who knows Rent Boy but whose story here is mostly a self-contained episode. Notably, as this quote shows, Davie Mitchell speaks in a way that’s closer to “standard English” than most of the other characters in the book. His more formal way of speaking seems to signify a higher social class than other characters who speak in slang-filled, regional dialects, and yet Davie Mitchell’s two main stories (“A

Traditional Sunday Breakfast” and “Bad Blood”) are among the two most shocking and graphic stories in the whole novel. This contrast is deliberate, highlighting how even relatively respectable-seeming people like Davie Mitchell may be hiding dark sides below the surface.

In this quote, Davie Mitchell wryly observes that most people see “opportunism” as a positive word, continuing with the theme of society’s underlying selfishness that runs throughout the novel. Davie himself knows the consequences of selfishness well, since he contracted HIV after having sex with a woman that Venters raped after he was already infected. Venters’s actions make him one of the most selfish characters in the story, and Davie Mitchell’s own story shows the consequences of that selfishness.

☛ The guys are looking embarrassed, really shit up by the crowd that’s developed. It’s sortay like, feeding off itself.

Related Characters: Kelly (speaker), Rent Boy, Begbie, Alison

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 275

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the reaction of a large male group of workers after one of them starts catcalling Kelly, and then things escalate until the scene draws an audience. The scene represents a major turning point for Kelly as she starts to feel less and less comfortable just accepting the sexism that society throws her way. One of the most interesting elements of the passage is the reaction of the other workers who don’t catcall Kelly. At first, they seem to tacitly encourage the worker who catcalled Kelly, but soon after the public opinion turns against the catcaller, the other workers start to distance themselves from him. Crucially, however, none of the workers takes decisive action until the foreman comes and tells them to get back to work. This shows how both popular opinion and authority figures can sway people’s minds.

While Rent Boy and his friends aren’t around for the scene, it has clear parallels to how they too hesitate to criticize their friends in public, even someone with views as extreme as Begbie’s. While this passage shows how some people will remain as bystanders instead of taking action, it also provides hope by showing how Kelly’s situation managed to rally support from a crowd of total strangers.

Home Quotes

☛ It aw started tae go wrong fir the perr bastard whin we came back up here. It nivir stoaped gaun wrong eftir that. Perr Matty.

Related Characters: Rent Boy (speaker), Matty

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 288

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is Rent Boy’s reaction to learning how his friend Matty died. Matty was in a more advanced stage of HIV than anyone realized, and he ended up catching an infection from the feces of a cat he spontaneously adopted, causing a deadly neurological condition. Matty and Rent Boy were together in London, so when Rent Boy says that things went wrong for Matty after coming “back up here,” he means Leith.


Rent Boy’s quote seems to suggest that there’s something about the environment in working-class, economically disadvantaged Leith that encourages reckless and potentially life-threatening behavior. On the one hand, it’s possible to be skeptical of Rent Boy’s claim, given that he’s an unreliable narrator and that, like many other characters, he often tries to find a scapegoat to take the blame when things go wrong. Nevertheless, the title of this chapter (“Home”), combined with the events that happen later in the chapter make it clear that on his trip back home, Rent Boy considers the ways his hometown shaped him, and often not for the better.

☛ –Ah well, ah’ll leave yis tae it. Keep up the trainspottin mind! He staggered oaf, his rasping, drunkard’s cackles filling the desolate barn. Ah noticed that Begbie seemed strangely subdued and uncomfortable. He wis turned away fae us.

It wis only then ah realised thit the auld wino wis Begbie’s faither.

Related Characters: Rent Boy (speaker), Begbie

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 309


Explanation and Analysis

While Rent Boy and Begbie are wandering around an abandoned old train station in Leith, an old drunk man approaches them and asks if they're trainspotting, then he laughs (because there are no more trains to watch in the abandoned station). Shortly afterward, Rent Boy realizes that the old man was actually Begbie's father. In the novel, trains symbolize progress and hope, so the lack of trains in the abandoned Leith station suggests stagnation and lack of hope. When the old man tells Begbie and Rent Boy to "keep up the trainspottin mind," he seems to be telling them to hold on to hope even in a situation where it makes no sense to have hope. This seemingly optimistic advice is much bleaker when it comes from a drunken old man who seems trapped to wander the abandon station, suggesting that all his hopeful "trainspottin" hasn't gotten him anywhere—and that Rent Boy and Begbie's won't get them anywhere, either. Thus, his advice conveys hopelessness rather than helpfulness.

☛ —It's the fuckin best. You ken the Mother Superior, Rents. Ah believe in the free market whin it comes tae drugs. Ah've goat tae gic the NHS its due though. Since ah hud this pin oaf n went oan the maintenance therapy ah've started tae believe thit the state kin compete wi private enterprise in oor industry, n produce a satisfyin product at low cost tae the consumer.

Related Characters: Johnny Swan (speaker), Rent Boy

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 310

Explanation and Analysis

Rent Boy visits Johnny Swan after Johnny has his leg amputated. After running out of veins to inject heroin, Johnny made the reckless decision to try injecting an artery instead, and this led to him getting gangrene and having his leg amputated as a result. As Johnny Swan talks to Rent Boy, he tries to convince him that he's still the same old "Mother Superior" from the very beginning of the book, despite all that has happened to him recently.


Johnny Swan's speech in this passage wryly observes how the illegal drug trade compares with both the legal free market and with government healthcare. As a drug dealer,

Johnny himself was a kind of businessperson, and his language about production costs illustrates how his work as a dealer wasn't all that different from running a legitimate business. His speech thus suggests that the illicit drug trade is just as embedded in broader social and economic systems as other, legitimate types of business.

☛ Tommy looks well. It's terrifying. He's gaunny die. Sometime between the next few weeks and next fifteen years, Tommy will be no more. The chances are that ah'll be exactly the same. The difference is, we ken this wi Tommy.

Related Characters: Rent Boy (speaker), Tommy

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis



This passage describes Rent Boy's reaction upon coming home to Leith from London and seeing Tommy, who has recently contracted HIV. Rent Boy feels particularly uneasy about Tommy's situation because it was Rent Boy himself who gave Tommy his first dose of heroin, arguably setting off the chain of events that led to Tommy's addiction and subsequent infection with HIV. As this passage shows, perhaps Rent Boy's real fear is that as he looks Tommy in the face, he has to confront how his own lifestyle will likely lead him to a similar situation. When Rent Boy says that likely "ah'll be exactly the same," he acknowledges that his own heroin use means that he too has a decent chance of dying within the next 15 years, either due to HIV or an overdose.


Rent Boy's responsibility for Tommy's fate is one of the most difficult moral questions of the story. On the one hand, Rent Boy helped enable Tommy's addiction by giving him heroin, which would make him indirectly responsible for Tommy's grim fate. On the other hand, however, Tommy's personality seemed to predispose him to addiction, and so it's also possible that on a certain level Tommy's fate is inevitable, just as Rent Boy has to face that his own fate may be inevitable if he continues to use heroin.

Exit Quotes

☞ No. He had to stay in control, There was too much at stake. There was everything at stake. There is nobody looking at Begbie though. Those who are not oblivious to him, can feel the vibes he is giving out. They employ that special talent people have: Pretending nutters are invisible. Even his companions won't meet his gaze.

Related Characters: Rent Boy, Begbie

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 326



Explanation and Analysis



This quote describes Begbie's paranoia as he and the others prepare to take a bus to London for a big heroin deal. Everything about this chapter has an air of finality to it, from the title ("Exit") to the stressed-out attitudes of all the characters. While most sections of the story have a first-person narrator, the final section has an omniscient third-person narrator who describes the actions and thoughts of the characters.

This shifting perspective helps to give more of an outside, objective view of the characters. In particular, this passage shows how to an outsider, Begbie isn't just an annoyance but a "nutter." Even strangers, however, recognize what Rent Boy and the others learned long ago: that it's often safest to avoid engaging with Begbie at all. Ultimately, this suggests that Rent Boy's failure to stand up to the violent and bullying Begbie is not just a personal failing on Rent Boy's part but also reflective of society's unwillingness to address social ills—in other words, it's easier to "Pretend[] nutters are invisible" than it is to identify and address the cause of their destructive behavior.

☞ Ironically, it was Begbie who was the key. Ripping off your mates was the highest offence in his book, and he would demand the severest penalty. Renton had used Begbie, used him to burn his boats completely and utterly. It was Begbie who ensured he could never return.

Related Characters: Rent Boy, Begbie

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 343

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes Rent Boy's thought process as he decides to take all the money from the heroin deal that he and his Leith friends just completed and start a new life in Amsterdam. Rent Boy's decision to betray his former allies may seem shocking at first, but in another sense, it is the logical next step for Rent Boy's character after growing apart from not just the people in his hometown but from Leith itself.

Begbie's father is the character who gives the book its title, and so it makes sense that Begbie plays a central role in motivating the climax of the book. Whereas previously, Rent Boy's loyalty to Begbie kept him trapped in Leith and tied to the violent version of masculinity that Begbie represents, Rent Boy's decision to betray Begbie gives him the freedom to leave Leith—but at the cost of never being able to go back.

☞ Now, free from them all, for good, he could be what he wanted to be. He'd stand or fall alone. This thought both terrified and excited him as he contemplated life in Amsterdam.

Related Characters: Rent Boy, Spud

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 344

Explanation and Analysis

These are the final lines of the novel. The quote describes Rent Boy's thoughts as he sets out to make a new life in Amsterdam with the drug money he took from his friends. The lines suggest an open-ended conclusion to the story, where Rent Boy's future is truly uncertain. On the one hand, Rent Boy's life up until this point has generally followed a cyclic path, with each attempt to kick his heroin habit followed by a subsequent relapse. It's possible to read the ending as yet another instance of Rent Boy deluding himself that this time things will be different. On the other hand, however, the ending also suggests the possibility of a new beginning for Rent Boy: in moving to Amsterdam, he figuratively and literally leaves orbit of his small social circle for the first time in his life. The ambiguous nature of the

ending reflects Rent Boy's own uncertainty as he considers his new life in Amsterdam, where he will no longer be able

to blame his acquaintances for any of the choices he makes (or the consequences of those choices).



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

KICKING

The Skag Boys, Jean-Claude Van Damme and Mother Superior. In Leith (the Edinburgh, Scotland neighborhood where most of the book takes place), Sick Boy is shaking and sweating while the narrator (Rent Boy) tries to watch a Jean-Claude Van Damme movie. Sick Boy interrupts the movie to say he has to go see *Mother Superior* (Johnny Swan). Rent Boy wants to keep watching the movie, but Sick Boy complains that he's suffering. At last, Rent Boy agrees to go.

It's a cold day for August, and Rent Boy and Sick Boy have trouble hailing a taxi. There's a group of men in tracksuits and bomber jackets that has been waiting even longer, but when a taxi shows up, Sick Boy tries to jump ahead of them. The men start arguing with Sick Boy, but he and Rent Boy take the taxi anyway. The taxi driver isn't amused, and Rent Boy is also angry that now he'll have to watch out for the men in tracksuits. But all Sick Boy cares about is making it to *Mother Superior*.

Mother Superior is the nickname of Johnny Swan, a drug dealer who used to be good friends with Rent Boy but who became more businesslike after he started dealing. Johnny isn't a big-time dealer, so he still uses as well. As Rent Boy and Sick Boy climb the stairs at *Mother Superior's* home, Rent Boy also starts to sweat. When they make it to the top, Johnny is already high. Raymie and Alison are also there.

Rent Boy asks Raymie to put on some music, so Raymie puts on a live version of "Heroin" by Lou Reed. Sick Boy helps Alison take a speedball of **heroin** ("skag") and cocaine. Johnny offers Sick Boy a shot—but only if he uses Johnny's equipment. But Sick Boy only uses his own needles for hygiene reasons. Johnny acts offended, but he says he was only joking earlier. They both know people who have AIDS. At last, Sick Boy shoots up and starts to feel relaxed again.

The novel begins with some of the main characters watching videos, suggesting how important pop culture is in the novel while also establishing Rent Boy as an observer (he will be the narrator for much of the novel). Even more important to the characters than the videos, however, is heroin, and this scene depicts the severe negative effects of withdrawal. The characters' nickname for their dealer, "Mother Superior," shows how heroin has become so much like a religion to them that even they themselves jokingly acknowledge it. Jean-Claude Van Damme is a famous martial artist who starred in action movies.



This brief episode establishes that while Rent Boy and Sick Boy both depend on heroin, Sick Boy is the more reckless of the two. His lack of concern about upsetting the men in tracksuits suggests that he only thinks in the short term and isn't worried about how his actions might come back to haunt him later.



This passage depicts how Rent Boy and Sick Boy don't use heroin in isolation but as part of a community. The boundaries between relationships get blurry as friendship, drug use, and business all come together.



*Lou Reed is a real musician who famously sang about addiction in the 1960s and 1970s. At times, musicians like Reed arguably blur the line between being a cautionary tale against drug use and glamorizing addiction. The characters in *Trainspotting* have a similarly conflicted relationship with heroin, seeking out the high even as they recognize its real dangers, which include HIV infection.*



Alison mentions her friend Kelly, who had an abortion recently and is depressed, and says that someone should go visit her at some point. She suggests Rent Boy (whose real name is Mark Rents, although Alison is one of the few people who calls him Mark). Rent Boy asks why he has to see Kelly, and Alison explains that everyone knows Kelly likes Rent Boy, which surprises him. Sick Boy says Rent Boy knows nothing about women, which annoys Rent Boy.

The group sits and talks for a while, and then Alison and Sick Boy get up, seemingly to go have sex. Raymie, meanwhile, is off in his own little world, drawing on the wall in crayon. Rent Boy thinks about seeing Kelly. He thinks he might be too squeamish to have sex with her if he thinks about the details of her recent abortion, and so he admits he might not know much about women after all. Rent Boy also feels too high to see Kelly, so when he leaves, he goes back to watching the Jean-Claude Van Damme movie instead.

Junk Dilemmas No. 63. The narrator (Rent Boy), in the middle of a high, describes being afraid of the wallpaper in the room they're currently in. The wallpaper looks like it was put up by an elderly person. He starts cooking up another shot.

The First Day of the Edinburgh Festival. On his third try, Rent Boy feels that he has successfully kicked his addiction, having taken his last shot that morning. He rents a big bare room and heads up with some supplies, including food, magazines, and some Valium he stole from his Ma.

As Rent Boy settles into his bare room, he begins to feel the familiar symptoms of withdrawal, which start like a panic attack and then spread through his whole body. Eventually, the pain gets so bad that Rent Boy wants a little bit of **heroin** to stop himself from crashing too hard. He calls Raymie, but Raymie is away, and one of his roommates answers. This means if Rent Boy wants heroin, he'll have to interact with Mike Forrester, who lives all the way out in Muirhouse and has low-quality product. Rent Boy takes a bus to Muirhouse.

Although the characters are mainly in their 20s, several of them have "Boy" in their nicknames (including Rent Boy, Sick Boy, and their collective title: The Skag Boys). "Boy" can suggest youthful exuberance, but it also suggests that the characters are naïve and powerless, in part because of their addictions.



The novel largely follows a male point of view, and here Rent Boy shows how he doesn't understand women and how that lack of understanding makes him uncomfortable. Instead, he retreats to the comfort of the hypermasculine Jean-Claude Van Damme movie, which he can watch from a safe distance.



There are several short sections of the book titled "Junk Dilemmas" and rather than tell a story, they generally focus more on setting a scene and conveying a mood, placing readers inside the mind of a person experiencing heroin addiction.



The beginning of this section is humorous because Rent Boy feels like he's kicked his addiction, when in fact, he just took heroin that morning and plans to replace heroin with Valium (a potentially addictive prescription drug).



