

# **The Hiding Place Study Guide**

## **The Hiding Place by Trezza Azzopardi**

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## Plot Summary

*The Hiding Place* begins in 1960 before the narrator, Dolores Gauci, is born. Dolores is the sixth of six daughters, born to Mary, a frustrated housewife, and Frankie, a compulsive gambler. Mary and Frankie both see hope in the birth of this last child. Perhaps this one will be the boy they have wanted for so long. However, Dolores' birth is marked by disappointment and the biggest loss Frankie could possibly suffer. Frankie gambles and loses his share in a cafe that is the family's livelihood.

Barely a month later, Frankie takes the rent money to gamble on a horse, leaving Mary to explain this to the rent collector. A fire starts in the kitchen while Mary is outside with the rent collector, and Dolores is burned. Then to add insult to injury, the man who owns their house is an old friend of Frankie's who claims the Gaucis' second child is really his biological child. In exchange for the deed to the house and enough money to fix the fire damage, this man, Joe Medora, insists that Frankie give him his daughter. Despite Mary's refusals, Frankie agrees to the deal.

Five years pass. Dolores has adjusted well to the loss of all the fingers on her burned hand and has grown into a healthy five-year-old. Frankie still gambles, and Mary still does whatever it takes to make ends meet. Their oldest daughter, Celesta, is seventeen now, and Frankie worries about her future. When a wealthy businessman, older than even Frankie himself, offers to marry Celesta, Frankie jumps at the opportunity. Frankie urges Celesta to spend time with this man, and after a disastrous date with a man her own age, Celesta agrees to marry this wealthy businessman.

Fran, the Gaucis' third child, is Dolores' closest friend. Fran is the sister who watches out for Dolores and who is the kindest to her. The only problem is that Fran has a bad habit of setting fires and watching them burn. One day, Fran lights a fire in an old storefront and nearly injures the old couple who owns it. Fran is sent to live at a home for troubled kids.

At the wedding, Joe Medora, who has been on the run all these years, shows up and takes Frankie away. Mary is distraught at the sight of Joe with Frankie. Salvatore, Frankie's old friend, is also concerned and goes looking for Frankie. During the search, Salvatore discovers that money from the business he shares with Joe Medora is missing. Salvatore knows Frankie has stolen it. Salvatore goes in search of Frankie and catches up with him at the docks. There he confronts Frankie and falls into a dry dock to his death. Instead of getting help, Frankie runs off, as was his plan all along.

Dolores and her sisters are sent to separate foster homes after Frankie disappears, and Mary, stressed beyond her limits, is placed into a hospital. Thirty years later, Dolores receives a letter telling her that her mother has died. Dolores goes home for the funeral and to find out a few answers to questions she has about her past.

Rose, Celesta and Luca come to the funeral with Dolores. Dolores tries to talk to them about the past, but the other girls do not want to remember their childhoods. Finally,



Dolores manages to get Luca to tell her a few things about their parents, and Dolores realizes how hard her sisters have tried to protect her all these years. All Dolores wants now is to see Fran again. Louis, Celesta's youngest son, brings Fran to Dolores.



# Part 1, Waiting

## Part 1, Waiting Summary

Dolores sits at her bedroom window and says the Lord's Prayer slowly, watching for her father to come home. If she sees him before she says the prayer three times, she is supposed to run downstairs and warn her mother, who is chatting with a friend and drinking a little too much. Dolores lives in a cramped rental house with her four sisters and her parents. She shares a bedroom with her mother and two of her sisters. Another bedroom houses two of her older sisters. One sister is no longer living with them, and the last bedroom is called the Box Room. That is where her father sleeps. There is a chest in Dolores' room where her mother used to put her to sleep with the lid down so that her father could not find her. He might have smothered her if he could have found her, her mother told her.

Dolores is nearly through the second prayer when she sees her father coming. She runs downstairs and tells her mother, and she watches as her mother rushes her friend out of the house and tries to hide the liquor on her breath with a sprig of parsley. This happens when Dolores is four. Later in life, Dolores is standing at her window again, staring at all the houses on the block that have been boarded up. She says she is the last one now. Dolores waits for her sisters to return.

## Part 1, Waiting Analysis

These few pages contain a lot of foreshadowing. First, we must wonder why Dolores is waiting for her father. What has he been doing? It is clear that the family is not rich. In fact, it seems they have very little money if the children must share not only rooms but beds as well. Another question also pops into the mind of the reader in this brief description of the living situation. Why do the parents not share a bedroom? Second, the reader must wonder why the father would have a desire to kill his own infant daughter. Even with five daughters before her, surely a father would never consider such action unless he has very good reason. Third, the reader sees foreshadowing in the idea of this bustling neighborhood Dolores has described suddenly boarded up and empty. What has happened to the people of this neighborhood? The reader must also wonder where Dolores' family is and why she is there alone waiting for her sisters to return.



# Part 1, Chapter 1

## Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

Frankie is a gambler. In 1960, shortly before his daughter Dolores is born, Frankie has a half partnership in a diner. Frankie's friend Salvatore is his partner and the cafe's cook, but Frankie would rather gamble and greet the customers than cook. Frankie and Mary have five children, all daughters, so Mary is reluctant to tell Frankie when she becomes pregnant again. Mary does not tell Frankie until she is nearly six months along. In response, Frankie starts a nightly card game in a room in their apartment above the diner in hopes of making extra money from the luck he believes this new child will bring him.

On the day Dolores is born, Frankie enters a big card game with a man named Joe Medora. When Dolores is born, Salvatore's wife mistakenly believes Mary has had a boy and calls the diner with the good news. In the middle of the celebration, Frankie loses a single hand of poker with his share in the diner and his father's ruby ring in the pot. When Mary returns from the hospital with her new baby daughter, they are homeless and forced to move into a house that Joe Medora owns.

Salvatore does not want to have anything to do with Frankie after this. Salvatore still owns his share of the diner, which has now become The Moonlight Club, and he still cooks. Salvatore worries about Mary and the children, and he worries that Mary will leave Frankie. Salvatore sends his wife to take care of Mary and sends food for the children from the diner. About this time, Dolores gets burned.

## Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

There is foreshadowing in the events of this chapter. Frankie loses everything on the same day his sixth baby girl is born. Gambling is never a good thing, especially when you are talking about a man who risks his livelihood with six children to care for. This foreshadows disaster for this family. There is also some irony in the timing of the loss. The object that was Frankie's luck, the impending birth of his only son, becomes a moment of extreme loss and disappointment. Also this chapter ends with a statement that is foreshadows events to happen in the next chapter in an unusually overt manner, "It is about this time that I am burnt." (pg. 17)



# Part 1, Chapter 2

## Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

Dolores is one month old, a sickly baby her mother struggles to keep warm and healthy. Mary puts the baby in a chest in front of the fire in the kitchen while she prepares dinner. The other children are outside playing. Mary calls them inside while her husband dresses in one of his best suits in order to meet with a bookie and make a bet on a horse race that will run that night. While Mary fights to get the children to wash their hands before they eat, Frankie takes all the household cash, money Mary earned working the night shift at a local bakery, from a tin where Mary has hidden it.

After Frankie leaves, Mary goes to get the rent money because she knows one of Joe Medora's men will be there soon to collect it. Mary cannot find the money and becomes hysterical. What will she tell Joe's man? Mary sends the girls out of the house a moment before Joe's man, Martineau arrives. Mary tells Martineau that Frankie took the money, and there is nothing she can do about it. They step out on the front porch to talk, leaving the baby alone in the kitchen in front of the fire. Mary becomes angry, not sure what there is to do. She is distracted and does not notice the smoke billowing out of the back of her house until a neighbor sees it. Martineau runs to the house behind the neighbor's boys and breaks the kitchen door down to retrieve the baby.

Frankie has made his bet and has lost. Frankie goes to Salvatore to ask for money and finds him unwilling to help. Frankie says he will ask Joe for more time on the rent. Salvatore tells him Joe does not want to see him, but Frankie goes upstairs anyway.

## Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

Most of the promises made in the first chapter have come true. The first chapter foreshadows Frankie's gambling problem and that has become more evident in this chapter, underscoring a theme of work, trust and betrayal. Also, the baby Dolores is trapped in a fire just as the narrator promises at the end of the last chapter. However, the narrator does not tell the reader the extent of the child's injuries, so the reader knows this question must carry through to the next chapter, building suspense. Another important note here is Mary's anger. This also underscores the theme of betrayal. Mary is reacting to the situation her husband has put her in with his addiction. The theft of her money is simply a symbol of the turmoil that must be a constant part of Mary's life with a husband who has such a serious addiction. Mary's anger also foreshadows potential trouble in the future, causing the reader to ask how long Mary will sit back and let him act that way and how deep into the gutter Frankie will take his family before he stops.





