

# **Don't Look Behind You Study Guide**

**Don't Look Behind You by Lois Duncan**

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# Plot Summary

Don't Look Behind You is the story of April Corrigan and her family and their life when they have to enter the Witness Security Program. April is a popular happy 17 year old who appears to have it all. She plays competitive tennis, has a loving boyfriend and is looking forward to going to Duke University. One day she goes to school and her whole world changes.

Her father has been secretly working undercover for the FBI and has been testifying against his boss, who has been smuggling drugs. A hit man has been hired to silence him and threats have been made against his family. The FBI comes and moves the Corrigan family to a hotel where they are told they cannot leave the hotel room or make any phone calls. The time slips by and April misses her prom and is going to also miss her boyfriend's graduation. After an argument with their bodyguard Jim, April sends her boyfriend a letter and inadvertently gives information that allows Mike Vamp (the hit man) to find the family. Jim saves the family, but is killed in the process.

The family then enters the Witness Security Program and is relocated to Grove City, Florida. The family members deal with their situation differently. Mrs. Corrigan begins drinking in order to cope. April makes new friends but is unable to accept the situation as being her new reality. Mr. Corrigan blames himself but tries to keep his family safe by limiting their public exposure. This means that Mrs. Corrigan cannot write and April can no longer play competitive tennis.

The family then takes an ill-fated trip to Disney World and April meets her old tennis partner and learns that her boyfriend has begun dating her best friend. As a result of this, she agrees to go to a party with her friend Larry, who is trying to make April his girlfriend. She has too much to drink at the party and tells Larry where she is really from and that she has a boyfriend. Larry is angry and suspects that the family is involved in something illegal.

April finally decides she has had enough of her new life and is going back to Norwood, Virginia. She buys a plane ticket and travels home to her grandmother's house. When she arrives she realizes that the hit man is closer to finding them than she realized and that she is not safe in Norwood. She and her grandmother travel back to Florida, unwittingly bringing the hit man back with them.

Mike Vamp arrives at the new family home, but luckily the rest of the Corrigan family is at the hospital, as Mrs. Corrigan's drinking has caused her to have a car accident. April manages to outwit Mike Vamp and he is killed. The family then finally accepts their new reality and decides to restart their life somewhere else, but this time to work together and succeed as a family.



# Chapters 1-2

## Summary

Chapter 1. The story starts with April Corrigan reminiscing about the day “the world as we knew it ended.” April has a perfect life for a high school junior. She is dating a good looking boy named Steve, and is the best tennis player at school.

April has a brother named Bram and lives with her mother and father. They have a beautiful house and April has a room filled with antique furniture. Steve gave her a crystal prism as a gift and it hangs in her room by the window, and sends rainbows spinning through the room every morning.

Her father is currently in Washington testifying in a trial. April is getting ready for her high school prom and is very happy with the way her life is going. She goes to school on a Tuesday and progresses through her day, only to be called to the counselor’s office after lunch where her Grandmother, Lorelei is waiting to take her home.

Chapter 2. Lorelei brings April back to her house. She has no idea what is going on and when April asks, tells her that her mother called and asked her to get April from school.

When they arrive back at the house, Max Barber, a family friend and FBI agent, is waiting for them. Mrs. Corrigan tells April that the family is leaving their house and heading to a hotel for a mini-vacation because someone shot at her father while he was in the courtroom in Washington.

No one is really concerned and the family packs to leave the house for a couple of days. They go to the FBI headquarters, switch cars, and meet Jim Peterson, the man who will be their bodyguard. At the end of the chapter, Mrs. Corrigan reveals to her children that Mr. Corrigan has also secretly been working for the FBI.

## Analysis

These first two chapters serve to introduce the reader to April and her family. Through April’s recollections, the reader develops a very vivid picture of her and her family’s life. Details that will be important later in the story are introduced, such as Mr. Corrigan working for the FBI, the attempt on his life, and the introduction of the crystal prism.

The reader is also introduced to the main protagonist in the story (April) and other main characters including Mrs. Corrigan, Lorelei, Bram, Max, and Jim Peterson.



## Vocabulary

hyacinths, mischievously, contagious, gaily, engrossed, hauled, acquaintances, retaliate, murmured, dutifully, envy, oration, coordinated, undisguised, bewilderment, incomprehensible, characteristic, impulsively, semidarkness



# Chapters 3-4

## Summary

Chapter 3. The Corrigan family checks into a hotel. April had assumed they would stay at a local hotel, but instead the family drives two hours to the Mayflower hotel, where they check into a suite and are told that they cannot leave the room and they are not allowed to make any phone calls. April is furious and storms off into the bedroom. She then decides to call her boyfriend and explain to him what is going on.