This passage depicts the severe negative effects of heroin withdrawal, which help to explain why kicking an addiction is so difficult in the first place. Rent Boy's contradictory thinking—that in order to quit heroin, he needs a little bit more heroin—illustrates the cycle of addiction.



On the bus, someone is listening to “Golden Years” by David Bowie with the volume so high that Rent Boy can hear it. At last, the bus makes it to Forrester’s apartment. Forrester takes a while to answer the door and doesn’t seem particularly happy to see Rent Boy. A woman with a broken leg in a cast and greasy dyed-blond hair sits on the couch. In a chair next to Forrester is a man with sinister-looking eyes. Forrester doesn’t introduce these people to Rent Boy.

Several of the musicians that the book mentions, including David Bowie, famously experienced periods of addiction. During Rent Boy’s earlier visit to Johnny Swan, the atmosphere was social, but when he’s surrounded by strangers, Rent Boy sees how he himself might look to a stranger, and the atmosphere seems more menacing.



Forrester doesn’t seem to notice Rent Boy’s urgency—he’s feeling really sick now—so he interrupts to ask Forrester if he’s ready to sell. Forrester gets irrationally angry. Rent Boy figures Forrester wants to create the impression that he’s a real tough guy. Also, Rent Boy once had sex with a woman Forrester liked. At last, Forrester is ready to sell, so Rent Boy gets out some money. Forrester pulls out two white capsules that he claims are opium suppositories.

This passage explores the social dynamic during a drug deal. Rent Boy’s strong dependence on heroin gives Forrester an unusual amount of power over him, and he exploits this power in petty ways. When he does finally hand over the suppositories, however, Forrester immediately loses his power over Rent Boy, which is why he’s so reluctant to give him the capsules.



Rent Boy doesn’t want to accept the suppositories at first, but Forrester says they’re exactly what Rent Boy needs. Eventually, Rent Boy gives in and goes to the toilet to insert his suppository. When he gets back, Forrester tells him the suppository might take a while to take effect. Forrester seems disappointed to have lost his power over Rent Boy, and Rent Boy soon decides to leave.

Because Rent Boy and Forrester aren’t on good terms, Forrester offers Rent Boy the suppositories, which seem to be one of his less desirable products. The fact that Rent Boy accepts them suggests how desperate he is.



As Rent Boy goes down the stairs of the apartment, he feels a little better, although he figures it’s probably still the placebo effect. All of a sudden, his guts feel loose, and he remembers he hasn’t emptied his bowels in almost a week. He starts defecating wet diarrhea in his pants, then he clenches his sphincter as soon as he realizes what’s happening. He doesn’t want to go back to Forrester, so he heads over to a local shopping center with a toilet.

Bodily fluids and gross imagery play a huge part in the book. Partly, the grossness contributes to the realism of the story, but it also helps to highlight the absurdity of being addicted to heroin and how people looking for a fix will put up with things that other people might find unbearable.



Rent Boy enters a shop and heads to the restroom, but a man inside stops him from using the toilet because it’s blocked. He thinks Rent Boy wants to shoot up **heroin** in the stall. Rent Boy gets angry, and at last the man lets him pass. Rent Boy sits on the toilet and empties his bowels, killing a fly in his hand and using it to write on the stall wall.

One of the main paradoxes of Rent Boy’s character is that he’s a vegetarian—but has no trouble killing animals himself, like the fly he smashes on the wall. This suggests that Rent Boy is hypocritical in some ways and possibly even an unreliable narrator, as well.



When Rent Boy is done on the toilet, he goes searching in the bowl for his suppositories and finds them. Outside the stall, people get impatient. Rent Boy considers just swallowing the suppositories to save himself the trouble, but then he figures that now that his bowels are empty, he can just try the suppositories again the normal way. He goes back to his new apartment to clean up.

When Rent Boy considers eating the suppositories that just came out of his own rectum with diarrhea, even he sees the absurdity of the situation. He recognizes that he has problems in his life but doesn’t yet feel enough urgency to change anything.



In Overdrive. A different narrator (Sick Boy) says he's tired of Rent Boy talking so much to him. Rent Boy wants to go back to his place and watch videos, but Sick Boy wants to stay on the bridge where they are and watch women in leggings.

Some English women of East Asian descent come by and seem to be tourists, so Sick Boy offers them directions, trying to do a suave Sean Connery voice. But they're going to see a production of a play by Bertolt Brecht and are more impressed that Rent Boy knows his other plays. The women agree to meet them later for drinks, but Sick Boy is annoyed at Rent Boy. In fact, Sick Boy is tired of all his friends, feeling like they're holding him back. In his head, he goes off on a racist and homophobic rant about how it's him against the world.

Growing Up In Public. Nina feels that her mother resents her but isn't sure why. Her mother hints that she should go make tea for Auntie Alice, and as last Nina takes the hint and goes to make it. Nina's Uncle Andy has just died, and although she liked him when she was younger, she finds grief very "uncool." She doesn't need to change her clothes for mourning because she always wears black anyway.

The kettle goes off, and Nina brings the tea to Auntie Alice. Her relatives talk about death and about how at least Uncle Andy died quickly from heart trouble. The doorbell rings, and it's the family doctor. He tries to act dignified, and all Nina's aunts and uncles fawn over him. Just then, Nina realizes her period is starting. She rushes to the bathroom.

On the toilet, Nina inspects her bleeding and notices that it hasn't quite made it through to her leggings. She can't find any tampons or pads because Auntie Alice is post-menopausal, so she improvises with toilet paper.

Nina gets ready to go back to the crowd, mostly just waiting for a chance to ask her mother for money. She needs the money to go see a band with her friends in Edinburgh. As she leaves the bathroom, she passes Uncle Andy's corpse, which is still in bed under the covers, his mouth hanging wide open as if he's in a drunken argument. She decides to stop and steal some clean underwear from Auntie Alice, then goes back to the bathroom to change.

While *Rent Boy* narrates many stories in the book, the novel combines the perspectives of several different characters. Although it's possible to read some of the sections in isolation like short stories, they have connections to one another that tie them together as a novel. Here, for example, Sick Boy references videos like the ones he and Rent Boy were watching at the very beginning of the book.



All of the characters in the novel are flawed to some extent, but Sick Boy is perhaps one of the most conflicted characters in the story. His struggles with addiction and with others not accepting him can be sympathetic, but he frequently looks down on the people around him, whether they're total strangers or his closest friends.



Some segments of the novel are only tangentially related to the main characters. These sections help build a sense of place and community, suggesting that the main characters are part of a larger world and not always at the very center of it.



Death haunts the main characters due to their addictions and the risks that accompany them, like overdosing or contracting HIV. This story shows how death can come suddenly even for people who don't use heroin. Nina's difficulty to accept mortality shows her similarities to the main characters.



Rent Boy had his own bathroom emergency in an earlier story. These sections emphasize how sometimes it's impossible to control the human body.



Uncle Andy's corpse forces Nina to directly confront the issue of death, despite her efforts to avoid it earlier. Perhaps Nina's theft of her aunt's underwear is her way of proving to herself that she isn't afraid of death (since the corpse is in the same room as the underwear drawer).



When Nina gets back to the group, her relatives are drinking alcohol instead of tea. She feels some of her relatives must be relieved that Uncle Andy died of his third heart attack, since now they won't have to be nervous whenever they hear the phone ring. Nina doesn't like her cousins, including Mark (Rent Boy), who is supposedly into drugs.

Nina's cousin Geoff comes over to talk to her. He says it's a shame about Uncle Andy, and they talk for a little while about school. He's a recent English literature graduate who is currently receiving unemployment. Suddenly, Nina realizes Geoff is a little drunk and that he's flirting with her. He offers to take her out to a pub. Nina hesitates but ultimately says yes because she wants an excuse to leave her aunt's house.

As Nina gets ready to leave, she remembers she left her gloves in Uncle Andy's room, so she goes back to get them. While she's in the room, she swears she sees Uncle Andy twitch. She feels his hand and it's still warm. She calls everyone up to check whether Uncle Andy is actually alive. One of her other uncles feels Andy's sweaty forehead and starts shouting that he's not actually dead.

The doctor comes up, however, and confirms that Uncle Andy has no heartbeat. It turns out someone just left the electric blanket on by accident. Geoff gets angry at the uncle who shouted Andy was alive, for all that he put Auntie Alice through. Meanwhile, Nina laughs until she starts crying as she remembers what it was like to be young and happy in her aunt and uncle's house.

Victory on New Year's Day. On New Year's Eve, Begbie greets Stevie with a hug. But Stevie is preoccupied about how Stella back in London hasn't called him yet. Franco tells Stevie to loosen up, which isn't difficult because everyone at the New Year's Eve party is high.

Stevie sees Rent Boy and Sick Boy at the party, and Sick Boy complains about how everything in the world has gotten too safe lately, from sex to soccer. Rent Boy agrees with him, which is unusual. But it doesn't take long before the two are arguing again.

Rent Boy reminds Stevie that he'll be staying with him for a while in February. Stevie hoped Rent Boy had forgotten about this. He likes Rent Boy, but Rent Boy is too into drugs for Stevie's taste. New Year's Eve parties begin to feel like work to Stevie.

Like Rent Boy (who turns out to be her cousin), Nina is cynical and sees the dark side of the people around her and how their seeming grief may also be mixed with other feelings, including even relief.



Nina doesn't seem to like Geoff that much, but she feels trapped at the funeral, and Geoff is her best chance out. Geoff is one of many characters in the book drawing unemployment benefits, which shows the extent of the difficult economic conditions in Scotland at the time.



While Nina tried to prove she wasn't afraid of Uncle Andy's corpse earlier, this time, she can't resist it. At first, the story leaves it deliberately ambiguous whether Nina really sees her Uncle Andy move or whether her anxiety is simply affecting her perception.



This section shows that Nina was letting her imagination get the better of her, revealing that perhaps beneath her tough attitude, she has still experienced a lot of grief or at least confusion at her uncle's death.



New Year's Eve suggests both beginnings and endings, and so it's appropriate that Stevie seems to be on the verge of starting (or failing to start) a new relationship.



Most of the characters speak in some form of a Scottish dialect, so soccer is "fitba" ("football") to them. The emphasis on how the characters speak relates back to the novel's focus on Scottish identity.



Like Nina, Stevie finds Rent Boy's heroin use somewhat disturbing, showing how Rent Boy's lifestyle can isolate him from other people around him, even friends.



Stevie thinks about his last conversation with Stella—he confessed his feelings to her at a pub, but she got freaked out and said she'd have to call him back later. Now, at the party, Nicola comes in, and Spud follows her. They start talking to Stevie, and before he knows it, he's telling them everything about Stella. He's worried he's boring them, and Spud eventually leaves, but Nicola at least stays to offer some advice to Stevie about Stella.

Stevie gets pulled back into the main room of the party, where people are singing. Stevie doesn't join in the signing at first, but other people keep encouraging him. Suddenly, someone says that there's a phone call for Stevie. Stevie springs off the couch to take the call, and it turns out to be Stella in London.

Stella reminds Stevie that she was just at her sister's, which is why she didn't call earlier. She says she thought about what Stevie said earlier and realized she loves Stevie too. Stevie is so happy that he cries and says he loves her too. She says the money is running out on her payphone call, so they hang up. Stevie leaves to pee, feeling euphoric.

When Stevie gets back to the party, he puts the Proclaimers' *Sunshine on Leith* onto the turntable. The other party guests are a little annoyed at first by the sudden change, but they're soon happy to see Stevie so enthusiastic.

Later that evening, Stevie heads to the **train** station to go meet Stella. Along the way, a bunch of soccer hooligans try to taunt Stevie, and one even punches him, but Stevie just wishes him happy New Year's. The hooligans leave to harass someone else. At last, Stella steps off the train. She and Stevie kiss until almost everyone else has left the station.

It Goes Without Saying. Rent Boy is hanging out with some friends, including Sick Boy, Spud, and Matty, when they hear a loud noise. Lesley comes into the room screaming about how Dawn is "away." Everyone gets angry at her for shouting, but when Sick Boy goes out to investigate, he comes back looking shaken. Rent Boy goes to investigate himself and finds that Dawn, who is just a baby, is lying face down dead on a cot.

Stevie's last meeting with Stella seems to suggest that she won't react well to his romantic overtures and that he is waiting for a call in vain. Later sections establish that Spud is famous for not understanding women very well, so it makes sense that he leaves in the middle of the story and doesn't know how to give advice like Nicola does.



Stevie's obsession keeps him from interacting with the people around him. In many ways, this story shows how love—or perhaps hope—can be their own forms of addiction.



Somewhat surprisingly, Stevie gets exactly the reply he hoped for, suggesting that his anxiety caused him to exaggerate his earlier doubts. Many of the stories in the book hinge on a character not recognizing or understanding something until later.



The Proclaimers are perhaps the most famous musicians ever to come from Leith, and so this section suggests that Stevie's happiness about Stella's call makes him feel better about the place where he lives.



The train is a hopeful symbol that symbolizes mobility, not just in the literal sense but in the sense of being able to move forward in life. While other sections of the book can be cynical, this one has an undeniably hopeful ending.



The disappearance of Dawn contrasts sharply with the end of the previous story. Whereas the previous story showed hope on New Year's Eve, the death of Dawn (since dawn also traditionally symbolizes hope) suggests that the happiness of the previous ending doesn't apply to everyone.



Spud and Matty panic because they can't call the police—the place is full of drugs. Sick Boy tries to take the lead and says nobody gets to leave until they figure things out. Nobody wants to flush their supply down the toilet if they don't have to. Matty suggests that since Dawn was Lesley's kid, maybe it's her responsibility to take care of everything. Spud disagrees and says Lesley needs their help. Sick Boy announces that he's going to stay sober for the rest of his life, and Rent Boy almost believes him.

Matty changes his mind and says Lesley isn't a bad parent and **heroin** didn't have anything to do with it. He says Dawn could easily have died from "cot death" (sudden infant death syndrome). Everyone agrees, so Rent Boy goes back into the main room and tells Lesley that Dawn died of cot death. Lesley says she needs a shot of heroin. A part of Rent Boy enjoys having the power to make everyone else wait their turn so that Lesley can get the first shot.

Junk Dilemmas No. 64. Rent Boy's mother shouts at him from the other side of a door. He loves his mother but doesn't want to get up to go to the door of his apartment. Instead, he cooks up another shot for himself. He decides he'll have to make time to visit his parents sometime soon.

Her Man. Second Prize and Tommy are at a pub when suddenly, a curly-haired man in the pub punches a woman. The woman taunts him, so he punches her again, and she bleeds. Second Prize regrets coming—he just wanted a quiet drink.

The curly-haired man and woman keep arguing. The man seems ready to hit the woman again, so Tommy intervenes to tell him to cool it. The man starts arguing with Tommy, so Tommy says they should take things outside. The man declines. Suddenly, the woman starts shouting "That's ma fackin man yir talkin tae!" at Tommy. Tommy punches the man, anyway, knocking him off his chair. A fight breaks out and Second Prize gets involved too.

Tommy and Second Prize eventually leave the pub, cursing everyone in it. Second Prize feels queasy about what he just saw, but the next day he'll boast about winning a fight to all his friends.

The characters' different reactions to the events highlight their different priorities. Sick Boy is the most pragmatic, but he's also the most selfish and uncaring. Meanwhile, Spud is the most empathetic out of all of them. Matty looks for someone else to blame, while Rent Boy mostly stands back as a passive observer, as he often does.



Although it's reasonable that Dawn died of sudden infant death syndrome, the novel leaves some ambiguity about whether that's actually the case or whether that's just the story that the main characters agree on for Lesley's sake. The characters all seem hesitant to confront the potential consequences of their actions head on.



The theme of paralysis comes up several times in the novel and will make more sense after a later section reveals some details about Rent Boy's family life.



Several of the stories explore ways that relationships between men and women can go wrong, and this story provides one of the more extreme examples.