# Part 1, Tinder

## Part 1, Tinder Summary

Dolores' right hand is unscathed, but she has lost all the fingers of her left hand. Dolores thinks it is a work of art, like a closed tulip. Dolores knows people stare at her left hand and search her face for more scars. The scars are there, but people would have to get close to see them. They do not, since the left fist is enough to scare them off.

Dolores thinks about that night a lot. She knows her father was with his bookie when it happened, drinking and screaming at horses who could not hear him, all the while unaware of what was happening to his home, to his youngest child. Dolores thinks about it a lot.

## Part 1, Tinder Analysis

This one page answers many of the reader's questions at the end of the last chapter. The burns are bad, but Dolores survives them. The description of her wounded hand is beautiful, symbolic of the maturity and intelligence the narrator has grown to acquire. This also leaves the reader anxious to find out how this maimed and unwanted child has grown to be such a forgiving person. This, again, is foreshadowing.



# Part 1, Chapter 3

## Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Frankie goes up to Joe's office in what used to be his den to ask for more time on the rent. Frankie is forced to wait while Joe finishes writing a letter. At home, the fire trucks come and take the baby from Mary. Mrs. Jackson, their neighbor, offers to take the children while Mary goes to the hospital with Dolores. Mary is in shock and cannot move. Another neighbor, Eva Amil, takes Luca and offers her to Mary. Then Mrs. Amil gently urges Mary into the ambulance.

While Frankie waits to get Joe's attention, he remembers back to when he first met Joe. Frankie is a young man, barely twenty, when he gets a job on a ship that takes him to Cardiff. Once there, he rents a room from a man who is also from his home of Malta. For several days he lives alone, trying to figure out how to survive in a place where he does not understand the language. One day, the door opens, and Joe walks in, just in time to save Frankie's inherited ruby ring from rolling into a crack in the floorboards. Joe is his roommate. Joe has also come from Malta, but he knows English already. He teaches Frankie little phrases that will help him get by. Joe knows a lot of people and has a good job with the local Syndicate. Joe introduces Frankie to people, especially pretty girls. When Joe finds a job as the manager of a club, he gives Frankie a job there too.

That was twelve years ago and still Joe acts as though Frankie owes him something. Frankie sees his father's ruby ring on Joe's finger and does not agree. Joe finally finishes his letter and looks at Frankie. Before Frankie can tell him what he wants, Joe makes a proposal of his own.

## Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

There is a flashback in this chapter in which Frankie remembers how he, a young man from Malta, ends up in Wales. It also explains Frankie's complicated relationship with Joe, who in the first chapter appears to be a simple acquaintance but who the reader now knows was at one time Frankie's closest friend. This introduces some irony into the story. Joe was Frankie's friend, but now he has become Frankie's landlord and a thief of sorts of all that Frankie values, his father's ring and his half share in the diner.

There is also foreshadowing in the final paragraph of the chapter. Frankie is in Joe's office to ask for an extension on his rent since he has just gambled it away on a horse race. Joe, however, makes his own proposal to Frankie before Frankie can even tell him why he is there. The reader must wonder what Frankie has that could possibly interest Joe? The author uses the technique of leaving a question unanswered at the end of a chapter to create interest, curiosity and suspense in the reader.



# Part 1, Chapter 4

## Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

Mary waits in the hospital corridor for the doctors to come talk to her. Celesta, Marina, Rose and Fran are at the Jackson's across the street from their home, playing in the backyard while they wait for their mother to come back. Mr. Jackson comes home, and Celesta overhears him talking with his wife. Mrs. Jackson is not very kind when she talks about Mary. She says that Mary was too busy flirting with a man in the alley to take care of her baby. Celesta decides she does not want to stay there anymore. Celesta takes the girls and heads for Salvatore and Carlotta's house.

The doctors come to talk to Mary. Dolores' burns are bad. She is burned on her face and her left arm. The doctors have wrapped her up in gauze. The doctor talks about skin grafts and plastic surgery. He tells Mary they have to be careful about shock. Mary thinks he is talking about her. When the doctor is almost finished, the curtain opens, and a woman walks into the room. It is a social worker.

Mary's other children leave the Jackson's and wander through town alone after dark. Celesta is not sure where Carlotta's house is, but she knows it is near their church. She had not realized how many churches there are. Frankie, in the meantime, has just left Joe's office, still shocked by Joe's proposal. Frankie goes to the bar to talk to Salvatore and is told about the fire at his house. Frankie and Salvatore rush to the hospital.

Mary leaves Luca with Eva and goes to the Jackson's to pick up the other girls. When she arrives, Mr. Jackson cannot remember where Celesta said she was taking the girls. Mary becomes upset until Mrs. Jackson remembers. Mary goes and gets Luca and then takes the bus to find her kids.

## Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

The abrupt announcement Dolores makes in the chapter *Tinder* has come true. This foreshadowing has found its conclusion with the doctor announcing that Dolores will probably lose her fingers. When the social worker shows up, not only is this another element of foreshadowing for the reader, but it is also symbolism. The social worker's appearance is symbolic of all the mistakes Mary has made in her role as mother. The social worker is also symbolic of Mary's fear of losing her children and the interference of government in her family. She is also in a lesser degree symbolic of Mary's acceptance of her failures as a mother. This can be seen in Mary's simple statement when she sees the woman standing there, a statement that shows no fear, no anger, only acceptance.

Celesta takes on the role of mother when Mary goes to the hospital to care for Dolores. However, Celesta's immaturity shows in the fact that she has no idea how to get to her destination. This is more foreshadowing. The reader is now concerned with where the

children will go and if their mother will find them safely. The fact that the children are lost on a journey and cannot find their destination is also another symbol of a family that is falling apart.



# Part 1, Chapter 5

## Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

Frankie arrives at the hospital and sees his daughter. Tears roll down his cheeks as he tries to remember her name. At the same time, Mary is across town on the bus. She lays her cheek against the glass of the window and remembers when she first left home to come to Cardiff. Mary is only nineteen when she runs away from her father's house. Mary gets a job at a local club as a waitress and is confused by all the fancy drink orders. Where she worked before, all anyone ever ordered was beer. Frankie is the bartender. He helps her with the customers and their strange orders. Mary thinks he is so gallant.

In the present time, Frankie goes to Salvatore's house and waits, mulling over Joe's proposal. Joe will give Frankie the house the Gaucis live in, money to fix it up and a job managing the Moonlight when he is out of town. It is a good deal, except Joe wants Marina, Frankie and Mary's second child, in exchange. Joe believes that Marina is his daughter, not Frankie's. Frankie is angry enough by this idea that he is willing to give up the child. He wonders if the other girls are his, and he decides, yes, they must be.

## Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

Here, again, there is a flashback, this time into Mary's past. Mary remembers her own fateful trip to Cardiff, running away much like Frankie to a world she thinks will be better than the one she has left behind. Cardiff, to Frankie and Mary, is symbolic of a better future, a better chance. It is ironic that their lives do not turn out the way they had hoped despite all they have found in each other. Frankie's inability to remember his daughter's name is symbolic of his cavalier attitude toward his family. When faced with the possibility that Marina is not his child, again the reader sees this in how quickly he believes the idea. The idea that Joe would even believe the child could be his tells a lot about Frankie and Mary's relationship. This, too, illustrates the dysfunction going on all around this family. It also introduces more clearly the theme of trust and betrayal.



# Part 1, Interference

## Part 1, Interference Summary

Frankie agrees to Joe's proposal and gives him Marina. Then Frankie takes the burnt kitchen door and begins building a rabbit hutch. Mary tells Dolores that what he really wants to do is saw her to pieces for her infidelity. Frankie gets rabbits when he finishes his hutch and uses them as currency to pay his gambling debts. The children, including Dolores, love them until the morning their mother yells at Dolores for touching the baby rabbits. The mother rabbit eats the babies. Mary tells Dolores she should not have interfered.

## Part 1, Interference Analysis

This very short passage answers the question of what Frankie will do about Marina. Marina is gone now, and Frankie has put all his energy into building a rabbit hutch. The hutch seems to the sympathetic reader to be a symbol of Frankie's fury and his only positive outlet to rid himself of it. However, the reader must wonder if this is true when it is later revealed that he uses the rabbits as some sort of legal tender. Perhaps it is simply a business venture, another outgrowth of his desire to find some easy way to get rich quick. This small passage also adds a little more to the theme of trust and betrayal. Frankie has betrayed his child by giving her away and he has betrayed his wife by taking away her child.

There is also an element of symbolism in the story of the baby rabbits. Their mother rejects them and destroys them. How does this relate to the parenting in the story? Frankie has rejected the child he has so far raised as his own, through Joe's interference. Mary has allowed Dolores to become burned, through Frankie's interference with the family's money. Will there be further instances of the parents damaging their children?