As April prepares to call Steve the phone rings and she picks it up. She overhears a conversation between Max and Jim. The FBI had intercepted a letter addressed to Mr. Corrigan that was threatening his family. Max says that the family may have to stay put for a while. Jim tells Max that he is having some physical problems and asks if he should have extra help. Max says no.

April decides not to tell her mom about overhearing the phone call and joins the family for dinner.

Chapter 4. The family is losing patience with being stuck in the hotel room. They are all gaining weight from eating too much, and Mrs. Corrigan has begun drinking in order to cope. Mrs. Corrigan confides in April that she blames Max for the family's predicament because he made his job seem glamorous and persuaded Mr. Corrigan to begin to secretly work for the FBI.

After about two weeks the trial comes to a close and initially the family is excited to be going home. However, when they receive a phone call from Max, he informs them that there have been more threatening letters, and the lawyers are planning to appeal so the family will not be able to return home.

April is devastated as this means that she will miss Steve's graduation. She has an argument with Jim when he will not allow her to call Steve and explain the situation. She instead decides to send him a letter and mails him a letter using an old stamped envelope that was left in her suitcase after a sleepover. She reads over the letter and tries to see if she has given away any information, and believes that the letter is safe. She sneaks out of the hotel room at night and mails the letter.

## Analysis

The family begins their confinement of the hotel room and the reader sees the unity of the family begin to crack. Mrs. Corrigan, Bram and April are not speaking frequently, and spend most of their days in different rooms. April is unable to relate to her mom and brother and spends most of her time watching TV with Jim.



April still does not understand the severity of the situation and takes out her frustrations on Jim. Jim tells her she needs to grow up and alludes to her Mom's growing alcohol problem. In April's letter, the reader may note that she has inadvertently given away the fact that they are on the fourteenth floor when she says, "I wish I really were the princess in that fairy tale and could let my hair down fourteen stories so my prince could climb up to me."

## Vocabulary

interior, humungous, establish, arbitrary, refuge, ultimatum, accusative, immensity, duration, disclosed, assimilate, monotony, logy, intensify, indignation, perversity, haphazard, innocuous, accosted



# Chapters 5-6

## Summary

Chapter 5. After April's fight with Jim in Chapter 4, she is civil to Jim but not friendly. She begins to spend her time with Bram watching game shows instead of the soaps with Jim. After three days Jim approaches April and the two apologize and solve their differences. April feels guilty about not telling Jim about the letter she sent, but rationalizes that it can do no harm. Jim leaves to go to the mall to buy some board games to alleviate their boredom. He complains about his hands hurting again.

While Jim is gone there is a knock on the hotel room door. April looks through the peephole and sees what appears to be a maid. As she opens the door, she feels uncomfortable and realizes that the maid's clothes don't fit, her hair color doesn't match her eyebrows, and that she had a five o'clock shadow. At the moment she realizes the maid is a man and begins to close the door, the maid tries to force his way into the room. Jim arrives back at that moment and the door slams shut when the maid turns to face Jim. After waiting for a while and hearing suspicious noises, Mrs. Corrigan calls security, who arrive and tell them that there is no-one in the hallway. Mrs. Corrigan then calls Max, who comes to the hotel, and the family leaves through the service entrance. April tells Max what she saw and Max tells her that the man's name is Mike Vamp.

Chapter 6. Mrs. Corrigan, April and Bram are reunited with their father in a motel. Max tells the family Jim has been found dead, shot in the head with his own gun still holstered. April realizes that the arthritis in Jim's hands meant that he was unable to draw his own gun. When she mentions this to Max he pretends that he knew nothing about Jim's problems. Max then tells the family that they will be entering the Witness Security Program.

After spending a few days moving from motel to motel, a woman named Rita arrives to tell them more about the program. The family learns that they will have to break all ties, including Lorelei, since she has decided not to accompany the family. Since Bram has one brown eye and one blue eye, he is told he will need to wear contacts. He is also told that they will not be able to take Porky (the family dog) with them. April asks when they will be able to return to Norwood, but her question is never answered.

## Analysis

The reader begins to understand the true gravity of the situation the Corrigan's have been placed in. They are stuck moving from motel to motel after Jim is killed. The family is still grieving Jim's death and has had no closure since they were not able to attend the funeral. It becomes apparent that Jim had become a close friend to the Corrigan's during their time together and his death has thrown their lives into even more turmoil.