Even though Tommy and Second Prize are trying to protect the woman, she is so dedicated to upholding traditional gender norms—or perhaps so conditioned to accepting his abuse—that she stands by her "man" even after he violently punches her. This section provides a darkly humorous depiction of how strong these ideas about gender can be.



Although the characters witness horrific things over the course of the story, they frequently repress them.



Speedy Recruitment. Spud and Rent Boy are at an American-themed pub. They talk about how they both have to interview for the same job. Neither of them wants the job, but they have to take the interview seriously or else they risk losing their unemployment benefits. Rent Boy explains that the trick is to just pretend to be interested instead of saying no, then he just acts like himself, since he'll never get a job that way.

Rent Boy's interview is first. He hates all the people he meets at the company and thinks it takes a lot of people just to interview for a simple job as a porter. On his application, he lied about going to a fancy school, since he figured they only want to give porter jobs to people with bad educations. But one of interviewers actually went to the school Rent Boy lied about attending, and he figures he can help out a fellow alumnus.

Rent Boy panics that he might actually get the awful job. When an interviewer asks him to explain the gaps on his résumé, Rent Boy says that he is recovering from **heroin** addiction and wants to be honest about it with any future employers. This seems to make the interviewing team nervous, and they tell him they have other people to see.

Spud's interview later in the afternoon gets off to a rougher start. Instead of lying or avoiding the issue, Spud admits that he didn't go to the fancy school he put on his application. He says that he wants the job for the money and that his biggest strength is his sense of humor. The interviewers thank him at the end and send him away.

Spud and Rent Boy meet at the pub afterward. Spud worries maybe he did too well and will get the job. Rent Boy says they can celebrate with a drink and some speed.

RELAPSING

Scotland Takes Drugs In Psychic Defense. Tommy has the choice between buying his girlfriend, Lizzy, a birthday present or buying Iggy Pop concert tickets, and he chooses the concert tickets. Lizzy is mad, so Tommy doesn't mention the concert to her again. But when Lizzy asks him to go to the movies one night, he has to mention that he already has tickets to see Iggy Pop with Davie Mitchell that night.

This section highlights the absurdity of bureaucracy. While Spud and especially Rent Boy are morally ambiguous characters who sometimes do questionable things, this section arguably portrays them not as scammers but as Robin Hoods taking back from a government and larger society that have failed them.



Rent Boy is the most well-read out of all his friends, and this makes it easier for him to manipulate people of a higher social class. This section explores the prejudices that many people hold about education and how a person's education should affect the jobs they're qualified for.



While it seems at first like Rent Boy might eventually face the consequences of his lies, he smoothly gets out of it, showing how ineffective the bureaucracy is. Rent Boy uses the stigma against addiction to his advantage.



Spud answers the questions honestly. The interviewers are shocked, suggesting that dishonesty is actually the norm during job interviews. Spud's performance also shows that perhaps Rent Boy overthinks things and that it doesn't take that much to outsmart the bureaucracy after all.



Although the ending of the section is relatively cheerful, it hints at how the characters are trapped in a cycle.



Iggy Pop is another musician who publicly went through a major period of addiction. The success and survival he achieved despite his addiction makes it clear why he would be a hero to characters like Tommy and Davie Mitchell.



The night before the Iggy Pop concert, Tommy invites Rent Boy over to watch Chuck Norris videos. The next day, he goes to visit his Ma to get money for the concert. She lectures him about the dangers of drug use, but he gets his money. That night, Tommy and some friends go to a pub before the concert to drink cider and do speed.

As Tommy gets high, he loses track of what's going on. Davie Mitchell says something about money, and Tommy thinks he sounds angry. The next thing Tommy knows, he's fighting with Davie Mitchell, but he can't feel anything. Someone eventually kicks them out of the bar, so they make their way into the Iggy Pop concert and push their way to the front. Tommy dances like crazy. Iggy Pop changes a line in a song from "America takes drugs in psychic defense" to "Scotland takes drugs in psychic defense," and this makes Tommy stop dancing for a moment.

The Glass. Rent Boy's friend Begbie has a lot of problems. He's moody and easy to make angry. The two of them get invited to a party with a plus-one invite, so Begbie brings June and Rent Boy brings Hazel, and they all meet at a pub beforehand. Rent Boy has been seeing Hazel on and off for four years. They rarely have sex because Rent Boy is often high, and Hazel doesn't enjoy most sex after being sexually abused by her father as a girl. But the two of them have an understanding.

When Rent Boy and Hazel arrive at the pub, Begbie greets them enthusiastically. June and Hazel don't know each other well but start their own conversation. As Rent Boy talks and drinks with Begbie, he feels a little uncomfortable—Begbie keeps poking him hard to get his attention and acting out violent things he saw in a video on Rent Boy. They start talking about a friend who died of AIDS. Rent Boy thinks Begbie is being too crude but doesn't say it.

Another group at the pub is being loud and obnoxious. All of a sudden, Begbie takes his glass and throws it at them, hitting one of them in the head and knocking him over. The rowdy group looks ready to fight, but they didn't see Begbie throw the glass, so Begbie comes over shouting that nobody gets to leave the pub until they find out who threw that glass. He suggests calling the police to find the culprit, but no one in the other group wants to do that. Rent Boy helps the injured man with his bleeding.

Tommy makes plans to go to the concert instead of going to the movies with Lizzy, suggesting how he priorities his friendships over his romantic relationship.



Although Tommy enjoys himself at the concert, it's also such a blur that he barely knows what's going on. The line about "tak[ing] drugs in psychic defense," which gives this section its title, suggests that characters like Tommy don't necessarily take drugs just for the thrill of it but as a way to cope with things happening around them that they don't have any other defense against—or at least that's how Tommy justifies it to himself.



Begbie provides an extreme example of the chauvinism that many other characters demonstrate. While Rent Boy tries to make sense of his complicated relationships with women but sometimes acts selfishly, Begbie feels no shame at all about always putting himself first in a relationship.



Everything about Begbie is rude and overbearing. He dominates the conversation with Rent Boy, using his gestures to assert his control. Begbie establishes his interest in violence, and the crass way he talks about his late friend suggests a broader lack of respect for others.



In this section, Begbie proves that he isn't just talk—at the slightest provocation, his bragging about violence can turn into real violence. Begbie acts outrageously after throwing the glass, as though begging for someone to catch him so that he has an excuse to perform even more violence. Meanwhile, Rent Boy shows his disapproval indirectly by helping the bleeding man.



All of a sudden, Rent Boy sees a punch coming for him and turns just in time to avoid getting most of the impact. One of the rowdy men intervenes to say that Rent Boy has nothing to do with the broken glass. Rent Boy, Hazel, and June slip out of the pub. Begbie already went outside in the confusion, and he and a new acquaintance from the pub are kicking some guy on the ground. When they're done kicking that guy, Begbie turns to his new acquaintance and punches one of his teeth out. June asks what he's doing, and Begbie says the guy he just punched and his friends inside are the same people who stabbed his brother.

Rent Boy, however, knows this is a lie: Begbie's brother got stabbed years ago and wasn't even that badly hurt. As they walk away, Hazel says Begbie has something seriously wrong with him. Rent Boy awkwardly lies to try to justify Begbie's behavior. He muses to himself that Begbie is like a **heroin** addiction because there's no getting rid of him. Rent Boy doesn't even really like Begbie, but Begbie is a "mate," so there's nothing he can do about it.

A Disappointment. Begbie really doesn't like this guy who has been showing up in the pub lately when Begbie's there with his friends. One day this guy and a friend show up at the pub and put some money down for a game of pool. Begbie points out that someone else already has his name on the board and they're trying to cut the line. He waits to see their reaction, but they back down, disappointing Begbie.

Cock Problems. Rent Boy has such a hard time finding a vein for **heroin** that the previous day, he ended up using a prominent vein on his penis. Now, he hears a doorbell and assumes it's his landlord. Rent Boy liked his old landlord, who carried a lot of cash on him and was senile and easy to rob. But after he died, his son became stricter about collecting rent.

As it turns out, it's not the landlord but Tommy at the door, shouting through the mail slot. Rent Boy shoots up in his penis for the second time then begins to feel a little nauseous, not realizing how pure the **heroin** was. He tries to keep it together while going to answer the door. Tommy comes in and tells Rent Boy that he and Lizzy just broke up. Tommy feels conflicted about the breakup.

Rent Boy remembers being back in school and watching with some friends (including Begbie) while Lizzy ran a race. Rent Boy and his friends were all lying in the dirt, and they discovered that Begbie had secretly masturbated against the ground while watching the girls. Rent Boy realizes maybe this is more a Begbie memory than a Lizzy memory.

As with Tommy and Second Prize's earlier attempt to help the woman whose boyfriend was beating her, Rent Boy gets punished for trying to help. Begbie reveals that he seems to enjoy violence in all its forms and doesn't really care who is the victim. He quickly changes sides, allying himself with one man then turning the next second and punching his tooth out. This foreshadows the dangers of being friends with Begbie.



Although Rent Boy despises Begbie, Rent Boy's own loyalty, both to Leith and to masculine gender norms, prevents him from fully disavowing Begbie. As much as Rent Boy wants to see himself as above Begbie, his own contributions to protecting Begbie make him just as responsible in some ways.



This short story from Begbie's perspective confirms that there isn't some hidden depth to his character—he really does just enjoy violence for its own sake and will commit violence at any opportunity he gets. Begbie's shallowness as a character contrasts with the more nuanced personalities of some of his friends.



Although Rent Boy's nickname comes from his last name (Renton), it also signifies his status (since people who rent are generally lower class than people who own property).



This story shows the direct consequences of Tommy choosing to go to the Iggy Pop concert earlier instead of seeing a movie with Lizzy. While it's possible to read *Trainspotting* as a short story collection, the connections between stories ultimately make it more of a novel.



Begbie comes across as an almost comically unpleasant character, which makes Rent Boy's tolerance of him all the more surprising and morally suspect. Once again, Rent Boy's refusal to disavow Begbie makes him more like Begbie than he'd like to admit.



Back in the present, Tommy, who uses other drugs but isn't a **heroin** user, asks Rent Boy what it's like to take heroin. Rent Boy hesitates but feels that he owes Tommy an honest answer. Rent Boy says heroin makes life feel more real and helps him deal with the disappointment. He says it's an "honest" drug because it makes good feelings better, but it also makes bad feelings worse. Tommy doesn't quite believe all this, and even Rent Boy admits he'd give a different answer on a different day.

Rent Boy has already established himself as a capable liar. In fact, Rent Boy has lied so much to himself and others that in this passage, he seems to struggle to figure out what the truth even is. His need for heroin has become such a central part of him that he can find different ways to justify it..



Tommy says he wants a hit of **heroin**. Rent Boy refuses, but Tommy insists. The two of them get high together, and Tommy seems to really enjoy it. Afterward, Rent Boy says he won't give Tommy any more—that he should try to kick heroin while he still can. Rent Boy says this partly because doesn't have enough for himself. Tommy leaves, and Rent Boy has an itch on his penis, but he doesn't want to scratch it, fearing it'll get infected.

Rent Boy has conflicted feelings about introducing Tommy to heroin. Rent Boy knows how dependent on heroin he himself is, and he hesitates to inflict the same fate on Tommy. Ultimately, however, Rent Boy seems to take the individualist perspective, believing that what Tommy does with his own life isn't necessarily Rent Boy's business, for better or for worse.



Traditional Sunday Breakfast. Davie Mitchell wakes up in a strange bed full of his own vomit, urine, and excrement. He realizes he's at Gail's mother's house, and he tries to go back through his memories to figure out how he got there.

Davie Mitchell is a minor character who is only tangentially related to Rent Boy's circle of friends. The contrast between the gross bed sheets and the nice room shows how people like Davie Mitchell struggle to fit into polite, mainstream society.



Davie figures out it's Sunday. He remembers that yesterday, he, Tommy, Rent Boy, and some other friends went to a big soccer match. There, they did acid, speed, and dope, and they also drank lots of vodka. That's where Davie Mitchell's memory gets foggy, but he figures Gail met up with them at some point. Davie Mitchell and Gail have been together for five weeks but haven't had sex.

Although it isn't clear at this point, Davie isn't actually a heroin user. As this passage shows, however, abstaining from heroin may not make much difference if a person uses alcohol and other drugs.



In the present, Gail knocks on the door to the room where Davie Mitchell's staying. She says Davie Mitchell seemed really upset. She notices the soiled covers. She invites Davie Mitchell down to breakfast. Davie Mitchell gets dressed and comes down, taking the sheets with him so that he can clean them later. At the table, Gail's mother also comments that Davie Mitchell was in a state last night but seems less upset now.

Gail's family doesn't seem to know the full extent of what Davie Mitchell and his friends got up to the previous night. Their polite background makes them assume that Davie Mitchell comes from a similar background and that he simply has a slight hangover.



Gail's mother tells Davie Mitchell she'll just wash the sheets. Davie Mitchell tries to protest, but she insists and grabs them from him. As she does it, the sheets come undone, and all the vomit and excrement comes flying out, some landing on the floor, some landing on the food, and some landing on Gail's father's glasses and white shirt. Gail's mother goes to puke. Davie Mitchell figures now he'll never have sex with Gail, but he doesn't care because all he wants is to get away.

The eruption of bodily fluids over Sunday breakfast suggests that much as Davie Mitchell tries to hide his wild lifestyle, eventually everything will come to light. This story shows the contrast between the uninhibited and reckless lifestyle of people like Davie Mitchell and the more repressed lifestyle of his girlfriend Gail's family.



Junk Dilemmas No. 65. Rent Boy is really cold because the only candle in the room has gone out. He finds Spud and complains about the cold, but Spud says nothing. Rent Boy figures Spud is probably still alive but can't be sure.

This short interlude shows both how heroin comes with the constant danger of death but also how it makes users strangely numb to the possibility.



Grieving and Mourning in Port Sunshine. Rent Boy's brother Billy is playing cards with some friends, including Lenny and Jackie. They're playing for money, but the big pool of "club money" is with Phil Grant (Granty), who hasn't arrived yet. The club money is real money worth £2,000, but they share it among themselves and treat it like "monopoly money." Lenny calls Granty's phone number, but he doesn't answer. One of them jokes that maybe Granty ran off with the money, but everyone knows this might not be a joke.

This story provides yet another example of how life in Leith differs outside of Rent Boy's circle of drug-using friends. It also highlights how some aspects of life aren't so different after all. Although it doesn't have the same reputation as heroin, gambling is another vice that can control people's lives, in part because it's even more socially acceptable.



The friends argue about the legal status of the money and whether Granty would technically be justified in keeping it. Billy says the law is irrelevant, since they're talking about "mates," which is more important than legal status. Granty hasn't missed a Thursday night card game for six years.

The relationship between these friends and Granty recalls the similar code of conduct that causes Rent Boy to stick up for Begbie despite his dislike of Begbie's actions.



The next morning, Granty still hasn't shown up. Lenny is late to his fortnightly trip to the unemployment office. It's still 11:00 a.m., but he doesn't like being up so early, so he goes to the pub for a pint. While he's there, he runs into a friend who asks if he's heard the news: Granty is dead of a heart attack.

Granty's sudden death of a heart attack resembles Uncle Andy's and shows how even outside the world of heroin use, there's no guarantee of health or safety. Random chance plays a major role in the book and doesn't always operate fairly.



Lenny spends the rest of the day getting drunk in the pub. His friends meet him there, and he tells them the news about Granty. Across the bar, Lenny spots Spud, Tommy, and Second Prize, and he insults them as worthless junkies, unlike Granty, who valued life. Lenny's friends convince him not to start anything, and soon after, they all go back to one of their apartments.

Lenny's contempt for Spud, Tommy, and Second Prize shows how the rest of the world views them. It may also be hypocritical, given that Lenny seems to have his own addiction to money and gambling in particular.