# Part 1, Chapter 6

## Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

Five years later, Mary finds a picture of Joe and another man in a magazine called *True Crime*. Mary becomes very upset by this picture, and she cuts it out and hides it in her sewing box. Mary then sends Dolores to the store alone, where she overhears the storeowners discussing an eviction notice they have been given. Several of the neighborhoods near Dolores' home and businesses are being demolished for new construction. When Dolores gets home, she finds her mother sitting alone in the living room crying.

Frankie walks home and recognizes a neighbor girl selling herself on the street. He becomes concerned about Celesta. A local man, a soda distributor, has his eye on Celesta. Pippo is older than Celesta, older than Frankie even, but he was in a marriage with a very ill woman and is anxious to have a more traditional marriage. Pippo wants to make a deal with Frankie for Celesta's hand. Frankie meets with Pippo and thinks that marriage to this wealthy man is the best thing that could happen to Celesta. It is better than selling herself on the street.

Fran is skipping school and wandering through the debris of the already demolished houses. Fran likes to light fires and watch them burn. This day she is caught and brought home, where her mother uses Dolores as an example of what can go wrong when you light fires. Fran slips out of the house that night and lights another fire.

## Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

Mary cutting the picture from the magazine is foreshadowing and symbolic of a relationship she must have with Joe that the reader has not actually seen yet. Frankie's meeting with Pippo is foreshadowing of what will happen in the next few chapters. Perhaps he will, in effect, sell off another child, more symbolism of his cavalier attitude toward his family.

Fran's desire to light fires is foreshadowing danger, and it is also symbolic of the destruction of this dysfunctional family. Fran's obsession with fire shows her personal struggles with the effects of her family's behavior and the effects of the fire that burned Dolores. Fran is acting out against the dysfunction at home and the emotional scars of seeing Dolores pulled from the burning kitchen. This behavior cannot lead to anything good for the little girl.



# Part 1, Chapter 7

## Part 1, Chapter 7 Summary

Dolores wakes one Saturday morning to the sound of her parents fighting over whether or not Celesta should marry Pippo. A knock comes on the door, and the police and a social worker are standing there. Fran has burned a building that she thought was abandoned. It is actually a store Dolores had been to weeks before. The couple who owned it could have been hurt in the fire, and they have lost their ledger with all the debts the neighbors owed. There are witnesses who saw Fran run from the building when it burned down. The social worker decides that Fran must be taken from the family and placed in a home for troubled kids.

When Lizzie, the social worker, comes to have Mary sign the papers that will allow her to take Fran, Mary walks out of the house without saying a word to anyone. She walks for a long time before she comes to the railroad tracks. There, Mary throws herself down the soft hill beside the tracks. Mr. Jackson sees her and carries her home. Mary takes a bath, and then she has a male visitor, one Dolores does not remember well. Then Mary is locked in the box room, and the girls are on display waiting for the doctor to come.

Fran goes to the priory the next morning. The girls wake and find her bed unmade. Rose and Luca and Dolores strip Fran's bed and find blood on the sheets. Fran has given herself a tattoo of a crucifix. Frankie stands out in the yard thinking of the two girls he has lost, the four others he still has and his wife in the Box Room. Frankie is not happy here anymore.

## Part 1, Chapter 7 Analysis

Foreshadowing is a major part of this chapter. Mary and Frankie fight about whether or not Celesta should marry Pippo. Mary is not happy because Pippo is more than twice Celesta's age. Mary feels that Frankie is attempting to get rid of yet another of Mary's children. This touches on the theme of trust and betrayal. Mary feels once again that her trust in Frankie is misplaced.

Another bit of foreshadowing occurs when Mary throws herself down the hill near the train tracks. This opens a new dimension of Mary's character. The reader has seen her sad and angry and frustrated, but never suicidal. Will this happen again?





# Part 1, Chapter 8

## Part 1, Chapter 8 Summary

Celesta has a job working at the Co-Op. Tonight she has a date with the manager, Markus. Celesta has cut her hair very short, and Mary is very upset about it. Mary is also upset because Celesta has promised Frankie she will meet Pippo that night, and she has decided to stand him up. Pippo waits for her all evening outside his restaurant while Celesta goes to meet Markus. Dolores later gives up a collection of prized toys to get Luca to tell her about their date. Celesta and Markus have a fancy dinner, and when Celesta comes home her fancy boots are melted. On the date, Markus sits Celesta too close to the fire and attempts to take more affection than Celesta is willing to give. Celesta bites Markus's lip and begins walking home. About the same time, Pippo starts to walk to the Gauci home to find out if Celesta is okay, since she has not shown up for their date. Pippo walks Celesta home.

Markus begins sending Celesta lots of expensive gifts to try to win back her affection. Pippo also starts coming around to the house and taking long walks with Celesta. Mary encourages Celesta to stay away from both men, but Celesta makes her own decision. Celesta chooses to marry Pippo.

## Part 1, Chapter 8 Analysis

Celesta's date with Markus is an act of defiance against her father. However, the end when Celesta bites Markus's lip symbolizes her youth and inexperience. Pippo shows up and walks her home, comforting her in a way she probably has never experienced. Ironically, Pippo has stepped into the symbolic role of father for Celesta while at the same time he anxiously wants to become Celesta's husband and lover, to do with her the same act he is comforting her over. Celesta's choice to marry Pippo underscores her defiance against her father. Also, in this chapter the reader sees the first definitive scene of sibling relationships between Dolores and Luca, which is one of the themes of the novel. An important symbol surfaces here yet again: fire. Fire is a destructive element, and it is linked to the human turmoil in the novel. Fire burns Dolores. Fran becomes obsessed with fire, and her obsession drives her from her home. In this chapter, fire melts Celesta's boots on her ill-fated date.



# Part 1, Chapter 9

## Part 1, Chapter 9 Summary

Eva has made the bridesmaid gowns for Luca and Dolores. However, Luca's gown is too small, and Dolores' is too big. Mary asks Dolores to get something from her sewing box, and Dolores spills it. Out of the box comes the picture from the magazine Mary cut out months before. Dolores tries to hide it because she knows the sight of it will upset her mother, but she is not quick enough. When Eva sees it, she asks Mary when she last saw Marina. Five years ago, Mary tells her. She asks, when did she last see Joe? Mary shrugs. Eva insists she has seen Joe there at the house, but Mary will not admit to having seen him.

Salvatore is deeply offended that Pippo will not let him cook the wedding dinner, so he has prepared a large feast for the men's party. Frankie is there at the Moonlight helping Salvatore prepare for the party, filling Pippo's soda bottles with a cheaper brand. After Frankie leaves, Salvatore goes out to the outhouse where he has hidden the food to keep Frankie out of it and brings it into the club. Salvatore has made lots of man food like ham and sausage and chilies. The only sweet he has made is biscotti. Salvatore remembers how Mary likes biscotti, so he takes some up and hides it in the safe to give to her later.

Fran is allowed to leave the priory for a few days because of the wedding. Everyone is very happy to see her. Frankie brings home a live rabbit, and Fran instantly takes it as her own, unaware that Frankie plans to butcher it for a stew. Later, the whole family watches while Fran takes the rabbit out to the old hatch that is not used anymore. That night, in bed, Fran shows her sisters the tattoos she has put on her arms. One is the crucifix she cut into her forearm before she left for the priory. The other is her name, which a boy at the priory put in her forearm with India ink.

At the party, Frankie plays the perfect host, though he comes on a little too strong for Pippo's taste. Salvatore sees Frankie talking to a man he does not know. This man turns out to be Paolo, Pippo's brother. Frankie slips him up the stairs to the safe. Paolo steals all the money in the safe and takes all but one of the biscotti.

## Part 1, Chapter 9 Analysis

Mary is not visibly upset when she sees the picture of Joe like Dolores thought she would be. Dolores is too young to understand the symbolism of the picture. To Mary it is a symbol of the child she lost and the man who took her. Mary also deceives Eva. She says that Joe has not been at her house even though Eva saw him. This touches on the unreliable narration of seeing the scene through a child's eye rather than an adult's.

A crime takes place right under Salvatore's nose, foreshadowing events that will take place in future chapters. Who Paolo is and why he takes the money with Frankie's help

are questions this foreshadowing asks. Also, this thievery touches on the theme of trust and betrayal, the betrayal of Salvatore's trust in Frankie.

# Part 1, Amulet

## Part 1, Amulet Summary

Dolores sits on the stairs in her mother's empty house, thinking how weird it is to be back in this house after thirty years. Nothing seems to be where it belongs. Dolores thinks perhaps someone other than her mother cleaned the house after her mother's death. Dolores stares into the kitchen and remembers the day of the wedding and all the noise and excitement that was in the air.

The morning of the wedding, Dolores wakes early and runs downstairs. Dolores finds her father on the back steps with his hands deep in the belly of the rabbit Fran had loved so much the day before. Frankie encourages her to come closer and see the rabbit's heart. Then he chops off the foot and tells her it is for Celesta, for luck.