The only solution for the family appears to be establishing new identities and relocating through the Witness Security Program.

The reader learns more about Max's character in these chapters. Mrs. Corrigan tells April that she does not like Max in Chapter 4 and in Chapters 5 and 6 Max's true character is revealed when he pretends not to know about Jim's arthritis. Mr. Corrigan is oblivious to this, however, and continues to support Max and his decisions.

## Vocabulary

momentary, conventional, digesting, grimacing, sophisticated, wistfully, bawl, poised, reluctant, persisted, projected, inefficient, purposefully, accomplished, belatedly, clutching, drab, dispelled, erratic, rancid, residual, authenticity, obligingly, disconcerted,



# Chapters 7-8

## Summary

Chapter 7. After Mike Vamp tries to find the family by contacting Lorelei with a fake movie offer for one of Mrs. Corrigan's books, the family begins their trip to their new home. April is told she has to cut off her long hair. She initially refuses, but her desires are overridden and she travels to the airport with hair that has been cut short with a pair of nail scissors. The family travels separately and under assumed names (Freeman and Gross).

The family is moving to Florida and will become Philip and Ellen Weber, who have two children Valerie and Jason. While they are on the plane April meets Abby Keller, a girl of her own age who is travelling to spend the summer with her dad and his new wife. Abby is eager to talk to April, but after April introduces herself as April Gross she quickly loses interest and pretends to sleep.

After landing in Sarasota airport the family finds their car and travels to Grove City, their new home. After some difficulty they locate their new home, but are disappointed by its condition. It is small, old and dirty. They try to make the best of the situation however, and settle down for their first night sleeping in their new home.

Chapter 8. After a night of nightmares, April wakes in her new home. She is even more depressed with the situation than the night before and leaves the house to go for a walk.

She finds herself at the secondary school and hears the sound of a tennis game. She then meets Kim Stanfield and Larry Bushnell. She takes over Kim's spot playing tennis and, although she loses, she has a great time and makes plans to meet up again the next day. She returns home feeling much more hopeful than when she left.

When she arrives home she meets Tom Geist, who will be their contact while they are in Florida.

## Analysis

The Corrigan family begins their new life. The family adopts a "laugh or you will cry" philosophy. The house they have been given is in very poor repair, infested with bugs, and very rundown and dirty. Mr. Corrigan is trying to remain upbeat, and to convince the family that they are still the same people that they have always been. April has also still not accepted her new reality. She believes that this is, at worst, a semester long separation, and that she will eventually return to Norwood and her old life.

## Vocabulary

ingénue, legitimate, abruptly, protectively, hacked, admonishments, apprehension, correlated, punctuated, progressively, illuminated, undaunted, spew, accusingly, bisected, forlornly, speculated, teetering, frantically, overwhelmingly, stifling, charred, exertion, disillusionment, despondently, travelogue, abruptly, glutton, condescending



# Chapter 9-10

## Summary

Chapter 9. The family struggles to adapt to their new life. Mrs. Corrigan wants to continue writing and asks her husband to bring home a typewriter from work. He keeps procrastinating and she eventually goes down to pick it up. Mr. Corrigan explains that he has been procrastinating because he doesn't want his wife to continue to write, as it may lead to them being discovered.

The family is also having a hard time financially. They were used to being an upper middle class family, and are now required to "learn how to make do." Mr. and Mrs. Corrigan approach this as an adventure of sorts, but April continues to struggle when she cannot have the luxuries she was used to.

Larry calls April and takes her to the movies with Kim and an out-of-town guest. When he picks her up he sees Bram and learns that he has two different colored eyes. Kim's out-of-town guest turns out to be Abby Keller, the girl who sat next to April on the flight from Virginia to Florida. She remembers April as "April Gross" — not "Val Weber" — and questions why April is using a different name.

Chapter 10. Abby continues to grill April about her name and the fact that she is from Virginia not North Carolina, but she is able to bluff so that Larry and Kim are not suspicious. When April arrives at the movies, she quickly realizes she is Larry's date. She meets several of her new classmates and overhears speculation about her and Larry. She doesn't really enjoy her evening and when she arrives home her father tells her he has decided she will not be allowed to play competitive tennis, because of the risk of her appearing in the newspaper or going to national competitions. She is so angry that she doesn't tell her father about what happened with Abby and the plane.

April's mom continues to drink, and is drinking even more in an attempt to cope with her new life and her inability to continue writing.