The friends all complain about the lost money Granty was holding. They mourn Granty too, but Billy says they need to sort out the money situation because he needs it for an upcoming vacation. He's worried Granty's girlfriend Fiona will run off with the money. Lenny accuses Billy of being selfish and not caring about Granty. But the others take Billy's side and agree to confront Fiona after the funeral.

This passage shows the dangers of money by showing how it leads all of the friends in the poker group to mistrust each other and their intentions.



On the day of Granty's funeral, no one actually does anything about the money. But the next day, they meet at Fiona's house. No one answers the door, and a neighbor says that Fiona is in the Canary Islands. Jackie says that settles the matter and there's not much more they can do. Billy surprises Jackie by punching him in the face and knocking him down the stairs.

Lenny tries to restrain Billy, but Billy accuses Jackie of collaborating with Fiona to help steal the money. Billy says he knows Jackie and Fiona have had sex. Jackie admits to it, but says it was a one-time thing. Billy says he doubts that. He says maybe Granty died because he knew Fiona was having sex with his good friend Jackie. The whole group turns against Jackie and starts kicking him on the stairwell.

Fiona's trip to the Canary Islands seems to suggest that she ran off with the money, although as other parts of the book have shown, sometimes characters leap to conclusions that don't turn out to be true. It seems unlikely that Jackie really collaborated with Fiona, although the actual nature of their relationship remains ambiguous.



Billy and the others feel so strongly about the money that they're willing to resort to violence against a friend to get it back, raising the question of whether they really have any right to feel superior to Rent Boy's heroin-using friends. The kicking of Jackie in the stairwell is perhaps a darkly humorous transition into the next chapter, which is called "Kicking Again."



KICKING AGAIN

Inter Shitty. Begbie wakes up with a headache, so he goes straight for two bottles of beer. Nearby, June, who is now pregnant, also wakes up. She asks Begbie where he's going. He says he's just completed some "business," so he has to disappear for a couple weeks. If the police come by, she should say she hasn't seen him recently. June gets made at Begbie for leaving her alone, but he says she probably isn't even having his kid.

Begbie goes to the pub with some friends to play pool, where he wins against Rent Boy. Begbie is looking forward to spending some time down in London, where Rent Boy is staying in a friend's apartment for a few weeks. Begbie tells Matty that he plans on dumping June when he gets back from London because he doesn't want to get involved with a kid. Rent Boy tells Begbie they should get ready to leave, so they buy some alcohol to take with them.

Begbie and Rent Boy get on a **train** to London that's very crowded. Begbie is annoyed at all the people. He and Rent Boy haven't booked specific seats and sit down near two Canadian women. Begbie tries to start a conversation with the women. They have a hard time understanding his Scottish accent, and when Rent Boy joins the conversation, Begbie is annoyed at the way he changes his speaking tone to sound posher. Begbie asks Rent Boy to get out some cards so they can play on the train, but Rent Boy says he forgot to bring any. Rent Boy starts reading a book, then he starts talking with one of the Canadians about the book, further annoying Begbie.

This story confirms that fatherhood hasn't changed Begbie—he still considers himself his highest priority, even as the birth of his child approaches. He is one of several characters (including Sick Boy) who refuses to accept the new responsibilities that would come with parenthood.



Begbie has no problem telling his friends that he plans to abandon June with a child, suggesting that he believes they agree with his way of thinking. Matty and Rent Boy's failure to contradict Begbie suggests that in a way they do agree with him, even if they wouldn't personally act in quite the same way.



Begbie resents how Rent Boy's literary knowledge allows him to connect with people from outside of Leith. Begbie himself is undeniably a product of the place he comes from, and while he can demand respect (or at least fear) from his friends, his ability to influence people doesn't extend beyond his immediate social circle in Leith.



Just then some strangers come up and say that Begbie and Rent Boy are sitting in their seats. Rent Boy politely acts confused, but the strangers insist on taking the seats. Begbie gets up and threatens the strangers, which causes them to finally move on, going to argue with the ticket inspector.

Rent Boy is very drunk and soon falls asleep, and so do the two Canadians. Begbie wakes Rent Boy up, and the two of them keep drinking. When they finally make it to London, Begbie gets separated from everyone else at the station and realizes he has Rent Boy's bag instead of his own. When Rent Boy finally finds Begbie, he has Begbie's bag. Rent Boy says the apartment isn't far away, so they get onto the subway.

Na Na and Other Nazis. Spud complains about the heat and about being low on cash. He's walking around and happens to run into Begbie and one of Begbie's friends. Although Spud isn't excited to see Begbie, after Begbie hears about Spud's money problems, he slips some money to Spud. Spud decides maybe Begbie isn't so bad after all. Begbie has just gotten back from staying with Rent Boy in London, and Spud suspects that Begbie was in trouble but wasn't sure what kind.

After leaving Begbie, Spud stops by the unemployment office to see Gav, his friend who works as a clerk there, but he ends up talking to another old friend who's on his way out of the office. After a short conversation, they part ways. Spud has been bored lately because he's not doing **heroin** and most of his friends are busy.

Eventually, Spud decides to go visit his grandmother, Na Na. Although Spud's mother and sister do more for Na Na, she prefers Spud because she likes men better. Na Na has had at least eight children with five men. Dode, Spud's uncle, is her youngest. Spud and Dode head to a pub.

Rent Boy's father and some of Rent Boy's other male relatives are at the pub, including his brother Billy. Spud and Dode talk briefly about Rent Boy with his father, before going off to their own table. Without realizing it, however, they end up next to a table where one of the members is wearing a T-shirt for the white supremacist band Skrewdriver. Dode is mixed race (his father being West Indian), so the Nazis start taunting him.

Begbie likes picking fights, and he sees an opportunity for one with the strangers. He acts as if he's defending Rent Boy, but everyone knows that in reality, Begbie welcomes any excuse to commit violence.



Rent Boy carrying Begbie's bag and Begbie carrying Rent Boy's bag shows how the two have developed a codependent relationship despite the fact that neither one of them wants to openly admit it.



Spud is the most naïve of Rent Boy's friends. This passage with him and Begbie, where Spud immediately raises his opinion of Begbie after Begbie loans him some money, suggests that Spud is gullible and can be easily manipulated in the moment. Nevertheless, even Spud can tell that Begbie is up to something suspicious.



Spud promised to quit heroin after the death of Dawn, and it seems that, at least in the short term, he has kept this promise. The fact that so many others have failed at this task suggests hidden strength on Spud's part.



Spud's Na Na is the rare example of a woman from Leith who seems to disdain the idea that a woman should stay loyal to one man until death, showing how gender norms are never absolute.



Several early punk early bands used Nazi imagery for shock, and this evolved into small punk subcultures that genuinely believed in white supremacist, Nazi ideals. The white supremacist at this pub represents how some of these beliefs continued to linger in Leith long after the collapse of mainstream Nazism in World War II.



Dode uses a glass ashtray to smash the Nazi wearing the Skrewdriver T-shirt in the head. The rest of the Nazis try to corner Dode and Spud, but Spud backs up against a wall and tries to punch and kick them off. Eventually, Rent Boy's father, Billy, and the other Rentons break things up. Spud sees that Dode is badly injured and needs an ambulance. Dode doesn't seem too worried, and when they get to the hospital, it turns out that Dode's injuries aren't as serious as they first looked.

The First Shag in Ages. After a day of getting stoned, Spud and Rent Boy go to a nightclub to get drunk. After the high wears off, they both have high libido and think all the women in the place are sexy—maybe even some of the men. They both realize that neither of them has had sex in a long time. Sick Boy is also there, and he never has problems finding women to have sex with. That night, even Begbie is there and looks like he's getting along with a woman (all while his ex-girlfriend June is in the hospital to have their child).

As Rent Boy and Spud feel like some of the last ones in the nightclub who haven't paired off yet, Rent Boy says he wishes he was back on **heroin**, just to see Spud's reaction. He says the thing about heroin is it's all you have to worry about other drugs (they're both currently on speed) or really anything else beyond the next score. Spud reacts strongly, saying heroin is a miserable life. Rent Boy takes it back and says maybe it was just the speed talking.

Half an hour before closing time, Rent Boy lowers his standards for women. He sees a woman with long brown hair that he likes and watches another man try and fail to flirt with her. Spud goes over to talk to the woman's friend, so Rent Boy goes over too. The woman's name is Dianne. She and Rent Boy argue over the band Simple Minds: she's a fan, but Rent Boy thinks they're as pompous as U2.

Dianne and her friend go to the restroom. Dianne thinks Rent Boy is a bit of a jerk but still somewhat interesting, especially compared to the other options. While Dianne is away, Rent Boy has a hard time holding it together (because of the speed), and he ends up talking to a guy who vaguely reminds him of a friend before realizing the guy is nothing like his friend.

Dode's resilience shows that he is more used to receiving this kind of abuse, whereas Spud's more exaggerated reaction to Dode's injuries suggests that he is still shocked about witnessing this kind of racial violence in his hometown.



Rent Boy's relationship with his own sexuality is complicated. The book hints that Rent Boy may be bisexual and repressing his attraction to men, although at other times, particularly during the heights of his addiction, he seems almost asexual. Ultimately, this is because Rent Boy puts his heroin addiction above sex or romance, but sex and relationships still play an important secondary role in his life, particularly during his periods of attempting to get clean.



One of the reasons why Rent Boy and Spud are more interested in sex now is because they're off heroin, and so they're looking for a new addiction to replace the void in their lives that heroin used to fill. Rent Boy gets nostalgic for the simplicity of heroin, which makes him forget the negative parts of life.



Simple Minds are a famous Scottish pop band best known for "Don't You (Forget About Me)" from the ending of the movie The Breakfast Club. As a fan of more punk-oriented music like Iggy Pop, Simple Minds would be too clean and mainstream for Rent Boy's taste, suggesting that he and Dianne value different things.



The omniscient third-person narrator in this section includes not just Rent Boy's thoughts but some of Dianne's as well. Meanwhile, Rent Boy's inability to focus due to the speed he's taken shows how fully drugs control his behavior.



Rent Boy goes to leave the club alone and sees Dianne about to step into a taxi alone. He asks where she's going then lies and says he's going the same way in order to hop in the taxi. In the taxi, Dianne complains about her friend, who is still hanging out with Spud and some other guy. Rent Boy learned from his past mistakes and tries to agree more with the things Dianne says. They kiss in the backseat, and eventually Dianne invites Rent Boy up for coffee.

Rent Boy isn't sure if Dianne actually wants to have sex or if she really does just mean coffee. He gets disappointed outside her apartment when she tells him to be quiet so as not to wake anyone up, since he thinks this is a bad sign. They go to the bedroom, and Dianne leaves to make two coffees. When she gets back, she asks if Rent Boy wants to go to bed, and he is eager but worried that the speed and alcohol might affect his erection.

Dianne reminds Rent Boy to stay quiet, then they start having sex. Rent Boy is happy with how his penis is working, although Dianne doesn't seem overly impressed. Rent Boy keeps himself from ejaculating too early by thinking of Margaret Thatcher. At last, they both climax in a way that is "close enough" for Rent Boy to count as simultaneous when he tells the story later.

Rent Boy is surprised and disappointed when Dianne tells him he has to go. She says he can stay on the couch if he wants, as long as he doesn't tell anyone about them having sex. He agrees to those terms and falls asleep on the couch. He wakes the next morning and hears the voice of a woman and a man he doesn't recognize, so he pretends to still be asleep.

Rent Boy hears the man and woman talking about how Dianne has brought another "friend" back. He gets up and introduces himself, telling a lie about how losing his apartment key and Dianne letting him stay over. Something is strange about the man and woman, but Rent Boy can't figure out what. They seem to be about his age. All of a sudden Dianne comes in, and Rent Boy can't believe it's her: without her makeup on, she looks like a child. In fact, she is a child, and the man and woman are her parents.

As Rent Boy pulls himself together, he begins to rely on his old trick of lying. While Rent Boy can't transform himself for women as well as Sick Boy can, Rent Boy nevertheless learns that he can influence people like Dianne just as easily as he influences interviewers during job interviews.



Rent Boy's lack of sexual experience, at least recently, makes him nervous about the situation he finds himself in. Although he is good at observing details, he doesn't always know how to interpret them and sometimes gets the wrong impression.



Margaret Thatcher was a very conservative British politician who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990—that Rent Boy rather comically thinks of Thatcher to prolong ejaculation reflects his disdain for British rule of Scotland while also reaffirming his pride in his Scottish identity. Rent Boy's reaction after sex shows that what he's doing isn't only for his own personal enjoyment but also for how it will improve his reputation among his friends.



It's clear that something is unusual about Dianne's living situation, but Rent Boy's own ignorance prevents him from figuring out exactly what's going on. As is often the case, if he doesn't see any immediate negative consequences for himself, he doesn't ask questions.



The twist that Dianne is actually underage shows not just how speed affects Rent Boy's judgment but also how sexual desire and perhaps the even greater desire to earn respect among his friends affects his judgement and compromises his morals. Readers should note that because Dianne is underage, her and Rent Boy's sexual encounter cannot be considered consensual.



Dianne's parents invite Rent Boy to breakfast and ask him what he does for a living. Rent Boy runs a scheme to defraud the unemployment office, and he's proud of it, but knows it's better not to mention it to too many people. He lies and says he's a museum curator on an exhibit focusing on working-class people. He learns that Dianne is taking her O Grade History exam in a year, meaning she's about 14 years old. Rent Boy realizes he could go to prison if anyone found out.

Rent Boy tries to stay calm in front of Dianne's parents. Dianne's father asks what Rent Boy is going to do about being locked out and offers to help. Rent Boy turns him down as politely as he can, mixing truth and lies again. Eventually, Dianne takes Rent Boy alone down to the **train** station. Rent Boy is worried that people he knows might see him and ask questions.

Rent Boy and Dianne stop in a record store, and Dianne looks around. Johnny Swan's brother suddenly surprises Rent Boy in the store. They talk for a little while, and he notices Dianne is with Rent Boy. He jokingly warns her to watch out for Rent Boy, then he leaves. Rent Boy says he should get going as well. Dianne asks for his address. Rent Boy can't think of a good lie, so he gives her his real one. In fact, she mostly wants to buy drugs from him. A couple nights later, she shows up in person, hoping the strange odor she smells is hash.

Strolling Through The Meadows. Rent Boy points at a stain on Begbie's pants and asks if he's wet himself. Begbie gets indignant. Meanwhile, Sick Boy is scanning the bar for women. Begbie gets angrier and angrier with Rent Boy, and Sick Boy tells Begbie to calm down. Recently, Begbie beat an American tourist so bad that the incident made local news. Now, Spud jumps every time he hears an American accent.

Begbie and Matty leave the pub, looking like they're ready to pick a fight with some strangers. Sick Boy brings out some low-quality ecstasy, and Spud and the others all take it. While they're high, they get the idea of trying to find Begbie. The walk around and run into two high school girls they know through selling drugs. Rent Boy and Sick Boy hug them while Spud just stands there.

Spud knows about Rent Boy and Dianne but thinks Rent Boy won't take advantage of these two girls. Meanwhile, Sick Boy reaches into the one girl's jeans, claiming to be looking for hidden drugs. They part ways with the girls.

Rent Boy's fake occupation as a museum curator for the working class mirrors author Welsh's own role, as he presents the lives of lower-class characters in a novel with a literary and somewhat complex structure. O Grades don't exist in Scotland anymore, but they used to be an important standardized test for high school students.



While Rent Boy is worried about the potential legal consequences of what he's just done, once again, his most important concern is what it will do to his reputation. Even worse than going to jail would be for people to think less of him.