## Part 1, Amulet Analysis

This short passage is a sort of flash-forward, or perhaps the reader has been brought into the present. Dolores is grown now, living on her own. Then, the writer quickly takes us back in time again. Dolores is five again, watching her father butcher a rabbit. This rabbit has become a symbol of Dolores' family. It is loving and secure one minute and dead and bloody the next, bringing back to mind the mother rabbit who turns on her young.



# Part 1, Chapter 10

## Part 1, Chapter 10 Summary

Dolores refuses to eat on the morning of the wedding. While Mary attempts to get Fran to try on the dress she will wear to the wedding, Dolores faints, essentially stopping her mother from seeing Fran's tattoos. The wedding goes off without a hitch. At the reception, Eva causes a fuss when she changes the seating arrangements at the dinner, but she is outshone by Dolores when she faints again at the sight of the rabbit stew her father has cooked. Celesta sits with Dolores and Mary until she is sure Dolores is okay. Celesta's dress is covered with money, all pinned around her skirt as gifts from her guests. Celesta lets her mother take some of it to make room for more and then gives Mary the rabbit's foot her father gave her.

Mary takes Dolores outside for some fresh air and then acts as though she's forgotten Dolores is there. Mary watches the traffic around them and thinks about Paolo. She recognizes him as the man from the picture in the magazine with Joe. When Joe suddenly appears with Paolo and Frankie, Mary makes Dolores promise she will stay where she is and runs after them. Mary keeps running even after they've gotten into a car and driven away.

## Part 1, Chapter 10 Analysis

Loss is a theme of this novel. Dolores loses several things in the chapter. First, she loses a little innocence when she watches her father butcher the rabbit. Second, Dolores loses another sister to marriage. Third, Dolores loses her mother when Mary runs after Frankie and Joe. Foreshadowing is seen here when Frankie climbs into the car with Joe. The reader must wonder if Joe has found out about Paolo and Frankie stealing the money from the Moonlight Club. Again, betrayal seems to be involved, another theme of this novel.

# Part 1, Missing

## Part 1, Missing Summary

The adult Dolores remembers sitting on the bridge for hours until Eva comes along and finds her. Mary is nowhere to be found. Dolores explores the house, remembering Eva and comparing her to a woman she works with at the library. Dolores thinks of the gifts she has brought for her sisters, feeling bad that they are not more personal. Dolores again thinks some stranger has been in her mother's house, moving things around to where they do not belong. She sits on the bed where her mother died and studies the living room. A brass bell she once played with sits on the dresser. Dolores picks it up and is surprised to find it is not brass after all but lacquered tin. She thinks of Fran, of Luca, of Eva, and she remembers Salvatore. Dolores adds him to her mental list of the missing.

## Part 1, Missing Analysis

This short passage is again a flash-forward or a move into the present. Dolores remembers the day on the bridge after her mother ran off in a flashback. Then she returns to the present and explores the house where her mother died. The bell Dolores picks up is a symbol of the sadness she feels, the changes that have taken place in the last thirty years and the erosion of her memories. The real bell is not the same as the bell she remembers, and this is true of much of her childhood.



# Part 1, Chapter 11

## Part 1, Chapter 11 Summary

Celesta is angry when she leaves her wedding for her honeymoon and neither her mother nor father is there. Mary is discovered at the Salvation Army Hostel and is helped inside by a local woman. Mary cannot remember who she is or where she is. Her mind has slipped into a childlike state.

Salvatore takes Martineau and goes looking for Frankie. They go to the Moonlight, and Martineau suggests Salvatore check the safe. Then, Salvatore discovers not only the money, 1,500 pounds, is missing but the biscotti have been eaten too. While Eva stays at the house with the children, Frankie rides with Joe and Paolo to the docks. Frankie, it turns out, bought back his father's ring with the money he had Paolo steal and bought passage on a ship that is to leave the next morning.

Frankie says his good-byes to Joe and walks carefully across the thin bridge over the dry dock to his ship. Halfway across, he hears footsteps behind him. Frankie turns to see Salvatore standing behind him. Salvatore yells that he knows Frankie took the money. How could Frankie steal from him, Salvatore, after all the years of friendship they have shared? How could he take Mary's biscotti? Frankie takes a step toward Salvatore to make him quiet down so that Joe will not hear what Salvatore is saying from where Joe waits in the parking lot. Salvatore steps back, once, twice, and falls into the dark abyss of the dry dock. Frankie watches Salvatore fall, checks to see if anyone has seen his fall and calmly walks onto the ship without a second glance back.

## Part 1, Chapter 11 Analysis

Several of the novel's themes are touched on in this chapter. Frankie's decision to leave his family is not only another example of his betrayal of the trust his wife and children have in him, but it also touches on the number of losses Dolores has had to face in her childhood. Not only has Dolores lost her hand, Marina and Celesta, but now she has lost her father and mother.

Frankie walks away from Salvatore after he falls into the dry dock. Had Frankie stayed, Salvatore might have been rescued, injured but alive. By walking away, Frankie has guaranteed that Salvatore will die. This death is symbolic of Frankie's decision to cut himself off from everything he has built in Cardiff. It is the final slice of the knife against the chains that tether him to this place. There is also foreshadowing here. The reader must ask what will happen to the kids now and what will happen to Salvatore, his wife and his share of the business.



# Part 1, Chapter 12

## Part 1, Chapter 12 Summary

Dolores spends a lot of time thinking about loss and gain while the adults around her deal with what has happened. Carlotta is devastated by the idea that her husband has been injured. Everyone tells her that Salvatore took the money and ran away, but Carlotta is certain Salvatore would never do such a thing. She will not let them convince her otherwise. The Moonlight Club has been put up for sale. Mary has been found and placed in a hospital, Whitchurch. Mary does not know who Dolores is when Dolores goes to visit her.

Luca is fascinated with Fran's tattoos, so she decides she wants one of her own. However, she decides she must practice on Dolores first. Luca takes Dolores in the kitchen and begins to carve a D into her left wrist. Dolores faints again.

Ms. Preece takes the girls to a photographer to have their pictures taken, telling Eva it is for Mary, and then she takes them for ice cream. When they return to pick up the pictures, the photographer accidentally reveals that the pictures are for the adoption agency to show perspective adoptive parents. Eva is angry because she believes Mary will recover well enough to take custody of the girls again. However, there is nothing Eva can do. She cannot take custody herself because her husband believes Dolores' injured hand would bring them bad luck.

Dolores goes back to see her mother, and Mary recognizes her now. She seems better. Mary asks Ms. Preece if she can take Dolores for a walk in the gardens. Ms. Preece agrees. Mary takes Dolores and somehow gets out of the gardens. She takes Dolores to the train tracks. Mary talks about the Virgin Mary and suicide and many other things Dolores does not understand. This is the last day they will spend together.

## Part 1, Chapter 12 Analysis

Again the reader finds a rich selection of examples of the theme of loss in this chapter, one of which is in Dolores' own words when she speaks of the losses she has suffered these last few weeks of her life. Carlotta, too, suffers from loss. There is also irony in the idea that Salvatore has taken the money from the safe. Salvatore falls attempting to solve the crime of the missing money.

There is also the foreshadowing of more loss. Ms. Preece is clearly determined to take the girls from their mother, since her illness clearly prevents her from being a good parent. The girls will lose their mother for good if this happens. It is also possible they will not be kept together, in part because of Dolores' injuries and in part because it is difficult to find one home for some many girls. Celesta also abandons her sisters here. She does not want to take them in, either.





## Part 2, Waiting 2

### Part 2, Waiting 2 Summary

Dolores, as an adult, has received a letter from the social services informing her of her mother's death. Dolores leaves her home immediately and goes to Cardiff. She imagines her sisters as they must be now, grown and with children of their own. She buys them gifts and imagines what will happen when they meet again. The city has changed from how she remembers it. There has been a lot of new development, and her old neighborhood is in the center of the recent changes. All the houses have been emptied, and the streets have been blocked off. The cab driver drops her at the corner and leaves her to find her own way.

Dolores goes to the house but does not have a key. She knocks on the door of the house beside hers where Eva once lived, but no one will answer. Dolores goes to another neighbor's house. She is surprised when another neighbor she remembers, Mrs. Riley, comes and lets her into the house with a key that hangs from a string just inside the mail slot in the door, like when she was a kid.

### Part 2, Waiting 2 Analysis

Once again we move into the present and see the adult Dolores looking at her old home through her adult eyes. This chapter, though it brings us to Dolores' adulthood, does not bring us as far forward in time as the initial moment we meet Dolores, waiting in the house for her sisters' arrival. The author is leading us up to this moment. There is a lot of symbolism in the changes Dolores notes in the city where she grew up and in the neighborhood where her mother continued to live all those years. These changes seem to underscore the change in narration and the idea that the narrator in the beginning of the book is not really the child Dolores but the adult Dolores remembering what happened when she was a child. The foreshadowing here is the question of whether Dolores' memories are accurate, and the changes in the neighborhood may be symbolic of Dolores' changing perceptions of her childhood.