## Analysis

The reader can see that cracks are starting to appear within the Corrigan's new world. Larry has seen Bram without his contacts, and Abby knows that April is not who she is supposed to be. Mrs. Corrigan is starting to lose control of her drinking, and Mr. Corrigan, although trying to keep his family safe, is beginning to alienate his wife and daughter.

April continues to cling to her old life, and refuses to date Larry, as she still considers herself Steve's girlfriend.

## Vocabulary

mired, replenished, interminable, monotony, intrusive, sensually, simultaneously, antagonizing, disdainful, spontaneous, demented, accelerate, enunciating, bewilderment, insufficiently, inadvertently, oblivious, disdainful, culverts,



# Chapter 11-12

## Summary

Chapter 11. In an attempt to make April feel better, her parents arrange a family day trip to Disney World. Mr. Corrigan admits to April that he made a mistake and regrets going undercover for the FBI. The family makes an extra effort to get along and have a fun day, and they are truly enjoying themselves by the time they reach Disney.

The family continues to have a great time and as the afternoon progresses the family decides to separate, with Mr. and Mrs. Corrigan going to Epcot, and April and Bram staying at Disney. After the family splits, April runs into her old tennis partner Jodi. April is evasive about where she has been and doesn't give away any information, but Jodi tells her that Steve and Sherry (April's best friend) have begun dating. April is devastated, but tells Jodi that she will be home for second semester and for the Christmas parties.

Chapter 12. April tells her parents about meeting Jodi and about finding out about Steve and Sherry. Her mom is sympathetic but her father is more worried about the exposure. This provokes another fight between April's parents and they ride back to Grove City in silence.

After finding out about Steve and Sherry, April agrees to go out with Larry again. They then make plans to go to a party together. While she is at the party, April has too much to drink and tells Larry that she has a boyfriend in Virginia. Larry then realizes that Abby has been telling the truth and confronts April. April doesn't tell Larry anything else, but Larry continues to speculate about why April has changed her name and is lying about where she came from. He comes to the conclusion that April's father must have done something illegal and the family is running away.

The next morning April has a terrible hangover and hopes that Larry is in a similar state and has forgotten about their conversation from the night before. That evening Mr. Corrigan gives April some money from the sale of her bedroom furniture from the house in Norwood. He tells her that the man who he testified against was killed while he was out on bail and tells April that Richard Loftin was not the man who hired Mike Vamp. April realizes that she will definitely not be home for Christmas and may never be able to return to Virginia.

## Analysis

Events are now moving more quickly within the story, and April's secrets are quickly becoming public knowledge. She meets Jodi and reveals to Larry that she is really from Virginia. The reader knows that Jodi will go home and tell everyone that she saw April at Disney. Her parents are continuing to fight and April has been forced to accept that she



will probably never return to Norwood. She feels abandoned, but she still is unable to accept that her new life is in Grove City.

## Vocabulary

volition, reluctantly, amicably, bewildered, rambunctious, gusto, pathetically, dispelled, surliness, irresistible, exile



# Chapter 13-14

## Summary

Chapter 13. April decides to go home to Virginia. She tells her parents that she is spending the weekend at Kim's house and uses the money from the sale of her furniture to purchase a plane and a bus ticket. She calls Steve to meet her at the airport and calls her grandmother to ask to live with her. Lorelei discourages the idea and tells April to go back to her parents. She disobeys and flies back to Virginia anyway. Steve meets her at the airport.

Chapter 14. Steve drives April over to her grandmother's house. On the way he confirms that he and Sherry have started dating. He also tells her that he didn't receive her letter. This makes April a little uneasy, but she rationalizes that there could be several reasons why Steve didn't receive her letter.

When April arrives at her grandmother's condos she finds that Pat, a man who she has known since she was twelve, will not let her in without speaking to Lorelei first. Lorelei allows April in, but will not let Steve come with her. April is horrified when Lorelei opens the door as her face is bruised and her arm is in a cast.

Lorelei tells April that a strange man came to her house pretending to be delivering a package. When she let him in he pinned her to the floor and twisted her arm behind her back trying to find out where the Corrigan's had gone. Lorelei eventually heard her arm break and passed out. When she awoke, she was alone. She called Max asking for help, but Max refused to help at all, directing her instead to the US Marshals.

April realizes she cannot stay in Norwood after all, and she and Lorelei pack so that they can both return to Grove City.