Although this chapter explores Rent Boy's own behavior, which at times seems predatory and manipulative, it also suggests that Dianne has her own wants and needs. While Rent Boy was trying to improve his reputation, Dianne was looking for a way to score drugs, cynically highlighting how some relationships are transactional instead of being based on genuine emotion.



Spud's reaction to hearing an American accent almost resembles symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. It suggests that Begbie (and the dark side of Leith that he represents) leaves permanent mental scar on the people who encounter him.



Even after the others separate from Begbie, they still feel compelled to try to find and follow him, showing how much influence he holds over the group, despite the fact that so many characters supposedly dislike him.



Spud is the most naïve of the main characters, and so he has an optimistic opinion of his friends, although even he notices that something is strange about how Sick Boy relates to women.



Rent Boy sees a squirrel and starts freaking out, throwing a rock at it and telling everyone to kill it. Spud doesn't like how Rent Boy is cruel to animals and thinks that Rent Boy resents the squirrel because unlike him, it's free. Two posh women start staring at the group of them, so Sick Boy says crude things to try to shock them into leaving. Sick Boy yells to the women that he'd never have sex with them. Rent Boy says that's a lie, and that Sick Boy would even have sex with the "crack ay dawn."

Rent Boy realizes too late that "dawn" will remind everyone of "Dawn," Lesley's child who died. Sick Boy was likely the father. Sick Boy doesn't acknowledge the awkwardness and just jokingly insults Rent Boy. As they talk, Spud realizes that Dawn, like the squirrel, was also free and innocent. When Spud starts walking away, Rent Boy asks him what's wrong. Spud says he didn't like how they were going to kill an innocent squirrel. Rent Boy admits that life has been hard recently and says Spud is a good man, using Spud's real name, Danny, when he addresses him. In the distance, Sick Boy tells them to either have sex already or to come help them find Begbie and Matty.

BLOWING IT

Courting Disaster. Rent Boy and Spud are in court. The judge accuses them of stealing books from a bookstore to sell. Rent Boy answers no just as Spud says yes. Rent Boy says his books were for reading. The judge asks him to explain Kierkegaard, so Rent Boy does, only realizing too late that it might be bad to sound too smart. Spud on the other hand, freely admits to selling books in order to buy more **heroin**.

The judge says that Rent Boy seems to be trying to control his addiction, so he gives him a suspended sentence if he gets addiction treatment, allowing him to walk free. Spud, however, will have to serve six months in prison. Rent Boy passes Spud and apologizes on his way out to meet with his family and friends.

Rent Boy and his family go to the pub and get drunk. Rent Boy's Ma starts talking about her long, intense menstrual periods, which embarrasses Rent Boy. Begbie and Sick Boy make fun of Rent Boy as a momma's boy. All of a sudden, Spud's mother comes over and starts accusing Rent Boy of being the reason Spud is headed to jail. Begbie takes this personally and shouts at her until she leaves the pub. Rent Boy's Ma says she feels bad for Spud's mother, but the subject soon changes.

Rent Boy is hypocritical—though he's a vegetarian (which implies a desire not to harm animals), he's willing to kill a squirrel just for startling him. Although Spud remains naïve, he occasionally hits on profound thoughts like why Rent Boy dislikes the squirrel (because it's free). Spud's empathy for animals reflects his greater empathy for humans as well, although sometimes this quality makes him vulnerable.



Dawn's death is what inspired many of the characters to give up heroin (although not other drugs), and so Dawn's absence hangs over much of the rest of the book. On the one hand, Dawn, like the dawn of a new day, the possibility of hope and rebirth. But so far, most of the characters seem to be acting about the same as they did when they were on heroin. Nevertheless, when Rent Boy addresses Spud by his real name, it suggests a moment of growth (and perhaps Rent Boy's realization that while Spud is mostly a good person, his other friends might not be good people).



The scene of Rent Boy and Spud in court intentionally parallels the scene in which they attended the job interview, suggesting that the consequences of both (either a menial job or going to jail) are not all that different. Rent Boy once again tries to manipulate an authority figure by using the judge's preconceptions about him against the judge.



Although Rent Boy didn't testify against Spud, he nevertheless prioritized himself in the courtroom. Previously, Spud's good nature carried him through difficult situations like the job interview, but here, Spud finally hits an obstacle he can't overcome.



All of the characters except Spud's mother support Rent Boy's actions, suggesting that at the end of the day, they too believe that looking out for oneself is more important than being loyal to one's friends. Even Begbie, who demands that his friends always stay loyal to him, stands up for Rent Boy's right to look out for his own interests.



Rent Boy and the others relocate to a new pub. Begbie is getting wound up, and Sick Boy encourages him. Sick Boy likes when Begbie says stupid things because everyone impersonates him behind his back, and this gives them more material.

At the new pub, Sick Boy points out Planet of the Apes, a man who looks like an extra from *Planet of the Apes*. Planet of the Apes is very drunk and starts talking to Sick Boy about a blond woman he was with earlier. Sick Boy says that Planet of the Apes can have sex with her for 50 pounds. Rent Boy is shocked that Sick Boy seems to be hiring the woman out for sex. Rent Boy knows her and knows she uses **heroin** and that she and Sick Boy have been hooking up on and off.

Rent Boy confronts Sick Boy about trying to sell the woman to Planet of the Apes. Sick Boy says if Rent Boy is so righteous, why did he get Tommy into **heroin**? Rent Boy feels like Tommy had a choice but doesn't say so. Just then, Tommy himself walks into the pub with Second Prize. Tommy's appearance makes it clear that he's switched from speed to heroin. He tries to buy more heroin off Rent Boy, but Rent Boy sends him away. Tommy says he can handle it—Rent Boy has heard this line several times, and he'll probably use it again himself at some point.

Even though he's surrounded by almost everyone he knows, Rent Boy feels alone. People at the pub start reminiscing about Spud. Begbie happens to notice June at the pub and gets mad at her for leaving their kid with her sister. As he goes to the bathroom, Rent Boy feels like it's been a hard day. He decides maybe he'll go to Johnny Swan for just one hit.

Junk Dilemmas No. 66. Rent Boy thinks it shouldn't be hard to move, since humans have been doing it since the dawn of time, but for some reason, he can't.

Deid Dugs. Sick Boy sees a skinhead walking a pit bull. He aims an air rifle at him, narrating it all to himself like a James Bond villain, then he decides to aim for the pit bull instead. The dog goes crazy and starts biting its owner, who tries to kick it away.

Sick Boy's taunting of Begbie shows how Sick Boy not only tolerates living a reckless lifestyle but seems to actively enjoy adding additional risks to his life.



The allusion to Planet of the Apes continues the pattern of pop culture references playing an important part in the story. While the apes in that film were intelligent, this man seems more animalistic and motivated by instinct and libido. Sick Boy's offer to sell the woman is a logical next step for his character, since he already treats relationships as transactional.



This section builds on Rent Boy's selfishness established earlier in the courtroom scene by showing the effects of the heroin that Rent Boy gave to Tommy. While Rent Boy doesn't deserve full responsibility for Spud's or Tommy's fates, his lack of active care for his friends seems to be having a ripple effect throughout the whole community.



Rent Boy always prioritizes himself, and this is what ultimately leads him to feel alone. The reference to Johnny Swan is significant because it will be the first time Rent Boy has used heroin since the death of Dawn.



This section reveals that Rent Boy did in fact get high. The literal paralysis he feels is also the metaphorical paralysis that his addiction creates, stopping him from moving forward in life.



This section gives just one example of how Sick Boy lives up to his nickname. Sick Boy contrasts sharply with Spud, who wouldn't hurt a squirrel (but who as a result of his kind nature gets sent away to jail).



The skinhead calls for help, and Sick Boy approaches him with an aluminum baseball bat. He sticks the bat under the dog's collar and uses it to choke the dog to death. The dead dog still holds onto the skinhead, so Sick Boy pries its mouth open with the bat. When the police arrive, the skinhead praises Sick Boy for intervening. One of the officers asks why Sick Boy has a bat, and Sick Boy says it's because there have been robberies in his neighborhood lately. The officers accept his answer. Sick Boy is very high and feels that it is a beautiful day.

Searching for the Inner Man. While Rent Boy has never gone to jail for **heroin**, he's had to go to several counsellors for rehabilitation, and he feels this is also bad. His current psychiatrist, Dr. Forbes, likes to use Freudian psychoanalysis. He asks if Rent Boy's addiction has anything to do with the death of his brother (Davie Renton, not Billy), since Rent Boy started taking heroin shortly afterward.

Dr. Forbes asks Rent Boy more questions about why he dropped out of university. Rent Boy says he had a hard time connecting with other students. Dr. Forbes returns to the subject of Rent Boy's dead brother, Davie Renton, who was totally paralyzed and could only blink and swallow. Rent Boy admits he resented Davie Renton because it caused the other kids to make fun of him and Billy.

Rent Boy isn't sure how all of this relates to **heroin** addiction, and he thinks that in his own way, Dr. Forbes might be just as "scoobied" as Rent Boy is. Rent Boy has spoken with several other counselors, none of whom really understand addiction, his opinion, but some get closer than others. He thinks society has to come up with theories to explain anyone who falls outside the mainstream and that none of these theories ever make much sense. People want Rent Boy to choose life, but what they really mean is a "normal" life of paying a mortgage, watching game shows, and having kids. Rent Boy refuses.

House Arrest. Rent Boy wakes up disoriented in his childhood bedroom. As he recovers, he remembers taking too strong a dose of heroin at Johnny Swan's place, then Johnny Swan and Alison taking him to the hospital. It's Rent Boy's first time overdosing.

Sick Boy gains nothing from this encounter other than perhaps his own sadistic pleasure. This passage conveys how Sick Boy thrives on outsmarting people around him and how he can trick people into liking him even when he's done terrible things to them.



This section reveals an important part of Rent Boy's backstory that helps explain some of the previous sections. Instead of using flashbacks, Welsh shows Rent Boy with a psychiatrist, which provides an excuse for Rent Boy to reconsider his past.



The paralysis of Davie Renton mirrors Rent Boy's own paralysis when he's on heroin. As is often the case, Rent Boy hates things that make him confront his issues and shortcomings directly, and his brother Davie is an example of this.



A mortgage (paying to own property) is the opposite of renting, so Rent Boy's nickname is appropriate, since he wants to stay renting and never have a mortgage. Although the book often portrays Rent Boy's choices and particularly his addiction in a morally ambiguous light, in this section Rent Boy defends his lifestyle and his actions, claiming that what he does is better than the alternative (i.e., upholding mainstream ideal). Rent Boy is an unreliable narrator, and so his statements shouldn't necessarily be taken at face value, but at the same time, the book does explore how Rent Boy might have a point about the emptiness of mainstream society.



Rent Boy's first overdose suggests that he has been lucky so far with his addiction but that his luck won't hold out forever.



Rent Boy's Ma comes in and tells him that everyone wants to help him fight his disease. The doctor told her withdrawal symptoms are like the flu, but Rent Boy knows they're way worse. His mother tells him she turned down any drugs like methadone to ease withdrawal symptoms, suggesting that Rent Boy should go cold turkey. Rent Boy realizes his mother feels guilty and sees similarities between Rent Boy's situation and the death of Davie Renton.

Rent Boy's father comes into the room and starts lecturing Rent Boy about all the opportunities he had but messed up. After his father is done talking, Rent Boy manages to convince his Ma to give him some Valium, which she got a prescription for after Davie Renton's death. She feels like she's an expert in addiction after kicking her own Valium habit, so she and Rent Boy's father essentially place him on house arrest. Rent Boy's mother and father try to make him eat steak mince, even though he's vegetarian. They plan to get a lock for his room to keep him inside.

Rent Boy's body aches, and he starts losing track of time. He starts hallucinating and having intrusive thoughts about eating his own tongue. He sees Dawn crying on the ceiling. When Rent Boy finally becomes lucid again, he doesn't know how much time has passed, but Sick Boy is there with his parents. Sick Boy charms Rent Boy's parents, and they soon believe Sick Boy has nothing to do with drugs.

When Rent Boy's parents leave, Rent Boy asks Sick Boy for **heroin**, but Sick Boy is trying to stay away from the drug-selling crowd so that he doesn't go back to using. Sick Boy says he's been through everything Rent Boy's going through. The most intense pain will be over soon, but what's even worse is the depression that follows. Sick Boy started drinking a bottle of tequila a day, but eventually he managed to kick that habit too.

Sick Boy mentions that he heard recently from a woman they both know that Rent Boy had a difficult time getting it up in bed. He says Rent Boy is really missing out by not having sex. Rent Boy's friends have also been asking about him, particularly with some concerts coming up. Although Rent Boy finds Sick Boy patronizing, he misses him after he leaves the room.

Both Rent Boy and his brother Davie have been "paralyzed" in some way—Davie was literally paralyzed, but Rent Boy is metaphorically paralyzed (although sometimes the effects of heroin also resemble literal paralysis). Rent Boy's mother's total rejection of maintenance drugs like methadone suggests that she doesn't understand the symptoms of heroin withdrawal.



This passage further explores how despite Rent Boy's parents good intentions, they don't really understand their son. They know that something has gone wrong with Rent Boy and want to help, but they lack the knowledge to do so and at times do more harm than good. Valium, while potentially addictive, is very different from heroin, and so Rent Boy's mother's suggestion that her own Valium habit gives her insight into her son's heroin addiction isn't quite accurate.



This passage tries to convey the extreme effects of quitting heroin cold turkey. When Rent Boy tried to quit heroin at the beginning of the novel, he suffered so much that he had to go get the opium suppositories. Sick Boy's manipulation of Rent Boy's parents once again demonstrates his depraved personality.



Rent Boy perhaps expects Sick Boy to be there to give him drugs, but in fact, Sick Boy has been able to stay away from heroin. Sick Boy may be a morally dubious character, but he focuses strongly on self-preservation, and this is perhaps why he is more successful than many of the other characters at kicking his heroin addiction.



Sick Boy and Rent Boy have a rivalry in their friend group, and so Sick Boy appreciates having an opportunity to gloat during one of Rent Boy's low moments. Nevertheless, a part of Rent Boy seems to enjoy their rivalry, and he understands Sick Boy better than someone like Begbie.



As Sick Boy predicted, Rent Boy's pain starts to go away, but he has to endure the worst depression he's ever experienced. He finds it difficult to answer simple questions, like when his mother asks him if he wants coffee. More days pass, and Rent Boy starts slowly feeling a little better. He heard recently that Lesley is on life support after an overdose. He runs into Johnny Swan at the club, and they talk about Lesley. Johnny thinks Lesley should be happy to not have any responsibilities anymore, now that Dawn is dead. Rent Boy disagrees.

At the club, Rent Boy can't stand to drink his beer. Songs play on the jukebox, and Rent Boy's parents get up to dance. Rent Boy notices that even while they're gone, they've tasked other people in the club with watching Rent Boy.

Rent Boy's father slips him some money and tells him to go buy the next round. On his way to the bar, Rent Boy runs into an old school friend. She used to have sex with Sick Boy and asks how he's doing. Rent Boy says Sick Boy is off somewhere dealing drugs, acting as a pimp, and extorting money. Rent Boy still considers Sick Boy a good friend and isn't sure why he helped spread these stories about him. Rent Boy goes back to his parent's table with the drinks and tries to act happy, but he feels that life is short and meaningless.

Bang to Rites. Rent Boy is at his first burial. Billy died in the army, which some consider heroic, but which Rent Boy considers "daft." He feels contempt as he looks at the Union Jack flag on Billy's coffin. Billy died while on patrol near a British army base in Ireland, three weeks before his tour of duty would be over. Rent Boy feels that Billy was an idiot who understood nothing about imperialism or Britain's history with Ireland and who just sort of stumbled into his death.