## Part 2, Chapter 13

### Part 2, Chapter 13 Summary

Mrs. Riley comes in and helps Dolores turn on the gas. They talk for a few minutes about Mary and how she died in her sleep. Dolores picks up a towel on a bed in the living room, and Mrs. Riley tells her she used it to lay Mary out. She rolled it up under Mary's chin to keep her mouth closed. Mrs. Riley wonders why Dolores came since there is nothing of value for her to inherit. After Mrs. Riley leaves, Dolores walks through the house, noting the things that are different and the things that are not.

Rose is across town having an argument with her husband. He walks out of the house, forbidding her to go to the funeral as he walks away. Rose takes a bag of peas from the freezer to attend to a bruise quickly forming on her cheek. In a moment of defiance, Rose grabs some money she has hidden away and empties out the pea bag to put the money in. Then she gets her dog, Parsnip, and leaves.

Dolores goes upstairs to her old bedroom and explores. Dolores sits on her old bed and wraps herself in a blanket to sleep for the night. She laments not stopping to get some food on the way home. She had thought her mother would have some food in the kitchen. Dolores eats some chocolates she brought as a gift for her sisters. Dolores starts to drift off to sleep and is startled by the sound of someone entering the house. Rose appears at the doorway and greets her with a derogatory nickname when she sees Dolores' hand and realizes who she is.

### Part 2, Chapter 13 Analysis

Rose's entire life seems to be a continuation of her childhood. Rose's husband is angry and abusive, as was Frankie. Rose hides money in her house like Mary did. Rose's life does not seem to have changed much. Her attitude toward Dolores has not changed either, despite the number of years it has been since they last met. This touches on the theme of sibling relationships.

Dolores is anxious to see her sisters and to talk to them about what they remember of their childhood. This foreshadows the coming chapters. The reader must wonder how many of her sisters will show up and how much information will they have for her. The reader must also wonder if her sisters' memories will be like hers. Dolores is the youngest of the group. She also seems to think of Fran the most. Fran is the sister who was kindest to the young Dolores. The foreshadowing here leads one to wonder if Fran will show up and if she will still be the kindest of the six Gauci sisters.

## Part 2, Chapter 14

### Part 2, Chapter 14 Summary

Celesta still lives in Cardiff, as well. Pippo is dead now, and Celesta is running his businesses with the help of her two sons, Jumbo and Louis. They have just begun a new restaurant, and Louis wants to call it The Moonlight. Celesta is not happy about this idea. She does not like to talk about the past or be reminded of it. Celesta is at home alone trying to pick an outfit for the funeral, but she is so upset by the intrusion of her past that she falls onto the bed in a fit of sadness.

At the same time, Luca is in an airport trying to make her way from Canada to Wales. Luca calls every Seguna listing she can find trying to reach Celesta. She is having no luck. On the plane, Luca remembers a time when she was two that her father picked her up and threw her into the kitchen. She slid across the linoleum on her belly. Rose, also, is thinking about the past. Rose remembers seeing her mother in Martineau's arms the day of the fire.

### Part 2, Chapter 14 Analysis

Celesta has done well for herself with the help of Pippo and his money. Her son wanting to name the restaurant The Moonlight is very symbolic to her, a symbol of a past she has worked hard to move beyond. She does not want to entertain memories of the past. To her son, Louis, however, it is a romantic symbol of a much more exciting time.

Luca and Rose both have memories in this chapter of episodes the reader has not seen until now. Luca remembers a moment of abuse that may foreshadow more revelations of abuse in the Gauci family. Rose remembers seeing her mother in Martineau's arms the day of the fire. To her, this is a symbol of her mother's abandonment of Dolores. Again, the theme of trust and betrayal is touched on here.



## Part 2, Chapter 15

### Part 2, Chapter 15 Summary

Rose and Dolores plan the reception after the funeral, making a list for groceries and discussing who might attend. Rose is adamant that none of the other sisters will attend besides Celesta. Dolores insists all the sisters will come as well as their mother's friends. She silently thinks of Fran and hopes that she will make it, though Rose has no news of her. Rose does know where Eva is, however, and sends Dolores to a retirement home to see her.

Dolores meets with Eva and finds a woman who is much more fragile than the woman she remembers. Eva is nervous during their talk and tells Dolores if she wants to know about the past, she should go to the old Moonlight. Eva also tells Dolores that Salvatore's body has recently been recovered from the mud at the bottom of the dry dock after thirty years. Then Eva gives Dolores an old purse.

### Part 2, Chapter 15 Analysis

Rose is a symbol of doubt and darkness for Dolores. Rose has become very cynical and often resorts to her old games of teasing and belittling Dolores in order to discourage Dolores from asking about the past. Rose does send Dolores to Eva, however, so perhaps there is as much love as there is sibling relationships and angst.

Eva, to Dolores, was her savior when she was a child. Now Eva is weak and tired. Eva is another symbol of change. Again the theme of loss appears here. Eva is no longer the woman she once was, so in a way, Dolores has lost her old friend. There is also foreshadowing in the gift of the purse. Perhaps there will be something inside it that will aid Dolores in her search for answers.



## Part 2, Chapter 16

### Part 2, Chapter 16 Summary

Luca is on the plane, and again she has another memory. It is three days after Fran left, and her mother is still locked in the Box Room. Luca can remember sleeping next to Dolores and waking to feel someone popping the knuckles on her toes.

Dolores walks through the old neighborhood on her way back from seeing Eva and stops on the same bridge where her mother left her when she ran after Frankie the day of the wedding. Dolores opens Eva's purse, and inside she finds a picture from the wedding. In it is a smiling Celesta, Pippo, Frankie, Mary and Salvatore. Dolores thinks of Salvatore and how horrible it must have been for him. Dolores imagines the things he would have heard while still falling. She imagines laying at the bottom of the dock screaming for help and not being heard. Then, she imagines the mud covering his body as a ship is shoved inside for repairs.

Dolores thinks about her father, about the day he left. She imagines how little guilt he must have felt as he left behind his family and friend in the dry dock. Dolores realizes that this knowledge of her father begins to unravel secrets in the events of her past she never quite understood or was even aware of. However, Dolores knows she needs to know more to understand it all.

### Part 2, Chapter 16 Analysis

The picture Dolores finds inside Eva's purse symbolizes the facade the Gauci family put forth, the image of a happy, normal family. In reality, this family was nothing close to happy. It is ironic to think this would be the last emblem of this family as a whole unit. Immediately after it is taken, Frankie disappears and Mary becomes so ill that her children are taken from her. To Dolores, this picture is what she thought her family was, and now with it finally in her possession, she has come to realize her family was nothing like the image in the photo.



## Part 2, Chapter 17

### Part 2, Chapter 17 Summary

Dolores becomes lost on her walk back to her mother's house. She runs into Celesta and her sons standing outside the new Moonlight. Luca arrives at her mother's house and knocks, but no one answers. When she turns to leave, she passes Rose on the street and does not recognize her. Rose returns from the store with the groceries she and Dolores agreed they would need for the funeral reception. In the process of putting things away, it occurs to her that Frankie may have left behind some of his valuable jewelry. Rose begins searching through the kitchen closet.

Rose finds a belt among some old clothes. Rose knows the belt immediately. This belt belonged to her father. Rose slips into the past and remembers a night when she was in Celesta's room watching her dance to her records. Rose tells Celesta they must do something, and Celesta says there is nothing to do. However, Rose cannot stop thinking of something from earlier in the evening. Rose is supposed to go into town and find her father, but she is not able to find him. Rose slips into the house worried about getting in trouble for being gone so long. There is a noise coming from the backyard. Rose rushes to the backyard just in time to see her father beating Fran with his belt. Frankie beats her so severely she will still have scars month later when she comes home for Celesta's wedding. When Frankie is finished with Fran, he tells Rose to go get Dolores for him. Rose refuses. She will not let him have Dolores.

Dolores sits inside the Moonlight and talks to Celesta. Dolores wants to talk about the past, but Celesta will only talk about the present. Later, Celesta sends Dolores and her son, Louis, to the old house so Dolores can collect her things and stay with Celesta at her house. Louis takes Dolores through the old neighborhood on the way to the house. They talk about the past, but Louis does not know much more than Dolores. Dolores tells him about Fran and about her tattoos. When they arrive at the end of the old block, Dolores insists that Louis go back. Dolores will not leave Rose alone in the old house.

Rose is on the floor with old clothes and mementos surrounding her when Dolores walks into the house. Dolores tells Rose she has seen Eva and that Frankie is wanted for murder in connection with Salvatore's death. Rose jokes that you do not have to look far to find something Frankie is wanted for. Then Rose tells Dolores she has found some old photographs and that Dolores she can have them. Rose is not interested in them. Among the pictures is a photo of Dolores and Luca when Dolores is only three weeks old. Dolores stares at the photo a long time. She has never seen her hand before.