## Analysis

The theme of change comes into play very strongly in these chapters. April is forced to accept that the life she left no longer exists for her. Steve has moved on, and her grandmother's home is not safe. The reader also gets confirmation that Max is not as good a friend or as trustworthy as Mr. Corrigan had always thought.

Duncan foreshadows that the letter could have been the cause of Jim's death when Steve mentions that he never received it. April also mentions on the phone Larry Bushnell's name and the reader might begin to wonder if there is a tap on Lorelei's line and if April has once again made a fatal mistake.





## Vocabulary

instinctively, sanction, reclusive, hostility, adaptable, incriminate, depleted, gamut, furtively, illegible, compelled



# Chapter 15-16

## Summary

Chapter 15. April and Lorelei begin the trip back to Florida. April is surprised by her grandmother's choices when she is packing as she doesn't take her expensive clothes, or the trinkets that she has collected. Instead she takes sentimental items. She has also taken Porky out of the kennel where he was boarded and plans to bring him to Florida too. As they leave the condos April is struck by the feeling that someone is following them.

They stop for the night at a motel and Porky barks at a parked black Camaro. April falls asleep after taking a shower but is abruptly awoken in the middle of the night. She thinks that someone is trying to get into their room. She locks the deadbolt and opens the curtains to look, but doesn't see anyone. The next morning she checks at the front desk to see if the spare key is there. When the girl behind the desk assures her no keys are missing she feels more at ease and doesn't worry when the map (which has their route marked) is missing, assuming it has accidentally been packed.

After being on the road for several hours, April notices that there is a black Camaro behind them on the highway.

Chapter 16. April realizes that the black Camaro is following them, and is successful in losing the tail by speeding up and then swerving to take an off-ramp off the highway. She and Lorelei travel north for a while before continuing their journey south. It isn't until they stop at a motel that they realize their map hasn't accidentally been packed and is missing. Once Lorelei and April realize Mike the Vamp has their marked map they try to call Mr. and Mrs. Corrigan. Upon receiving no answer they immediately continue driving in an attempt to beat him back to Grove City so they can warn the family.

When Lorelei and April arrive back at the house they are shocked to see the family Plymouth is sitting half in the drainage ditch by the driveway and the family is missing.

## Analysis

The tone of the book changes slightly and the tension tightens yet further. Through heavy hints the reader knows that Mike Vamp has found April and is following her and her grandmother, although initially April is oblivious to this fact. When April and Lorelei realize Mike Vamp is headed to Grove City, the tone turns frantic and the reader gets swept up in pace of the story. April has indeed made another potentially fatal mistake and the reader desperately hopes that the duo will beat Mike Vamp back to Grove City.

Throughout these two chapters a role reversal of sorts has occurred. Because of Lorelei's injury, she is frail and weak. April is forced to assume almost an adult role and



care for her grandmother. She ultimately rejects that role, and is pleased when her grandmother, realizing her daughter is in danger, assumes control again.

## Vocabulary

ermine, sentimental, trudged, ecstatic, indefinable, dejected, accentuated, surreptitiously, resignation, dignity, self-righteously, contrite, barreling, retract



# Chapter 17-18

## Summary

Chapter 17. April enters the house, looking for clues as to what has happened to her family. She finds Kim's number next to the phone and realizes that her family figured out she had gone back to Norwood. She tries to call Larry, and Larry's father tells her that a man had already called that night and was looking for the Corrigan's. April hangs up the phone and is trying to decide what to do next when Porky starts barking. April turns and sees Mike Vamp at the window. She locks the door, but remembers the front door is still open. She and Lorelei try to get to the front door, but Mike Vamp has already come inside.

He tells April that it was her letter and her phone call to Lorelei that allowed him to find her, and tells her that he will keep them locked up as hostages until he finds Mr. Corrigan. April begs not to be locked in a closet, which is where Mike Vamp then decides to put them. The chapter ends with April telling Lorelei that they were exactly where she wanted to be.

Chapter 18. April successfully escapes from the closet by climbing through the attic and coming out in Bram's room. She plans to go and get help but when she reaches the yard she finds Mike Vamp and he begins to chase her. She successfully makes it back to her grandmother's car, but since she left the head lights on, the battery has died. Vamp points a gun at April and tells her to get out of the car. April has a moment of clarity when she realizes that this situation is her fault and becomes determined to fix it. She takes her tennis racquet from the car and, after turning off the headlights, gets out of the car and hits Mike Vamp in the head with the racquet. He stumbles backwards and falls into the drainage ditch, which has flooded. April climbs into the ditch to try and find Vamp. She remains there until her father finds her.