Rent Boy figures Billy's death is good for him because it makes other people more sympathetic. Spud and Tommy are there; Spud looks clean, but Tommy looks pale and wasted, a total role reversal of how they used to be. Begbie is on holiday, and Sick Boy has gone to France to live with a new woman. Throughout the day, Rent Boy thinks of times that Billy physically or mentally bullied him.

Rent Boy commonly shows symptoms of depression, and it isn't always clear which feelings are related to heroin use and which feelings he'd have anyway. Although Rent Boy liked Johnny Swan at the beginning of the book, he slowly begins to see how Johnny Swan isn't that great a person, particularly after Johnny talks so callously about the Lesley's hospitalization.



Rent Boy's feeling that his parents are always watching him may be paranoia. Even after he begins to kick his heroin habit, Rent Boy has a difficult time reconnecting with the world around him.



Rent Boy tells his school friend about the morally questionable things Sick Boy is doing (all of which are true) as a way of getting revenge for the earlier scene where Sick Boy talked down to Rent Boy while Rent Boy was recovering at his parents' house. Rent Boy doesn't understand why he feels the need to keep up a rivalry with Sick Boy, and this perhaps relates to his overarching sense that life is meaningless.



This book takes place during the Troubles, a period in history when the largely Protestant royalists (who supported Northern Ireland remaining part of the UK) fought against the largely Catholic republicans (who supported a united, independent island of Ireland). For Rent Boy, who believes that Scotland too should become independent, Britain is an oppressive imperial power, and so by joining the British Army, Billy betrayed his homeland of Scotland.



Rent Boy continues to see the selfish side of things (how Billy's death might be good for him) and yet his feelings are arguably more sympathetic here than usual, since unlike with Spud, Rent Boy actually has a reason not to care about Billy (because Billy used to bully Rent Boy).



Rent Boy starts flirting with his goth cousin, Nina, who smiles but gets embarrassed, until Rent Boy's father scolds Rent Boy for being disrespectful. Rent Boy decides to get a ride back to the house with Tommy, Spud, and Davie Mitchell, who drop Rent Boy off and don't come inside. Inside, Rent Boy's mother is talking with Billy's woman, Sharon, who's pregnant.

Nina was the main character of a previous chapter that took place during a funeral (Uncle Andy's). The many funerals in the book show how accustomed the characters have become to death and hardship in general.



As people keep reminiscing about Billy, Rent Boy stays silent because all his own memories are bad. At last, he feels he's attracting unwanted attention, so he compromises by giving a short speech and saying that while he and Billy disagreed on some things, they agreed on the value of a good drink, so everyone should try to enjoy themselves for Billy's sake.

While Rent Boy typically has no problem lying, he struggles to lie in this scene and so limits himself to telling a version of the truth. This shows how, while Rent Boy might not have liked his brother very much, he nevertheless remains deeply affected by his death.



Rent Boy gets drunk and goes back to hitting on Nina, wondering if what he's doing is legal. She looks like she's heard all his lines before and thinks Rent Boy is a jerk. She says it's a shame about Billy. One of Rent Boy's uncles sees Rent Boy and intervenes. He was already angry at Rent Boy about his inappropriately lighthearted speech. Rent Boy taunts his uncle, ready to smash a glass on his head if his uncle goes for a punch. His uncle is "orange," meaning a conservative loyal to Britain (and opposed to Scottish independence).

While Rent Boy himself feels that Billy was a traitor to Scotland, many of his family members feel exactly the opposite and that Billy was a patriot. This reflects Scotland's complicated relationship to England the rest of the UK, pitting family members against each other, and it illustrates why Scottish independence remains a contentious issue.



One of Rent Boy's more sensible uncles tells Rent Boy not to get in a fight, for his mother's sake. Rent Boy steps aside to go to the bathroom and happens to run into Sharon, who's very drunk. Rent Boy tells her he needs to have a conversation with her in the toilet. The two start kissing, and soon Sharon starts giving Rent Boy oral sex. He tries to finish in her from behind but can't fit, so instead they have vaginal sex. Rent Boy imagines getting fucked by Billy's fetus inside Sharon.

Rent Boy's unusual behavior once again shows that his brother's death, perhaps combined with his heroin withdrawal-induced depression have caused him to act erratically. Rent Boy seems to think at first that he can finally assert his superiority over Billy by having sex with Billy's girlfriend after Billy's death.



Someone knocks on the bathroom door, temporarily interrupting Rent Boy and Sharon, but Rent Boy says Sharon has just had too much to drink and he's helping her while she's sick. When the person goes away, Rent Boy pulls out and puts his head on Sharon's chest, feeling like a baby himself. Sharon asks if she and Rent Boy will keep seeing each other. Rent Boy suddenly finds it repulsive that Sharon thinks she can replace Billy with him.

Rent Boy soon realizes that his efforts to try to outdo his brother are futile—after all, Billy is dead, and so it's impossible for him to compete with Rent Boy. Rent Boy's disgust toward Sharon is in part a manifestation of Rent Boy's own disgust at himself and the morally questionable things he's willing to do.



One of Rent Boy's cousins, who's a police officer, threatens to break the bathroom door down. Rent Boy finally opens the door. He doesn't like the mood at the house, so he takes Sharon back to his apartment. Sharon talks about how Billy beat her multiple times and generally mistreated her. But he was her partner, and she thought she could change him. Rent Boy thinks about how Billy always wanted Rent Boy to stop doing drugs and how it really is hard to change people. Rent Boy now wants Sharon to leave so he can cook up a shot of **heroin**.

Junk Dilemmas No. 67. Rent Boy muses on how his addiction really isn't so bad compared to all the children in the world starving to death. The only real problem with **heroin** is eventually you run out.

Sharon's behavior with Billy recalls that of the random woman in a bar that Tommy and Second Prize witnessed being beaten. Billy's inability to change his own violent behavior has clear parallels with Rent Boy's own inability to quit his addiction. Rent Boy faces his own dark side at his brother's funeral, and this drives him yet again to seek out heroin as a coping mechanism.



The location of this "Junk Dilemmas" confirms yet again that Rent Boy has relapsed and is back to using heroin.



EXILE

London Crawling. Rent Boy makes it to an apartment in London, but the people he's looking for aren't there, and it's locked. A woman next door says they've been away for two days. Rent Boy goes for a walk around the city. He's only been away from London for three months, but it already feels unfamiliar. He approaches a pub that's been newly renamed "the Britannia" and reflects on how he's definitely never felt British, but he's also never quite felt Scottish. In fact, Rent Boy would be fine with abolishing countries in general.

Rent Boy goes into the Britannia and thinks it's much worse than it was before the renovation. He commiserates with the bartender about the bar's new customers, who act like yuppies but aren't even that rich. Rent Boy goes back to the apartment and finds that it's still locked, so he returns to the pub for more drinks. Afterward, he goes to a payphone and tries to call some of his old contacts in London, but they've all moved. He has one friend called Mel that he might try seeing in person, but Mel lives far away.

Rent Boy spends the night in a porno theater that screens movies all night. He falls asleep but suddenly wakes up to an old man (Gi) touching his thigh. Rent Boy gets angry and says he isn't gay. The man apologizes, and Rent Boy almost feels bad. Rent Boy wonders how he knows for sure that he's not gay if he's never been with a man.

Shortly after his brother's funeral, Rent Boy continues to see signs of British imperialism wherever he goes. The irony is that as much as Rent Boy despised his brother for joining the British army, Rent Boy himself decides to leave Leith to go to London, the capital of the UK. Rent Boy himself seems aware of this contradiction, which is why he proposes an end to borders in general as a way to try to resolve it.



The parallels between the pub and British colonialism continue, with the pub illustrating how British imperialism often leaves places worse off than they were before. As Rent Boy observes, consumerism (represented by the bar's new customers) isn't just about spending a lot of money—it can also be a mindset, and so even lower- or middle-class people can participate.



Previous sections have hinted at Rent Boy's potential bisexuality, but particularly since Rent Boy himself can be an unreliable narrator, it wasn't always clear how Rent Boy feels about his sexuality. Here, Rent Boy seems similarly conflicted, feeling repulsed at first by Gi but more analytical soon after.



Rent Boy did once get oral sex from a drag queen in London, then he returned the favor, but Rent Boy didn't like the plastic taste of sucking on a condom. His friends who own the London apartment walked in on Rent Boy in the middle of it, embarrassing him. Back in the present, Rent Boy muses that he doesn't think there's anything morally wrong with homosexuality, he just doesn't find most men sexy. Rent Boy doesn't find the old man who was touching him attractive, but he has a place near Mel's, so Rent Boy goes with him.

The man introduces himself as Gi (short for Giovanni) and says he has a wife and kids back in Italy, but Rent Boy senses he might be lying. But Rent Boy is surprised when they finally make it back to Gi's dingy apartment to find pictures of Gi's family everywhere. Gi lets Rent Boy sleep in his bed. Rent Boy soon wakes up, however, with Gi's semen on his face. He gets angry and starts beating Gi.

Gi starts saying the names of his wife and children, so at last Rent Boy stops attacking him and apologizes. He offers to take Gi to breakfast (which is conveniently closer Mel's place). At breakfast, Gi tells Rent Boy about how he had to leave Italy after people discovered that his wife's younger brother was his true lover. His wife's older brothers beat up Gi and the younger brother, then the younger brother killed himself, so Gi left for England to work in Italian restaurants.

Rent Boy and finally makes it to Mel's, where reggae music is still playing after an all-night party. Rent Boy enters and is thrilled to see several familiar faces. The English are more likely to smoke **heroin** instead of using needles like the Scottish, so Rent Boy takes a drag. Everyone there is confused about who Gi is. Gi ends up talking about soccer with some of them, so Rent Boy leaves him to talk to other people.

Rent Boy walks around the apartment and finds a room where a man and a woman are having sex only a couple feet away from where some people are shooting up **heroin**. Rent Boy figures maybe his theory about everyone in England smoking heroin instead of using needles is wrong after all. Rent Boy gets depressed that none of the women at the party seem to be available. He wonders if maybe having sex with Gi is his best option after all.

Bad Blood. Davie Mitchell meets a man named Alan Venters at his HIV support group. Venters doesn't stay in the group long and doesn't take very good care of himself, soon developing an infection. Most members of Davie Mitchell's group have tested positive for HIV but don't have any symptoms yet. When Venters enters hospice care, Davie Mitchell tells a counselor he wants to quit the support group.

Although Rent Boy claims to have no prejudice against homosexuality, it is possible that he has internalized the attitudes of people around him, like Sick Boy, who occasionally makes homophobic comments.



Giovanni's name may be a reference to [Giovanni's Room](#) by James Baldwin, one of the most famous gay novels of all time. Gi alternates between being kind and being too aggressive, suggesting that he too struggles with his sexuality.



The violence that Gi escapes in Italy is similar to the violence that Rent Boy witnesses Begbie and others commit in Leith. This violence seems to have a direct connection to masculine identity and enforcing certain gender norms.



The combination of reggae music in an English city with a Scottish guest and an Italian guest helps convey the cosmopolitan character of London. This contrasts with the more homogenous Leith, where outsiders often stick out.



Rent Boy's realization that his theories about different methods of heroin use are wrong symbolizes his larger realization in London that there's a lot about the world outside of Leith that he doesn't understand. His openness to having sex with Gi suggests a willingness to do something that he'd probably never do if he were still in Leith.



As with the previous section that Davie Mitchell narrated, the story in this section is largely self-contained. While many characters in Rent Boy's friend group are lucky to avoid contracting HIV, this section shows the situation of those who aren't quite so lucky.



Most members of Davie Mitchell's HIV support group are drug users. Davie Mitchell himself isn't. He thinks of Rent Boy, a friend of Davie Mitchell's friend Tommy, and how Rent Boy has somehow been using needles for years without getting HIV. The **heroin** users in the support group look down on the two homosexual group members. Meanwhile, Davie Mitchell and a couple women who don't use heroin but contracted HIV through partners look down on the drug users.

Davie Mitchell thinks back on his encounters with Venters at the support group. During an early meeting, Davie Mitchell lied and said he knowingly had unprotected sex with people after his HIV positive diagnosis. The counselor thanked Davie Mitchell for his honesty. Venters then got up and said he did the same thing. Afterward, Venters rolled his eyes and secretly smiled at Davie Mitchell.

Davie Mitchell remembers how Venters always acted like he was immortal during support group meetings. Davie Mitchell and Venters become friends, although for Davie Mitchell, Venters is often more like a test subject to scrutinize. When they go out drinking, Venters drinks heavily, which is likely how he weakened his immune system and got infected.

Davie Mitchell keeps thinking about how he went to visit Venters in hospice care several times, always fantasizing about a final visit when he'd get revenge on Venters. One day he goes and Venters is almost too weak to speak. Venters says it's a pity he didn't know Davie Mitchell earlier and Davie Mitchell agrees, but he is still thinking of revenge. He figures killing Venters would be too easy, so he decides to talk to Venters to try to find out what would be even better.

In his hospice talks with Venters, Davie Mitchell learns that one of the only people in the world Venters cares about was his five-year-old son, whose mother, Frances, doesn't let the boy (Kevin) see Venters. Davie Mitchell then seeks out Frances, pretending to run into her by accident and winning her over as a result. When they have sex, he initially insists on using a condom but ultimately decides that he trusts her and would also do it without a condom. Frances is grateful that he doesn't seem to think less of her because her old partner had HIV.

While some characters in Davie Mitchell's support group try to claim moral superiority based on how they contracted HIV, ultimately, they are all in the same situation. This passage makes it clear that, while it's possible to mitigate the spread of diseases like HIV, ultimately the role of random chance means that the people who get the disease might not be the ones engaging in the riskiest behavior.



Davie Mitchell seems to feel contempt for the entire process of the support group, and Venters's rolled eyes suggests that he feels the same. While in fact, Davie and Venters dislike the support group for very different reasons, this section continues to draw parallels between the two of them, suggesting that they might have a deeper connection than the story has yet to reveal.



Venters engages in the type of reckless behavior that makes him more likely to pick up diseases like HIV, yet Mitchell is more cautious and ends up in the same situation as Venters, showing how ultimately who gets infected has nothing to do with fairness.



At this point in the story, it isn't clear why Davie Mitchell wants revenge on Venters. Given that he considers the possibility of literally killing Venters, though, it seems that Davie has a very strong motivation for disliking Venters. This section continues to ask whether Davie's actions are justified or not.



Davie Mitchell's actions are extreme, making him almost like the James Bond villain that Sick Boy sometimes imagines himself being. By involving seemingly innocent people like Venters's ex-girlfriend and young son, Venters's actions seem less justified.



One day, right as Venters' condition is sharply declining, Davie Mitchell volunteers to help Frances by babysitting Kevin. The Wednesday before babysitting, Davie Mitchell goes to visit his parents at their house. His mother is watching TV while his father reads the paper and makes racist comments about Chinese immigrants. Davie Mitchell leaves without telling them about his HIV.

On the Saturday that Davie Mitchell is babysitting, he brings some sharp tools from his toolbox. Frances goes out to a meal with some friends for the first time in a while. Davie Mitchell and Kevin have a good time. He begins to feel bad about what he's doing, wondering if he is any better than Venters, and he feels worse even later when developing some photographs he took.

After developing the photos, Davie Mitchell goes to visit Venters at the hospice. Venters is happy to see him, but Davie Mitchell finally reveals why he has been visiting. Davie Mitchell got HIV from having sex with a woman, and she told him that she got it after being raped at knifepoint by Venters. Venters tries to apologize and blame everything on his disease, but Davie Mitchell doesn't want to hear it.

Davie Mitchell then pulls out his photos to show Venters. The first photos reveal him and Frances as lovers. Another photo shows him with Kevin on his shoulders. Then he shows a photo of Kevin naked, tied to a chair, and bleeding. Venters is horrified. Davie Mitchell says he tortured Kevin for twenty minutes before killing him. He tells Venters that Kevin's last words were "Daddy." Then he suffocates Venters with a pillow over his face and goes to find a nurse.