## Part 2, Chapter 17 Analysis

Much more information about Frankie and his behavior toward his family comes out in this chapter. The belt Rose finds is a symbol of anger, pain, betrayal and fear for her despite the fact that she is grown now and does not need to fear her father. This symbol explains in simple terms why the girls are so reluctant to talk to Dolores about the past. Like they did when they were children, Rose and Celesta are trying to protect Dolores in their own, clumsy way. This touches on the theme of sibling relationships.

This second picture Dolores is given is another symbol for her. This picture, however, has more to do with the theme of loss than it does with the mystery of her family. Dolores lost her hand at such a young age she might never have had one. However, here and now, in her mother's home, she finds a picture of her hand before the fire. It is also symbolic of perfection, of a time before everything began to go wrong in her tiny life.



## Part 2, Chapter 18

### Part 2, Chapter 18 Summary

The funeral begins quite somberly. Dolores finds herself watching for someone, anyone, to show up and surprise them all. Fran or Luca or Marina, she hopes, or maybe even Frankie will come. Just when it looks like no one will join them, Luca suddenly appears. Dolores stands between Luca and Rose. As the priest begins the eulogy, Rose starts throwing her voice like she did as a child and causes Dolores and Luca to laugh.

After the funeral, Dolores walks with Louis. Louis has gotten in trouble with Celesta for not taking Dolores home with him the night before. However, he's not upset with Dolores. In fact, he has a surprise for her. Louis takes Dolores back into the old neighborhood and to the building that one housed the old Moonlight Club. It is now a produce stand called Tino's. Inside, Dolores is surprised to find her mother's old friend, Martineau.

Martineau tells Dolores about the night of the fire. When the fire occurs, he is new to the country and does not speak fluent English yet. Joe has only recently hired him, and he and the other henchman, Ilya, are always at odds with each other. Joe sends Martineau to collect the rent that night instead of Ilya because Joe knows Ilya often takes advantage of the desperation of the women on his list. Joe does not want that to happen anymore. Martineau has a successful night until he arrives at the Gauci home. Mary tries to explain to him about Frankie taking the money, but Martineau does not understand. Then Mary walks him into the alley and offers her body to him. Martineau refuses, and that is when they realize the house is on fire. Martineau jumps the back fence and charges into the house to save Dolores. Afterward, he goes to the Moonlight to tell Frankie, but Salvatore tells Frankie before Martineau can.

Martineau then tells Dolores how he was in love with Eva. He agrees to check on the family for Eva. When he goes to the house, he finds Frankie building a rabbit hutch out of the burned-out door and the girls sitting on the stairs still in their nightclothes. They tell him they are hexed, cursed. They are afraid of Dolores because of the way she looks immediately after the fire. Louis is upset that Martineau's story does not make Dolores happy like he thought it would. Louis promises to make it up to her and runs off. Dolores returns to the old house alone.

### Part 2, Chapter 18 Analysis

The funeral turns into an almost comical event after Luca shows up. The theme of sibling relationships is strong here, especially when Dolores remarks how Rose was hers before but now that Luca is back, it is the two of them again. Dolores has always felt left out with the two of them, left out and tortured. It is as if nothing has changed.





A lot of the foreshadowing from the early chapters has reached a conclusion. Finally the reader knows exactly what happened the day of the fire, at least as Martineau remembers it. The theme of trust and betrayal comes up here. Mary betrays Dolores by leaving her alone in the house that day. There is also the theme of loss in the reminder of how Dolores lost her hand. Louis running off as he does at the end foreshadows coming events. What more secrets could he possibly have to reveal?



## Part 2, Chapter 19

### Part 2, Chapter 19 Summary

Celesta, Rose and Luca are in the kitchen when Dolores returns to the house. Celesta has the death towel, and she has covered some sandwiches with it. Later, Rose dries wine glasses with the same towel. Dolores wants to tell them what Mrs. Riley used it for, but she decides it is too late. The four girls talk about the funeral. Dolores attempts to move the conversation toward the past, but her sisters cut her off at every attempt.

Dolores goes into the kitchen closet to retrieve the wine glasses and has a memory of her mother playing hide and seek with her, only her mother has forgotten the seek part. Dolores is pretty sure a man comes to see her mother while she hides there, but she does not see him. Eventually she slips out of the closet and goes upstairs.

The sisters share a drink, and Dolores becomes sick. She goes out into the garden to the outhouse, and Luca follows her. Dolores sees the old rabbit hutch still sitting in the back of the garden. She asks Luca about it, if she remembers it. Luca says no. Angry with all the denials she has faced today, Dolores yells at her that she must, that she and Rose locked her in it once. Luca tells her they did not lock her in. They were letting her out. Suddenly Dolores has new memories she had not known she had. Dolores remembers her mother having a male visitor quite often. She remembers being put in the rabbit hutch whenever she spies on her mother and her visitor. Dolores also remembers going into the hutch on her own one night, the same night Frankie beats Fran so badly with his belt. Frankie beats Fran because she is lookout so her mother can be with her male visitor, so she can be with Joe. Frankie comes home early that night and catches Joe in the house.

Dolores finally realizes her sisters were not mean to her. They did not cut her out to hurt her. They were attempting to protect her. Dolores understands now. Celesta has gone when Luca and Dolores go back into the house. Rose says it is time to go, and Luca agrees. The two women leave Dolores alone. Dolores wants to gather a few things. She will take the pictures and the chest where she slept as a baby.

### Part 2, Chapter 19 Analysis

The theme of sibling relationships really opens up in this chapter. All through the book it seems as though the siblings in the Gauci family do not have much use for Dolores because of her burns. However, in this chapter the reader is finally invited inside to see that they were not afraid of Dolores. They were afraid of their parents. The Gauci girls wanted only to protect Dolores from the same fate they have all suffered before her. In a strange way, they are successful.

The rabbit hutch is finally revealed to be the novel's title object, the hiding place. The hutch is a punishment for Dolores, yes, but it also serves as sanctuary. The hutch symbolizes safety for young Dolores.



## Part 2, The List

### Part 2, The List Summary

Dolores prepares to leave, but first she moves objects in the house back to their rightful places. Dolores moves the bed out of the living room and replaces the table that once sat under the window. Dolores sits there and makes a list of all the "ifs" that might have changed her fate. The final thing on her list is "ask Fran." However, Fran never showed up. Slowly Dolores makes her way to the corner to call for a taxi. Almost to the corner, Dolores sees two figures walking toward her. One is Louis. The other is a vagrant woman with her arms outstretched. On one arm is a crucifix cut into the skin. On the other arm is the name Fran tattooed in India ink.

### Part 2, The List Analysis

In this short passage, Dolores thinks of all the events that happened and how they could have been different. This touches on all three of the major themes of the book, trust and betrayal, sibling relationships and loss. Dolores' relationship with her sister would have been much different if not for the abuse they all suffer at the hands of their parents. She is betrayed by her parents many times. She loses much in just the first five years of her life. However, as she starts to leave the past behind her, finally she finds the one sister she never felt betrayed by.



# Characters

## Dolores Gauci

Dolores is the narrator of the book, a small child at the beginning and a woman of middle age at the end. Dolores is the sixth of six daughters, unwanted in a family that can barely take care of the children they have, let alone another. When Dolores becomes injured at barely one month of age, her parents become ashamed and afraid of her. Dolores often does not attend school because of the phantom pains she feels in her hand where her fingers once were. Mary hesitates to send her out on errands though she does with the other children on a nearly daily basis. This makes Dolores feel overprotected when in reality she is hidden away.

Dolores grows up to be a librarian. She is raised as an only child by foster parents and given every opportunity in life. Dolores holds on to her past, however, convincing herself she has memories that go back as far as the time in the hospital after her burns. Dolores believes she can remember the feel of the gauze on her skin, the moon shining through the window above her crib and her father crying for her in the hospital ward.

Dolores sees her mother as a victim in her life, a woman who faces a difficult life with a louse of a husband with as much strength as she is capable of. Dolores blames herself for the destruction of her family. She believes that if she had only been strong enough to make her mother lift her head from the railroad tracks, if she could have dragged her from her depression, she could have saved her family. Dolores does not realize how deeply ill her mother was until she is told that her mother and not her sisters locked her into the rabbit hutch. Dolores sees the troubles of her family through a child's eye, and therefore she sees the solutions through that same child's eye.

## Rose and Luca Gauci

Rose and Luca are Dolores' sisters and are two and four years older than Dolores. Dolores remembers Rose and Luca torturing her as a child. Rose and Luca are always together in Dolores' memories, always giggling together and holding hands. When Dolores returns to her mother's home after her death, Rose and Luca show up for the funeral, as well as Celesta.

Rose is the clown of the family. Rose will often do imitations of people to make Luca laugh. However, Rose's adult life is far from a comical one. Rose grows up to marry a man much like her father, a man who hits her and tries to run her life. Rose runs away from her husband to attend the funeral, but she returns to him when it is all over.