After the family returns home, April learns that her mother was drunk when she found out that April was not at Kim's house and tried to drive to go find her. She drove the car into the ditch and broke her arm so the family had to go to the hospital.

The family realizes that they cannot stay in Grove City and that they will never be able to return home to Virginia. Mr. Corrigan offers to leave the family, so that they can forge his death certificate and return home, but the family decided to stay together and start a new life somewhere else. Tom Geiss tells them that the Security Program will not help them anymore, and they decide to try and make it on their own.

## Analysis

The story comes to a resolution with April atoning for her mistakes that allowed Mike Vamp to find them. April's mother accepts that her drinking is out of control and the family resolves to come together to face their challenges. April and her mother have



been blaming Mr. Corrigan for their situation for most of the story, but when he suggests a solution that would allow them to return home (but without him) they reject it, choosing instead to bond together to start a new life elsewhere.

## Vocabulary

embankment, pervasive, interminably, staccato, riveted, barricade, tentative, dispensation, disconcerted, intoxicating, guttural, tauntingly



# Epilogue

## Summary

The epilogue takes place about four months after Chapter 18. April, Mr. Corrigan, Lorelei, and Mrs. Corrigan have all gotten jobs in a new city. April is at the mall and sees a boy she finds attractive. She goes over to talk to him and makes plans for a date. The boy is looking for a gift for his mother and April recommends a prism (which is the same gift that Steve gave her at the beginning of the story.) The epilogue concludes with her hanging the prism in her bedroom.

## Analysis

The epilogue is important to the story because it shows the reader that April has at last accepted her new reality and is moving on with her new life.

## Vocabulary

dilapidated, intentional



# Characters

## April Corrigan/Valerie

April is the main character in the story. She is a senior in high school and her world is turned upside down when she and her family enter the Witness Security program. Through her actions, their first bodyguard is killed, and their location is revealed to the hit man who is stalking her family. She then atones for her mistake at the end of the story and saves her family from the hit man.

## Bram Corrigan/Jason

Bram is April's younger brother. He is in the third grade. He adopts the name Jason when the family enters the Witness Security Program. He and his buddies use the attic in their new house as a hideaway and it is through this knowledge that April is able to escape and outwit Mike Vamp and thus save her family.

## Jim Peterson

Jim is the first bodyguard assigned to the Corrigan family. He advises them to stay in the hotel room and not have any contact with anyone. April breaks his rules and he is killed after Mike Vamp finds the hotel room they are staying in.

## Elizabeth Corrigan

April's mom is a famous author. She gets very depressed when the family enters the Security Program and she can no longer work. She begins to drink to deal with her feelings. She also harbors some resentment towards her husband for putting them in their current situation. Towards the end of the story, while driving drunk, she crashes the car into a ditch and is taken to the hospital. Ironically, this possibly saves her husband's life as the family is not at home when the hit man arrives at the house.

## George Corrigan

April Corrigan's father works for an airline and his boss has been smuggling drugs. He secretly works for the FBI and then testifies against the drug smugglers and an attempt is made on his life. He and his family then enter the Witness Security Program and he becomes the manager of a photo developing business. He feels badly about what has happened to his family.



## **Max Barber**

Max is Mr. Corrigan's friend from childhood. He works for the FBI and talked Mr. Corrigan into working undercover for the FBI. He comes to town to inform the Corrigans what has happened with Mr. Corrigan and the trial. Mr. Corrigan regards him as a good friend, but it is clear to the reader (and to Mrs. Corrigan) that Max is only looking out for himself and he eventually abandons the Corrigans.

## **Mike Vamp**

Mike is the hit man hired to kill Mr. Corrigan. He finds the hotel room that the Corrigans are staying at in Virginia, and later tracks them to Florida. He is killed at the end of the story.

## **Steve Chandler**

Steve is April's boyfriend. After April leaves, he begins to date April's friend Sherry. The family's bodyguard, Jim, is killed after April writes a letter to Steve to tell him what is going on. Steve is the most important person in April's life and she risks her own family to communicate with him.

## **Sherry**

Sherry is April's best friend in Virginia. After April moves, she begins to date April's boyfriend Steve. April feels betrayed and it is Sherry and Steve that cause April to try to come back to Virginia.

## **Jodi**

Jodi is April's tennis partner. After April enters Witness Security, she and her brother visit Disney World and meet Jodi. When Jodi returns home to Virginia she tells people that she met April.