Later, Davie Mitchell goes to Venters's funeral, and the minister gives a short speech because he has few good things to say about Venters. After the funeral, he goes to find Frances and Kevin. In reality, Davie Mitchell only knocked Kevin out with chloroform, then he staged his injuries with paint and makeup as part of his elaborate revenge plan.

At first, the scene with Davie's parents might seem unrelated to his revenge plot. The connection, however, is that Davie doesn't want to tell his parents he has HIV because he is afraid they are too conservative to accept it. His inability to communicate with his parents might be part of why he channels his frustration with his disease into revenge.



Davie Mitchell's actions are still mysterious at this point, but it becomes clearer that he's going to do something extreme. The sharp toolbox hints he might be planning to kill Kevin, and so the question becomes whether Davie would kill an innocent child for the sake of revenge.



Even Davie himself has doubts about how far he's taking his revenge plot, but it's too late to turn back. Nevertheless, when Davie finally reveals the reason for his revenge, it turns out he does have good reason to be angry at Venters and that what Venters did is undeniably horrific, further complicating the moral justification of Davie's actions.



In this section, Davie Mitchell's actions seem almost unimaginably gruesome. Torturing and killing a child is even more shocking and gruesome than what happened in his first story (pouring vomit and feces all over a breakfast table). Davie's stories add to the broader sense of hopelessness and meaninglessness that characterizes much of the novel.



The reveal that Davie Mitchell didn't actually kill Kevin once again renews the question about the morality of his actions. His murder of Venters could conceivably be justified, since Venters indirectly infected Davie with HIV, but Davie's plan nevertheless involved questionable actions against innocent people.



Time passes, and Davie Mitchell and Frances break up. Davie Mitchell ends up back with the woman who initially gave him HIV (which she got from Venters). Eventually, Davie Mitchell tells his parents about his HIV diagnosis. At first his father seems too shocked to say anything, but later, his father cries and embraces him. Davie Mitchell vows to make the most of his life and survive as long as he can.

There Is A Light That Never Goes Out. A group of people high on drugs enter a bar. The group includes Spud, Begbie, Rent Boy, Alison, and Kelly. They all drink while Kelly flirts with Rent Boy. They see a news report about a baby that died of cot death, which makes them think of Lesley's dead baby, Dawn.

Spud wants to have sex. He's been thinking recently about Nicola, who looks a little like Kylie Minogue. She isn't currently at the pub, but a couple months ago they were out walking and having a good conversation, and he considered putting his arm around her. Then he thought of a line from the song by the Smiths "There Is A Light That Never Goes Out," which is about missing an opportunity, and he decided not to put his arm around her after all. Spud generally only has sex with women more assertive than him. One memorable experience involved him in bondage, accidentally concussing his head against the side of a toilet bowl.

Back in the present, everyone eventually leaves the pub. It's still dark, but Begbie suggests getting a big breakfast. Rent Boy doesn't want to eat meat but ends up coming along, as do all the others. Begbie doesn't drop the topic of vegetarianism, saying he remembers that Rent Boy used to kill animals with an air rifle all the time. Rent Boy is embarrassed that Kelly is there to hear about that, but he simply says he doesn't like the taste of meat. Spud figures Rent Boy is doing the right thing for the wrong reason with his vegetarianism.

After breakfast, the group starts chanting soccer cheers and gets thrown out. They go to another pub, where Rent Boy and Kelly leave after a drink. Several drinks later, Alison says she'd like Spud to come stay with her for a while because she doesn't want to be alone. Spud is pretty sure he knows what she means but can never be sure.

Davie Mitchell never experiences any sort of consequences for his revenge plot, suggesting that some people in Leith successfully hide their dark sides. The story gets a surprisingly hopeful ending when Davie Mitchell's father breaks down his stern exterior, which suggests that people can change.



The beginning of this story sets a familiar scene, collecting most of the major characters together in one place. As is often the case, the death of Dawn (and the hopelessness her death represents) still casts a shadow over everyone.



"There Is A Light That Never Goes Out" (the song by the Smiths that gives the story its title) is told from the perspective of someone in a car who wants to make a move on a potential romantic partner but can't bring themselves to do it, so instead they hope that a double-decker bus will kill them and their romantic partner, sparing them the stress of having to act at all. It's clear why the passive Spud would relate to the song, and his own romantic experiences suggest that he can be equally indecisive and perhaps also self-destructive.



Rent Boy's vegetarianism is yet another way in which Rent Boy doesn't quite understand the reasons why he does what he does. Rent Boy blends the cerebral with the instinctual, showing how even someone as well-read as Rent Boy can't force his mind to control his body—a concept that's particularly relevant to the psychology of addiction.



Alison's name may be a tribute to the song "Alison" by Elvis Costello (another musician who famously struggled with addiction). Her suggestion that Spud come home with her seems to come out of nowhere, once again highlighting how the story only follows the perspective of certain characters and how Spud still doesn't understand women.



Feeling Free. In a pub, Kelly gets tired of listening to Alison say derogatory things about Rent Boy. She thinks it's hypocritical that Alison wants to criticize Rent Boy when Alison has had sex with Sick Boy. Kelly says Rent Boy isn't a junkie and only uses **heroin** sometimes, which Alison scoffs at. Kelly doesn't push the issue, and Alison has to leave to see the Housing Department about unpaid rent. Kelly leaves with her.

The meeting at the Housing Department goes well, but Alison is still tense and reacts angrily on the way out when some workers catcall them. It turns into an argument, and some bystanders join in, including some Australian university students, who take Alison's side. One of the workers who catcalled the women calls all the women lesbians, so one of the Australian students calls all the workers gay. Some of the workers seem embarrassed at the scene and don't support the man's catcalling. Eventually, a foreman comes over and tells his workers to mind their own business, which Alison, Kelly, and the students celebrate as a victory.

Alison and Kelly go to a café with the "Australian" students (who turn out to actually be New Zealanders and who in fact are lesbians). They talk for a long time, then they go back to Kelly's place for tea and hash. They all complain about the men they know.

Suddenly, Rent Boy shows up at the door of Kelly's apartment. He's a surprised to see Alison and two stoned strangers there. The women all make fun of Rent Boy, with Kelly impersonating Begbie's voice. Rent Boy takes it with good humor and leaves to let them to keep talking.

The Elusive Mr. Hunt. Kelly is working as a bartender. Sick Boy comes up to her and asks if she's seen Mark Hunt. She says she's seen Mark Renton (Rent Boy) but no Mark Hunt. Sick Boy says that's not who he's looking for, so Kelly shouts out to the bar if anyone has seen Mark Hunt. One says he hasn't, but he'd like to. Rent Boy and Sick Boy both laugh, and when Kelly figures out why, she throws half a jug of water at them. She normally takes jokes well but isn't sure why this time bothers her. Rent Boy notices she's not laughing.

While the novel features only a couple stories that primarily follow female characters, these stories give insight into the female perspective that Rent Boy and the others fail to see.



This passage depicts a conflict between the old, regressive gender norms that the catcalling worker embodies and the more modern gender norms that Alison, Kelly, and the students represent. The other workers don't support their most outspoken coworker, but they also hesitate to contradict him, showing the power that these old norms still exert on them.



This passage is one of the few in the story where multiple women are together without men. For Alison and Kelly, the meeting seems to be a revelation, since they are used to spending time in male-dominated groups.



Rent Boy doesn't always understand women, but he has enough self-awareness in the moment to see that Kelly, Alison, and the students enjoy having their own space, so he lets them have it.



Mark Hunt sounds like "my cunt," particularly with a Scottish accent. It's the type of fake name that might be used for a prank phone call. Sick Boy has pulled far worse pranks than this (like killing a pit bull), so he of course doesn't care about how the joke affects Kelly. Rent Boy laughs when he thinks the joke is harmless, but he feels uneasy once he realizes that Kelly isn't laughing (perhaps because her experiences in the previous story have caused her to be wary of men).



HOME

Easy Money for the Professionals. Begbie makes Spud promise to keep a secret, not even telling Rent Boy. Spud and Begbie take a taxi to June's place, where she lives with Begbie's kid. June asks Begbie what's going on, but he ignores her and the kid, leading Spud to the bedroom, where he has a big canvas bag full of money. Begbie got the money in a scheme that involved copying keys.

There's a knock at the door. Begbie and Spud fear it's the police, but it's just a short young guy who helped with the scheme and wants his share of the money. Begbie tries to intimidate the short guy to make sure he won't blab about the scheme. He throws a dart at his face, removing the dangerous metal part first, but the guy recoils, thinking it's real. He takes his cut of the money and nervously leaves. Spud thinks Begbie was too hard on the guy, but Begbie feels it was necessary to make sure he's discreet with the money.

A Present. Rent Boy stays with his friend Gav for Matty's funeral. Rent Boy doesn't know the full story of what happened to Matty, but Gav tells him Matty had HIV but didn't realize it until late. Gav explains that Nicola's cat had kittens and Matty got one for the young daughter of a woman he knows. But the woman didn't want her daughter to have the kitten, so Matty brought it back to his place. He didn't take very good care of the cat and got toxoplasmosis from its feces.

Gav continues the story, telling Rent Boy how Matty got a brain hemorrhage then had a stroke at age 25. After the stroke, he looked like a different person. Three weeks later, he had a second stroke and died. The police only found him later when neighbors complained about the kitten's noise.

Memories of Matty. Begbie, Rent Boy, Spud, Alison, and others have all gathered for Matty's funeral. At a small chapel connected to the crematorium, a busy minister gives a short speech. Rent Boy and Spud almost laugh when the minister mentions Matty's guitar skills (which in reality were mostly nonexistent).

Begbie continues to have no interest in acting as a father, showing how his character remains consistent over the course of the book. The novel never reveals the specifics of Begbie and Spud's most recent criminal deal. Spud's willingness to join a new scheme so soon after his release from prison suggests either naivety or desperation.



This scene provides yet another example of how Begbie only knows how to communicate through force and domination. Nevertheless, despite Begbie's toughness, this scene also hints at his vulnerability and how, because Begbie needs to rely on other people (like the young man), he will always be paranoid that someone is out to get him.



Matty's death results from a combination of poor decision making and very bad luck. While his character was a relatively minor figure in Rent Boy's group, his death nevertheless shocks the other characters and sets a darker tone for the remainder of the book.



The details of Matty's death are particularly shocking. Strokes generally occur in old age, and so Matty's condition shows how HIV (and by extension, heroin) can make people prematurely old before killing them.



This section ties together several threads of the story by weaving together the perspectives of many different characters. This illustrates how Matty's death ripples throughout the whole community.



Several people at the funeral recall their memories of Matty. Spud remembers how when Matty was stoned, he used to watch Australian soap operas. Alison remembers having sex with Matty a long time ago, back before either of them started using **heroin**. Begbie feels impotent, willing to fight over any insult to a friend but unsure what to do in the face of death. Matty's mother remembers him as a child. Matty's younger brother wants revenge on Matty's drug-using friends for bringing Matty down. Matty's ex-girlfriend holds their daughter's hand tightly, thinking about how Matty used to be a romantic.

Sometime later, the bartender at a pub tries to get everyone to stop singing so loudly. No one listens, although Begbie glares ominously at the bartender. Rent Boy tries to distract Begbie to diffuse the situation, reminiscing about a trip they went on together with Matty. This pacifies Begbie at first, but then he suddenly says that Sick Boy should have been at the funeral.

At the pub, Spud tries to defend Sick Boy for missing Matty's funeral, saying Sick Boy is in France, and so it would've been a long trip for him. But Begbie digs in and insists Sick Boy should have come, so at last Spud gives up and agrees. Begbie gets up and puts his arm around Rent Boy, saying that when he's in London, he'd better take better care of himself than Matty did. Rent Boy promises he will.

Still the pub, Rent Boy goes over to join a conversation between Spud and Alison. Spud says he's attended way too many funerals for someone his age. He wonders who's next. Rent Boy says at least they're all getting a lot of practice with grief for the future. Eventually, everyone leaves the bar to go into the dark, cold night.

Straight Dilemmas, No. 1. A woman at a pub offers Rent Boy a mix of marijuana and opium to smoke. He says he's always been too nervous around drugs to do them. He thinks about Kelly and misses her. The thought of **heroin** bores him now, even though he admits that he's probably a less interesting person than he was when he was using heroin.

Each of the characters remembers a different detail about Matty, often one that doesn't on the surface seem like it should be the most important thing they remember about him. This passage shows how a person's real impact on others might take on surprising forms, with seemingly small details mattering much more in retrospect.



Similar to the section "Scotland Takes Drugs In Psychic Defense," this passage shows how characters often use drinking, drugs, and revelry as defense mechanisms that help them to cope with the harsh reality of the world they live in—a world, for instance, where people like Matty die young.



Spud understands that perhaps Sick Boy is better off getting away from Leith, where the environment seems to inevitably pull everyone back toward heroin and violence. On the other hand, the somber mood of Matty's funeral seems to bring out a rare show of affection from Begbie.



The conversation here reaffirms that funerals are a common occurrence for the characters. Although they are not necessarily numb to death, their humor and casual attitude suggest that they're more familiar with it than most, mostly due to their struggles with addiction.



"Straight Dilemmas" is a play on "Junk Dilemmas," the recurring segment in earlier parts of the book. The introduction of this segment here suggests that Rent Boy might finally be serious about kicking his heroin addiction.



Eating Out. Kelly can tell it's going to be a slow night with poor tips at the bar where she works. She misses Rent Boy, who is still away in London. Four drunk upper-middle-class English patrons walk into the bar. They make crude jokes about women, and Kelly tries not to hear. They persist, alternately verbally harassing and attempting to flirt with Kelly. Kelly tries to get her boss to kick them out, but her boss says they're paying customers.

Kelly decides to take matters into her own hands. She's in the middle of a heavy menstrual period. Some of the English customers have ordered tomato soup, so she squeezes some blood from a tampon into the soup. When the customers ask for more wine, Kelly adds some of her urine, which seems to be cloudy from a urinary tract infection into the carafe. She adds more urine to their fish marinade. They eat everything and don't notice. She empties her bowels onto a newspaper and adds it to the ice cream, also adding a little bit of rat poison. Afterward, she finds it easier to put up with the customers' insults.

Trainspotting at Leith Central Station. Rent Boy is back in Leith after being in London when he hears two men yelling near an archway. He isn't sure if they're yelling at each other or him, so he keeps walking quickly. Eventually, he comes across Second Prize vomiting on the street. Second Prize is talking incoherently and even takes a punch at Rent Boy at one point before calming down again. Rent Boy finds a taxi, pays the driver in advance, and tells him to take Second Prize to Sick Boy's home.

Rent Boy keeps walking until he reaches a pub and finds Begbie already inside. Begbie greets him enthusiastically and introduces him to some other guys in the pub. Suddenly, Begbie gets more serious and asks if Rent Boy has heard that Tommy's sick. Rent Boy says he's heard and is already planning to visit Tommy.

Begbie tells everyone that Rent Boy is a great guy and no one should blame him for selling **heroin** to Tommy, implying that earlier Second Prize was blaming Rent Boy. In exchange for the compliment, Rent Boy tells some flattering stories about Begbie. They leave the pub and go walking; Rent Boy feels like a tough predator when he walks with Begbie.

This section recalls the earlier sections where Kelly gets catcalled out on the street and where Sick Boy plays a prank at her expense. As Kelly continues to endure harassment from men, her patience for dealing with this harassment diminishes.



Once again, the book uses gross and shocking imagery for humor. Kelly's revenge perhaps goes so far that it strains believability (much like Davie Mitchell's elaborate revenge plan), but a slight touch of the surreal makes sense in a novel where drug use alters many characters' perceptions of reality. The men's continued indifference to the terrible meals helps highlight just how little they pay attention to what women do, even when it directly affects them.