Luca was the baby before Dolores' birth. Luca has a mean streak, and she often bribes Dolores into giving up her prized possessions to learn the gossip Luca claims to know but often does not. Luca also returns home for the funeral. Luca lives in Canada now and is newly divorced with daughters. Luca also has a disease that has caused all her



hair to fall out. If not for Luca, Dolores may never have learned the truth about her mother and the rabbit hutch.

## Mary Gauci

Mary is Dolores' mother. Mary has had a hard life. Mary runs away from her country home and her father when she is nineteen. Mary meets Frankie at her first job in a nightclub in Cardiff. Mary thinks he is suave and protective. Mary's husband is a gambler who does not think twice about betting the rent money on a horse or giving away his second child when another man claims to be the father. Mary will do whatever it takes to keep a roof over her children's heads, including selling her own body for a week's extension on the rent. However, Mary has a secret she will do anything to keep quiet, including locking her child in a rabbit hutch to keep her from telling what she might have seen. Mary often entertains her lover in her home while her children stand watch for their father.

Mary loves her children. Even through the somewhat unreliable narrator of Dolores as a child, it is clear that Mary believes she is doing what she can to help her children. It is also clear, however, that her own desires often outweigh those of her children. Mary will trick her own child into playing hide and seek and then forget to look for her so the child will be out of the way when her lover comes to visit.

## Frankie Gauci

Frankie is Dolores' father. Frankie desperately wants a son when he learns of his wife's sixth pregnancy. However, he is disappointed once again. Frankie is a gambler who often makes poor choices. Frankie gambles his wife's earnings and leaves her desperate to find a way to pay the rent. Frankie loves his wife, or is at least possessive of her, a fact that is clear in his violent reaction to the idea that she has cheated on him. When he chooses to run out on his family, it is his final wish to see Mary one last time.

Frankie is from Malta. At a young age, Frankie gets passage on a ship going to Wales and leaves in the middle of the night so his grandmother does not know and cannot stop him. Both Frankie's parents are dead. When Frankie arrives in Wales, he discovers that his grandmother must have known about his plans because he finds a ruby ring that belonged to his father stuffed into the bottom of a bag of mementos he has brought with him. Frankie later loses the ring to Joe Medora.

## Joe Medora

Joe Medora is Frankie's roommate when he first arrives in Cardiff. Joe works for the Syndicate running a local nightclub. Joe gets Frankie a job at the nightclub, and here Frankie meets Mary. Joe goes on to become rich and successful while Frankie struggles with his gambling debts. Joe plays cards with Frankie on the day Dolores is born and wins Frankie's share in a café and Frankie's father's ruby ring. Joe Medora is



the man who claims to be Marina's father and the man who is having an affair with Mary.

## Salvatore

Salvatore is Frankie's partner in the cafe and later Joe Medora's partner in the Moonlight Club. Salvatore is a great cook and an honest man who stays faithful to his wife despite the temptations that hang out at his club. Salvatore is Frankie's friend, the man Frankie goes to when he finds himself in trouble. Salvatore never bails Frankie out. In fact, he often points out everything Frankie has done wrong and what he should do to fix it. Salvatore often takes fresh food to the Gauci children and sends his wife to help Mary when she needs it. Salvatore is like an uncle to the Gauci girls. Salvatore finally discovers Frankie has robbed the safe and falls to his death when he goes to confront Frankie.

## Martineau

Martineau is a recent immigrant who works for Joe Medora. The day Dolores is burned in the fire, Martineau comes to Mary for the rent. She offers her body to Martineau while her child is left alone in a burning kitchen. Martineau rushes into the burning house despite the danger to himself and saves the baby from the chest where she lays. Later, Martineau drives Salvatore first to the Moonlight and then to the docks on the night Salvatore dies. Martineau never tells anyone about what he sees that night. When Dolores returns to Cardiff for her mother's funeral, Martineau tells her the truth about the day she was burned.

## Eva Amil

Eva is a neighbor of the Gaucis. Eva is married, but she does not have any children of her own. Eva is a free spirit, the type of woman the gossips might call a tramp. She likes to smoke and drink, and she often brings vodka to Mary so the two of them can enjoy an afternoon drink. Eva steps in when Mary is taken to the hospital after Celesta's wedding and watches after the children. Eva does not want the state to take the kids, but she cannot take them into her own home because her husband is superstitious about Dolores' damaged hand. Later, when Dolores comes home to bury her mother, she finds Eva in an old folk's home, more fragile than before but otherwise very much the same as she recalls.

## Celesta and Pippo

Celesta is the oldest of the Gauci children. Celesta takes a maternal role with the younger girls, often gathering them up and taking them out of her parents' reach when one or both of them are upset. As Celesta grows older, she becomes more and more



interested in the world outside her family home, ready to move on at a young age. Celesta is the only child who does well for herself, marrying into money.

Pippo is Celesta's husband. Pippo is much older than Celesta, older than Frankie in fact. Pippo meets Celesta at his wife's funeral and decides then that he would like to marry the beautiful young girl. Pippo owns a soda bottling company, and Celesta takes over the business after his death, expanding it and making it a big success. Pippo and Celesta have two children, Jumbo and Louis.

## **Lizzie Preece**

Lizzie Preece is the social worker assigned to the Gauci family when Fran is caught lighting fires. Ms. Preece makes the decision to move Fran from the family environment and into the priory home. Ms. Preece is so concerned about what she sees on her visits to the Gauci family that she remains involved. After Frankie disappears and Mary is hospitalized, she is the social worker who eventually takes the children from the family home and places them in foster care.





## Objects/Places

### The Chest

The chest is a small wooden chest where Dolores' mother lays her to sleep and closes the lid to hide her from her father.

### The Rabbit Hutch

The rabbit hutch is Dolores' hiding place when her father becomes enraged after finding Mary with Joe Medora. The hutch is also where Mary puts Dolores to punish her.

### Ruby Ring

The ruby ring is a ring Frankie Gauci inherits from his father that he loses gambling with Joe Medora.

#### *True Crime Photo*

The *True Crime* photo is a photo Mary tears from the magazine *True Crime*, with the caption, "Have you seen these men?" One of the men is Joe Medora. Mary hides it away in her sewing basket.

### The Moonlight Club

The Moonlight Club is the name of the restaurant Joe Medora opens in the cafe he wins from Frankie after a bad hand of cards.

### Dry Dock

The dry dock is where Salvatore falls to his death while arguing with Frankie after he discovers Frankie has stolen all the money from the safe at the Moonlight Club.

### Tattoos

When Fran is sent away to live in the priory, she cuts two tattoos into her arms. This is how Dolores recognizes her later.

### Talgarth Priory Children's Home

The priory is where Fran is sent after she is caught lighting fires.



## **Number 2 Hodges Row**

Number 2 Hodges Row is where the Gauci family lives, where Dolores is burned in the kitchen and where the family comes together again after their mother's death.

## **Cardiff**

Cardiff is the capitol of Wales, and it is the town where the Gauci family lives.

## **Malta**

Malta is the island nation where Frankie Gauci and many of his friends and neighbors are from.



# Themes

## Sibling Relationships

Dolores is the youngest of six daughters, a situation that opens up a whole list of sibling rivalry scenarios. However, Dolores only suffers this typical family dynamic from two of her sisters. Celesta is twelve years older than Dolores, so she is more concerned with the world outside the family home than the torture of her younger siblings. Marina leaves home when Dolores is only a month old, and Fran is consumed with her own pursuits. Rose and Luca often take advantage of their position in the family to force Dolores to hand over her prized possessions for information. They sometimes tie her in a sheet to force information out of her or lock her in the rabbit hutch when she becomes a major annoyance to them. However, the adult Dolores will finally discover that some of these acts of normal, if slightly vicious, sibling rivalry did not take place in the way in which she recalls them. The end of the book reveals many truths not only to the reader but to the adult Dolores about the actions of both their father and their mother that Dolores was unaware of or had forgotten. In the end, it is the father who abused Dolores' sense of safety and her mother who tortured her in cruel and demeaning ways.

The family dynamics of this novel are complicated. In the beginning, through the innocent eyes of Dolores, we see a mother who is kind if slightly unstable. Mary appears to care for each of her young children, becoming hysterical when one is given away to her biological father and locking herself in a room when Fran is taken away to the home for setting fires. Mary also appears to be the only one who is not afraid of Dolores' defects after the fire and does not see her as a hex, as her husband and other children do. However, at the end of the story the reader sees Mary not through the eyes of an adoring child but through the eyes of her adult children and family friends. Dolores learns that on the day she was burned, the reason her mother was not in the house with her was not because she was attempting to make the rent collector understand her unintentional desperation. She was attempting to pay for her rent with the sale of her body. Dolores also discovers that her clear memory of Rose and Luca locking her in the rabbit hutch is not completely reliable. Rose and Luca are manipulating the lock, but they are attempting to release Dolores after her mother locks her inside. Mary hides Dolores away so she cannot tell her father that Joe Medora has come to the house for a visit, one of his many visits.