## **Kim Stanfield**

Kim is a friend that April meets when she moves to Florida and assumes the name Valerie. She is Larry's cousin, and Abby's stepsister. April tells her mother that she is staying with Kim when she goes back to Virginia.





## **Larry Bushnell**

Larry is one of the first people that April (Valerie) meets when her family moves to Florida. Larry enjoys playing tennis with April and is under the impression that they are dating. He feels betrayed when April rejects him and gives away their address to Mike Vamp.

## **Abby Keller**

Abby is a girl that April meets on her plane flight to Florida. April tells Abby that her name is April Gross. Abby later turns out to be a new friend's stepsister, and she remembers April from the plane ride. It is due in part to Abby that Mike the Vamp finds April and her family.

## **Lorelei**

Lorelei is April's grandmother. She is a very active lively woman who initially declines the offer to go into Witness Security with the rest of her family. After visits from Mike Vamp and later from April she decides to join the family in Florida. Mike Vamp follows them and finds the family.

## **Tom Geist**

Tom is the Corrigan's contact with the US Marshals in Florida.

## **Richard Loftin**

Richard Loftin is Mr Corrigan's boss. He testifies against him in court and as a result he and his family enter the Federal Witness Security Program.



# Objects/Places

## Southern Skyways

Southern Skyways is the airline company that Mr. Corrigan worked for. The executives in the company were helping to smuggle drugs and Mr. Corrigan was working undercover with the FBI.

## Virginia

Virginia is where April and her family initially live. They are moved out of Virginia when they enter the Witness Security Program.

## Grove City, Florida

Grove City is where April and her family are relocated. It is a very small town and the family does slowly adapt to their new life.

## Attic

The attic is Bram's escape in the new house. He and his new friends spend hours up there playing. April uses the attic as an escape when Mike Vamp locks them in the closet.

## Prism

The prism is a gift that Steve gave to April before the story started. April leaves it behind in Virginia, but it is packed up and sent to Lorelei for storage. In the epilogue April watches an attractive boy pick out a prism for his mother and she decides to hang her own prism as it now represents a new beginning and an acceptance of a new reality.

## Tennis Racquet

The tennis racquet initially serves as a symbol of April's old life. Her grandmother tries to give it back to her when she returns to Virginia but April is hesitant. Her grandmother puts it in the car anyway and April then uses the racquet to kill Mike Vamp. In killing Mike Vamp with the racquet April is taking control and atoning for the mistakes she made by clinging to her old life.



## Hotel Room

The hotel room is where April and her family spend several days while waiting for the trial (in which Mr. Corrigan is testifying) to be over. The whole family feels very confined in the hotel room, which they do not even leave to eat. Mike Vamp finds the hotel room (due to the letter that April sends to Steve) and Jim (the Corrigan's' bodyguard) is killed outside the door to the hotel room.

## Letter

Whilst the family is living in the hotel room, April sends a letter to her boyfriend Steve telling him what is going on. The letter is intercepted by Mike Vamp and he figures out where the Corrigan Family is staying. He finds the hotel room and kills Jim (the bodyguard).

## Zip Pic

The Zip Pic is the business that the Witness Security Program buys for Mr. Corrigan. It is a small photo developing store. It is not profitable and Mr. Corrigan does not make any money from it.



# Themes

## Family

Family is an important theme in *Don't Look Behind You*. At the beginning of the story, April has a picture perfect family; her mother is a famous author, her father works for an airline company, and she plays competitive tennis. They live in a nice house, and are comfortably wealthy.

When the family is forced to go into hiding, cracks begin to appear between them. Even when the family is confined to a hotel suite, they spend their time separately, with April watching soap operas, Bram watching game shows, and Mrs. Corrigan writing and then beginning to drink to cope. April puts her boyfriend above her family's safety and sends him a letter that results in the family being located by Mike Vamp.

When the family eventually reunites with Mr. Corrigan, April and her mother blame their father for their forced exile and for the fact that they must both give up what they love (writing and tennis). The family relationships continue to break down, with April continuing to place more emphasis on her friends than her family. It is this choice (when April decides to return to Virginia) that ultimately leads Mike Vamp back to her family.

There is a resolution at the end of the story when Mr. Corrigan offers to leave the family, so that they can forge his death certificate and the rest of the family can return to their old lives. The family rejects this idea and finally the familial bond is restored and the Corrigan family decides to face their problems together.