The title of this section, which mentions "trainspotting," suggests that something about this section is important enough to give the whole book its title. At first, the story seems to describe just another drunken evening for Rent Boy and his friends. Second Prize's failed punch at Rent Boy may seem like Begbie-style random violence, but in fact, Second Prize has a specific reason for being angry at Rent Boy, though the novel has yet to reveal that reason.



One of the reasons why Rent Boy sticks with Begbie is that despite Begbie's bad qualities, he remains loyal (in his way) to Rent Boy and will always welcome him back from London.



This passage illustrates how Begbie and Rent Boy rely on each other to justify their actions. While Rent Boy usually defends Begbie, this scene shows Begbie defending Rent Boy, raising the question of whether this is a new development or whether Rent Boy always depended on Begbie for support but just didn't realize it until now.



Begbie and Rent Boy make it to an old **train** station. Begbie laments that a person used to be able to get a train to anywhere at the station, but now it's empty, about to be demolished and turned into a supermarket. Begbie wishes he could book a train out of Leith, which is unusual, because Begbie is usually proud of where he's from.

The empty train station signifies an inability to move forward and a lack of connection with the rest of the world. It embodies the isolation of Leith, which causes even Begbie to voice a few negative opinions about his hometown.



An old drunk man comes up to Rent Boy and Begbie and asks if they're trainspotting (watching **trains**), then he laughs at his own joke. Begbie says yes then curses the old man under his breath. The old man tells them to "keep up the trainspottin mind" and then leaves. Rent Boy only realizes later that the old drunk man was Begbie's father. On the way back to Begbie's place, Begbie randomly beats up a stranger on the street. Rent Boy doesn't intervene.

Trainspotting is a real hobby, but the idea that Rent Boy and Begbie could be doing it in an empty station is ridiculous, hence the old man's laughter. Begbie's anger at the random stranger seems to be directly related to his encounter with his father, although neither he nor Rent Boy says anything about this. The scene between Begbie and his father shows how in Leith, violence gets passed down from generation to generation.



A Leg-Over Situation. Rent Boy goes to visit Johnny for the first time since his leg amputation. When Rent Boy last saw Johnny, he had a lot of abscesses and was talking about a wild plan to move to Bangkok. He's surprised to see that Johnny seems pretty happy. While he prefers to get his drugs on the "free market," he is happy that the National Health Service has provided him with some prescription drugs that mix well with his methadone.

What surprises Rent Boy about visiting Johnny is not how much Johnny has changed but how much Johnny seems the same even after losing his leg. Rent Boy realizes that people like Johnny won't change their reckless behavior for anything, and this causes him to face some uncomfortable truths about himself.



Johnny lost his leg because he ran out of veins and had to start shooting heroin into his arteries, which gave him gangrene after just a few shots. Rent Boy can't help looking at the site of Johnny's amputation. Johnny says he knows exactly what Rent Boy's thinking and pulls out his penis to show Rent Boy they didn't amputate it. (This wasn't what Rent Boy was thinking.)

The more time that Rent Boy spends with Johnny, the more he begins to see through Johnny's happy exterior. While Johnny tries to prove that he's still a man by taking out his penis, Rent Boy can see the desperation behind Johnny's attempts to prove himself.



Johnny says when he saw his amputated stump, he thought it might at least be a new injection point, but someone in the hospital told him that might kill him. Now he plans to continue with maintenance therapy to get clean, then he'll become a more professional sort of dealer who doesn't use. He still talks about going to Bangkok, which surprises Rent Boy.

Johnny's plan to be a more businesslike dealer contrasts with many of his previous actions, including his admission that he considered using the stump where his leg used to be as a heroin injection site. While Rent Boy sees himself as better than Johnny, Rent Boy has already used his own penis as an injection point and so doesn't have much room to talk.



Johnny talks about how he's eager to have sex but will probably have to pay for it. Johnny asks Rent Boy if he's still having sex with Kelly. Slightly annoyed by the question, Rent Boy says he isn't. Johnny says Kelly and Alison came by the other day to observe the "freak show" he's become. Johnny says he never used his status as a dealer to coerce people into sex, but Rent Boy replies jokingly that that's just because he had so much **heroin** in him that he couldn't get an erection.

Although Johnny and Rent Boy continue to maintain a friendly and joking attitude with each other, Rent Boy has a harder time acting like he agrees with Johnny as Johnny describes increasingly bizarre behavior. While Rent Boy is hesitant to question his friends' views on women in public, he is more willing to tease Johnny in a private setting.



Somehow, Johnny is still HIV negative. He dreams of being in Bangkok and surrounded by Asian women. Rent Boy wants to leave soon but waits for an opening. Johnny doesn't seem to acknowledge Rent Boy's impatience and starts talking again about how he tried to make Alison give him oral sex. Finally, Rent Boy gets up to leave.

Rent Boy's departure from Johnny represents a rejection of what Johnny represents. Rent Boy has come a long way since the beginning of the novel, when Johnny was "Mother Superior" and had almost religious significance to Rent Boy. This suggests that while addiction is a cycle, people like Rent Boy can still break away from that cycle and move forward.



Winter in West Granton. Tommy looks healthy, even though his HIV diagnosis means he'll likely die sometime in the next few weeks to 15 years. As Rent Boy sits longer in the old chair at Tommy's apartment, he realizes that maybe some part of Tommy is missing, as if some of him has already died. Tommy asks how London is, and Rent Boy says it's fine, about the same as Leith. Tommy doubts this.

Tommy and Rent Boy's conversation is tense because Rent Boy is the one who got Tommy addicted to heroin, starting the chain of events that led to Tommy getting HIV. Tommy's belief that London must be better than Leith reflects how he thinks Rent Boy's life is better than his own at the moment.



Tommy gets angry at Rent Boy, saying Rent Boy has shared needles with many people but never gotten HIV. But Rent Boy maintains that he never shared. Tommy recalls how after he and Lizzy broke up, he went to Rent Boy and asked to try **heroin** for the first time, even though he used to look down on heroin users. Rent Boy wonders how guilty he is for Tommy's condition. He feels that some people like Tommy naturally get strong heroin addictions, but this doesn't necessarily make Rent Boy feel any better.

Although Tommy projects his anger onto Rent Boy, in a way he is expressing a larger frustration with an unfair world. Ultimately, Tommy's own personality and recklessness played a role in his fate, leaving Rent Boy unsure about how to feel about his own role in Tommy's addiction and resultant illness.



Rent Boy realizes that Tommy's apartment is so run down that it probably doesn't get much heat—Tommy might not even survive the winter in his weakened condition. Tommy asks Rent Boy if he has any **heroin**, and Rent Boy says he's sober. Tommy says then the least Rent Boy can do is lend him some rent money, so Rent Boy pulls out a couple bills. Rent Boy and Tommy lock eyes and have a brief moment of understanding, but it passes quickly.

Tommy is so desperate that he appeals to Rent Boy's sympathy and guilt for all he can get. The understanding that passes between Tommy and Rent Boy is deliberately ambiguous and could be positive or negative. On the one hand, it could signify that Tommy has accepted his fate and knows that Rent Boy isn't the only one responsible. A darker interpretation, however, would be that Rent Boy knows the "rent money" he gave Tommy will go to heroin and that he's decided to let him have it anyway, with the knowledge that each new injection might be Tommy's last.



A Scottish Soldier. Johnny shaves his head, trying to look cleaner. The knee in his remaining leg is weak after a soccer accident a while back, and Johnny wishes he'd shot up in that leg so that it was the amputated one instead. He goes out into a public square and writes on a cardboard sign that he's a Falklands War veteran who needs help.

Johnny's masquerade as a war veteran calls back to Billy actually joining the army. As Johnny shows, manipulating people's opinions is as simple as holding up a sign, and with a little bit of cardboard, he transforms from a standard "junkie" to a brave war veteran.



Johnny makes more money on donations than he does at most other jobs. While some people ignore or look down on him, many give money or even come up to thank him for his service. As he looks at all the money, he gets excited about how he is going to trade prescription medicine with a friend who has cancer in order to put together his new favorite drug cocktail.

Despite the bleakness of Johnny's life, his story ends on a humorous note. While the novel accurately depicts the dark side of heroin use, it also acknowledges the characters' resilience and ingenuity as they try to maintain their dangerous addiction.



EXIT

Station to Station. Begbie, Rent Boy, Second Prize, and Spud wait for a bus, with Begbie holding an Adidas bag. They have big plans, and Rent Boy took his first shot of heroin in months to calm his nerves. Begbie complains that Sick Boy hasn't shown up yet. In fact, Sick Boy is standing nearby watching them, waiting until the last minute to join in case any police officers arrive. He's talking with Molly, an HIV-positive sex worker who likes Sick Boy. One night at a pub, Sick Boy kissed her to prove HIV doesn't spread through kissing, but he later regretted it.

Although Rent Boy took heroin specifically for this job, it's likely that his recent encounters with Johnny Swan and Tommy also shook him and motivated him to shoot up. But unlike Rent Boy, Spud seems to be the same as he ever was, still talking to women and still living as if he's invincible.



Sick Boy finally leaves Molly and joins the others. He notices that Begbie seems tense and worries about the attention that Begbie might draw if he gets violent. Even more worrying is how high Spud and Rent Boy seem to be. Spud in particular can be clumsy and might mess up their scheme. Sick Boy turns to Second Prize, who used to be a fairly talented soccer player before he slipped into alcoholism. All of them enter the bus.

Begbie demonstrated during an earlier scheme (when he threw the tipless dart at the young man's head), that he gets tense and paranoid under pressure. As with the section that depicted Matty's funeral, this section jumps between the perspectives of different characters in order to tie everything together as the novel comes to a close.



Molly comes up to the bus, calling for Sick Boy. Sick Boy tells the others he'll just be a moment and goes to see her. Begbie fantasizes about what he'd do to Molly. At last, Sick Boy gets back on the bus. Rent Boy thinks he knows Molly's father. Sick Boy also knows him and says Molly's father often threatens Sick Boy, not knowing that Sick Boy is already setting his daughter up with sex work.

For Sick Boy, his relationships with women are often a way of asserting his control. Rent Boy thinks of Molly's family, however, showing greater recognition of her as a person and demonstrating how he's gotten further and further away from Sick Boy's way of thinking.



Sick Boy complains privately to Begbie that Rent Boy and Spud broke their promise to stay clean for the job. Begbie senses that Sick Boy is trying to win favor with him and just tells Sick Boy to stop complaining. Spud and Rent Boy, meanwhile, are having withdrawal symptoms. Eventually Rent Boy says he has to use the bus bathroom. Spud asks if he's shooting up **heroin**. Rent Boy angrily tells him no, but actually he is.

The alliance of Sick Boy with Begbie suggests that Sick Boy too senses an impending rift with Rent Boy. Although Sick Boy led the charge of making fun of Begbie, in many ways, their personalities are more similar than Sick Boy would probably like to admit.



In the bathroom, Rent Boy hesitates just a moment before shooting up. When he gets back, everyone seems more unified, perhaps feeling better that the police haven't come yet. Rent Boy picks an argument with Sick Boy about whether Lou Reed made better music solo or with the Velvet Underground. Sick Boy has an unusually hard time putting together an argument.

Rent Boy looks around the bus and sees some men in tracksuits and a blonde woman who seems to be a backpacker. As a prank, Rent Boy starts burning some of Sick Boy's ponytail, causing Sick Boy to get angry and leave them all to join the backpacker. Rent Boy is shocked at how quickly and easily Sick Boy seems to change his whole personality to appeal to the woman.

Begbie's speed kicks in, and he needs someone to talk to now that Sick Boy has left. Rent Boy pretends to sleep and wakes Spud up so that he'll be stuck with Begbie. Begbie keeps talking until the bus reaches a service station. In the cafeteria of the service station, Begbie pulls Sick Boy aside and warns him not to steal anything from the backpacker or do anything else that might draw attention. Sick Boy says he isn't stupid, although he is secretly grateful for the reminder from Begbie because otherwise, he would've scammed the woman. Sick Boy loses interest in the backpacker.

The bus starts back up again and makes it to Victoria Station in London. The group takes the taxi, telling the driver they plan to go to a Pogues concert. At last, they make it to the hotel of Andreas, the man they're going to see. Sick Boy met Andreas through a woman they both went out with, pulling off several small-time scams together. When Andreas started the hotel, he tried to distance himself from Sick Boy, but then Sick Boy approached him with an offer about some quality **heroin**.

In the present, Andreas sets Sick Boy and the others up with Peter Gilbert, a successful drug-dealing middleman. They haggle over the price of the **heroin**, with Gilbert feeling disdainful toward all of them, secretly wishing he could work directly with whoever sold them their supply. After completing the deal, all of them go out to celebrate, except Rent Boy who stays back to watch their new money.

Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground came up in the very first section of the book, and so the reference to them again here brings everything full circle. It's unclear whether Sick Boy actually has trouble putting together an argument or whether Rent Boy just feels invincible after shooting up.



Although Rent Boy isn't as violent as Begbie, his decision to burn Sick Boy's hair just to see what happens shows that he has similar destructive impulses, particularly when he's with his friends.



Despite Begbie's feelings of superiority over the other characters, his speed habit makes him not so different from the heroin users on the bus. In general, this chapter emphasizes how the characters are more similar than different, even as they try to differentiate themselves from one another. This section further shows how characters are more alike than different when the typically reckless Begbie warns the typically calculating Sick Boy not to scam the backpacker.



Andreas seems to be someone with a better sense of long-term planning than Sick Boy or any of the others from Leith. Andreas understands that a well-run scam is similar enough to a legitimate business transaction that he can try to make the transition, whereas Sick Boy seems to actually prefer the more dangerous lifestyle of living off schemes.



Peter Gilbert represents the opposite of all the heroin-using characters from Leith. While many of them claimed to want to be more businesslike, Peter seems to be a rare example of someone in the heroin business who operates pragmatically instead of impulsively. Despite Sick Boy's distrust of Rent Boy, even he believes that Rent Boy will honor their unspoken code of conduct as mates and protect the money.



Back at the hotel, Rent Boy looks in the Adidas bag, which holds more money than he's ever seen before. Out the window, Rent Boy can see Andreas caressing his girlfriend in the back garden. Suddenly, Rent Boy takes the Adidas bag and starts leaving the hotel. He feels nervous with so much money on him, so he deposits a little over half of it into his bank account. He goes and buys a round-trip ticket to Amsterdam but only plans to go one way.

In Holland, Rent Boy feels relief but also some guilt about what he's doing. He and Sick Boy went through some good times, even if they were growing apart. The only one Rent Boy really feels bad about hurting is Spud, who never hurts anyone (other than occasionally robbing them to support his **heroin** addiction). On the other hand, Rent Boy feels good—righteous even—about ripping off Begbie. In fact, Begbie may have motivated everything. Leaving Begbie behind makes Rent Boy feel like a new person. Rent Boy feels like he can never go back to Scotland, and he's both excited and scared as he considers a new life in Amsterdam.

Rent Boy's decision to run off with the money is shocking in one sense, but it's also a logical outcome of his becoming more distant from his friends. Going to London temporarily helped Rent Boy kick his addiction, and so his logic seems to be that maybe he can make even more progress by moving someplace farther from home.



Rent Boy feels justified betraying almost all of his former friends. And though he regrets hurting Spud, who almost all of the main characters agree is a good person, this passage suggests that at least part of Spud's goodness might be relative (since he does steal from people he knows to support his addiction). Ultimately, the final passage draws attention to Begbie, confirming why that scene in the abandoned train station with Begbie's father is so crucial to the story. Begbie (and others) helped Rent Boy see the dark side of his old life, and so Rent Boy goes to make a new one, although the question remains whether he will truly change or fall back into new patterns of addiction.





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