## Acceptance

The theme of acceptance is very prevalent in this story. The Corrigan family is forced to accept that they must leave their old life behind and embrace a new one in Florida. The whole family struggles to accept this change. April views it as a temporary measure and Mrs. Corrigan drinks in order to accept she can no longer write. Mr. Corrigan seems to have accepted the change, but in doing so alienates his wife and daughter. The story is resolved when the family finally comes together and accepts that they will need to bond together and start a new life.

## Change

Duncan does a very good job of emphasizing change within her novel. April's life literally changes overnight as she and her family goes into hiding. The family changes almost everything about themselves; April cuts her hair, Bram gets contacts, and the family changes their names.



The changes in their living situation are also striking. The family moves from a large house in an upper middle class neighborhood to a small rundown house in a small town. The way that the family handles these changes is the basis for the story. April, being unable to face these changes, causes Mike Vamp to find the family. The epilogue provides evidence that April finally accepts the change to her life as permanent, moving on to a new relationship and becoming content with her new life. Mrs. Corrigan also struggles with change, and begins drinking in order to cope. Mr. Corrigan has the easiest time accepting these new changes, but alienates his family in the process.



# Style

## Point of View

This story is written from the first person point of view. The narrator is April, and she is recalling the story of how her family moved into the Witness Security Program. This point of view is very effective for this story as it creates suspense and allows the reader to discover events as April did. The author, Lois Duncan, helps the reader understand events where April was not present by using dialogue between other characters to reveal what has happened. By using a limited first person point of view, the author causes the reader to identify with April and feel more connected to her as a character. The reader experiences April's panic when her world falls apart, and when she realizes that she is responsible for Mike Vamp finding the family.

## Setting

This story is set in Norwood, Virginia, and Grove City, Florida. The two settings are very different from each other. Norwood is a bustling city, and the family lives in an upper middle class neighborhood. The family is relocated to a small town, and a house which is dilapidated, dirty and infested with rodents. The setting is important to the story because it makes it harder for the family to adapt, which in turn increases April's desire to return home to Virginia. It is this return that allows Mike Vamp to locate the family.

## Language and Meaning

The language used within the story is very rich and descriptive, but the tone of the story is one that would be typically used by a high school student. This is important, since the narrator of the story is a 17 year-old high school girl. The description allows the reader to create a very vivid picture of April, her family, and her life and to see the events of the story very clearly.

Duncan's choice of language makes the story flow quickly according to the pace of the narration, which allows for quite a bit of tension and suspense. The reader gets caught up, and it becomes very hard to stop reading until there is a resolution of the story.

## Structure

The novel is divided into 18 chapters. Each chapter is 8-10 pages long. The story revolves around April — told through her point of view and through dialogue that happens around her. The story is told as a flashback, with April recalling the events.

There is one main plot, that of Mike Vamp trying to find the family and kill Mr. Corrigan. The story explores the consequences and struggles of the family entering the Witness

Security Program and needing to adapt to their new life. The story comes to a resolution with the death of Mike Vamp and the acceptance of their new situation.



## Quotes

After I'd completed the letter I reread it carefully. As far as I could see, it was totally innocuous, void of every shred of real information. (Chapter 4)

A man like Vamp knows all the angles. (Chapter 7)

It doesn't make any difference what we call ourselves. We're still the same people we always were, isn't that right kids? (Chapter 7)

I missed that girl and I desperately wanted her back. (Chapter 7)

All the warmth and solidity was gone from our lives, and my parents had changed so much I barely knew them. (Chapter 12)

There had been a time when I could not have lied to my mother; in fact, I had never been comfortable lying to anyone. But in the past three months I had become practiced in deception, and the words slipped out of my mouth sounding easy and natural. (Chapter 13)

Things change, and life goes on, and we roll with the punches. (Chapter 14)

We had burned our bridges, and there was nothing left for us to do but move on. (Chapter 18)





# Topics for Discussion

## Topic 1

What events led Mike the Vamp to find the family? Which event was most significant?

## Topic 2

If April hadn't written the letter to Steve, how might the story have been different?

## Topic 3

How did April grow as a character throughout the story?

## Topic 4

What was the significance of the prism throughout the story?

## Topic 5

How did each of the family members cope with leaving Virginia? Which family member do you think gave up the most in the move?

## Topic 6

Explain the relationship between Lorelei and her daughter. When do you think the relationship changed?

## Topic 7

Mike Vamp claims that he would not have hurt the rest of the Corrigan family, as George Corrigan was his target. Do you think he was being honest?

## Topic 8

Explain the significance of Max as a character in the story. Why did Lois Duncan include him?