Dolores' family is a dysfunctional one. Her mother is mentally unstable, and her father is violent and untrustworthy. However, the sibling rivalry she sees through the eye of a child will eventually become clear to her as not rivalry but the clumsy protection her sisters are able to offer her. Dolores' sisters protect her from her mother's brand of punishment and her father's violent rampages with his favorite belt.



## Trust and Betrayal

Trust and betrayal is a primary theme in this novel. There are several aspects to trust and betrayal that are portrayed in the separate relationships that fill the novel. The first is the trust that is inherent between a child and her parents. Dolores is an infant at the beginning of the novel, barely a month old. She trusts her mother to keep her fed, to keep her clean and to keep her safe. Dolores' mother fails to keep her safe. Dolores is a sickly baby. Mary puts her close to the fire in order to keep her warm. However, she becomes distracted when she discovers the rent money is missing. Mary sends the other children out of the house and quickly forgets the baby in the kitchen as she tries to persuade the rent collector to take the rent in another form. Mary betrays the basic trust between a child and a mother. Mary does not keep her child safe.

The second failure of trust in this novel is the trust that is implied between sisters. Dolores trusts that her sisters will always be there, that they will never hurt her and that she can always turn to them for the truth. Dolores' sisters fail her in all three. Marina leaves before Dolores is even old enough to get to know her, gone off to Malta at the young age of nine with her biological father. Celesta gets married. Fran is put in a home for troubled children for lighting fires. Rose and Luca go to a foster home separate from the one Dolores goes to. She is abandoned by all five sisters. Rose and Luca, while they are still a family, make a game of torturing Dolores. Dolores has memories of them tying her up in a sheet and locking her in the rabbit hutch. They betray her trust by hurting her when they should have protected her. Finally, when they all return to their mother's house for her funeral, Dolores wants to know the truth of what happened when she was a child. Celesta flat out refuses. Rose makes veiled references to the past that Dolores does not understand. Only Luca eventually reveals some truth to her. That truth negates all the hurt Dolores thought she had experienced at the hands of her sisters. However, it brings home the betrayals she has suffered at her parents' hands.

Finally, the last breach of trust in this novel takes place between Mary and Frankie. Mary trusts that Frankie will not take the rent money and gamble it away. Frankie trusts that Mary will not cheat on him and bear the child of another man. However, both Mary and Frankie let each other down. Mary sees her failure as justified by Frankie's addiction to gambling. Frankie sees his addiction as his right due to what Mary has done to him. Mary has made a public fool of him, betrayed him and made him a laughing stock. This circle of betrayal will end with Frankie's ultimate act of betrayal, his disappearance the night of their daughter's wedding.

## Loss

Loss also is a major theme in this novel. There are two separate losses Dolores suffers, the loss of her hand and the loss of her family. Dolores' hand is her first experience of loss, and it takes place at such a young age that she does not even realize she has lost something. Dolores is only a month old when doctors are forced to remove her fingers because of the third degree burns she receives due to her mother's negligence. Dolores



grows up with this deformity, so used to its presence that she would not know how to live otherwise. Not until she is in her thirties and looking through photographs does she truly grasp the degree of her loss. At this moment, Dolores finds a picture of herself before the fire. This is the first time she sees her hand whole.

The second act of loss in this novel is the destruction of the family. It comes slowly at first, beginning with Marina's departure. Then Fran is sent to the home, and Celesta plans her wedding. Finally, the day Celesta gets married Frankie boards a ship and runs away from the life he has built. The finality of this departure sends Mary into such a depression that she is hospitalized and unable to care for her children any longer. Rose and Luca are sent to one foster home, and Dolores is sent to another. Dolores loses her entire family in one quick, impetuous decision on her father's part. However, despite the dysfunction of this family and her tender age, Dolores never forgets a single member of her biological family.



# Style

## Point of View

*The Hiding Place* is written primarily in the first person point of view with Dolores as the narrator. Narration in the first half of the book is written from the point of view of a woman remembering events that took place when she was an infant and then a small child. By the nature of the narrator's age, the narration tends to be unreliable at times. However, in the last half of the book the narrator is a grown woman. The narration becomes more reliable. The story throughout the novel is told from memory, first of the narrator and then the members of her family. Dolores' memory is often unclear because she is a small child at the time and this makes her an unreliable narrator.

The narration is non-linear, jumping at times from the 1960s and Dolores as an infant to a time thirty years later shortly after Mary dies. There are times when these jumps are sudden and difficult to discern for the reader. However, the end of the novel clears up the confusion and makes the narration style seem almost linear, if the reader can see that Dolores has always been telling the story as the adult she became even though it appeared to be the child speaking.

## Setting

This novel is set in Cardiff, Wales. Cardiff is a shipping town that is full of sailors coming and going on the ships that often dock on her shores. In the section of town where the Gauci family lives, there is a large Maltese community. Dolores' father is also Maltese. In this part of town, there is also a strong criminal presence, a mob called the Syndicate, that dabbles in gambling, prostitution and theft. Dolores' father, Frankie, at one time is a member of this syndicate and during the course of the novel spends a lot of time in debt to members of this group due to his gambling habits.

The majority of the novel takes place in the small house where the Gauci family lives. This house was originally a rental house the Gaucis rented from Joe Medora. However, after the Gaucis give Marina to Medora, who believes the girl is his biological child, the Gaucis own the deed to the house. In this house, Dolores is burned and loses all the fingers of her left hand. Here, Mary is caught in Joe Medora's arms. The children eventually come home to this house after their mother dies. This sad house is symbolic of the pain and heartache that is this family's never ending legacy.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is primarily well-educated English. This might give the reader a clue that the chapters in which Dolores is a small child, in some a mere infant, are indeed narrated by the adult Dolores remembering her past through her own recollections and those of the people around her. Many of the other characters in the



novel are uneducated and/or foreign-born persons whose English is often broken and improper. However, the writer chooses to show this lack of education with only the father, Frankie, whose English is often marred by his lack of understanding of English grammar. The mother's English is near perfect, though she is a runaway and a barmaid before she marries her husband. This perfect speech may be attributed to Dolores' flawed memories of her mother.

The writer also uses unique dialogue cues throughout the novel to alert the reader that these discussions are not taking place in real time, but rather in memories. The dialogue is often short and paraphrased, lacking the traditional quotation marks and paragraph breaks. A bit of dialogue can show up in the middle of a descriptive passage or at the end of a paragraph, as though forgotten until just that moment. Often the author does not say "he said" or "she said" to indicate who is talking. The reader must pay careful attention so as not to lose track.

The writer depends strongly on simple narration to tell her story. It is written as though the reader is inside Dolores' head remembering alongside her the events of her young childhood, as she walks through the neglected ruins of her childhood home. This is intentional on the writer's part, as the reader will discover in the last few chapters of the book.

## Structure

*The Hiding Place* is made up of nineteen chapters with seven mini-chapters that are not included in the chapter count and are presented with separate single word titles that have significance to the adult Dolores. Each of these seven mini-chapters presents narration that may not have been known by the younger Dolores or that may add depth to the prior or forthcoming chapters. The chapters themselves are of average lengths but are broken in many smaller pieces, some of which no longer than a paragraph or two. The chapters are simple to read, and there are numerous places in which a reader may set the book down without losing his or her place.

The story line moves from a time before Dolores is born to her sister's wedding when she is five years old. The story then jumps forward thirty years to a time shortly after Dolores' mother's death. The neighborhood moves through these years from a thriving community of Maltese people to a boarded-up and abandoned neighborhood that will soon be torn down for new construction. Dolores struggles with her memories throughout the novel, wanting nothing more than to share what she remembers with her sisters in order to clarify some of her more indistinct memories. However, her sisters refuse to walk down memory lane with her, which leads Dolores to wonder if her memories are as clear as she has always believed them to be. Later, it becomes clear to both Dolores and the reader that many of her memories are not clear and that perhaps she would be better off not knowing everything.

The novel's pace tends to be a bit slow in places as Dolores picks through the memories of her family members and her own tainted recollections. The timeline is

divided between the past and the future, though it becomes clear at the end that the novel is really told in only one time period through a long series of flashbacks. The jump from one time period to the next may be slightly confusing to the reader at the beginning, but it becomes steadily clearer as the reader moves into the second part of the novel.





## Quotes

"I slept in the chest, when I was newborn. My mother told me how she wrapped me in a shawl at night and hid me from my father.

"He would've smothered you, she said, without malice but with a strange sense of pride, as if I were a Rescue kitten she had taken in." Part 1, Waiting, pg. 5

"Mary is in a state of mute blankness. A girl baby, yet again. In her head, she wonders what to call me - she's exhausted her list of Saints' names on the boys she never bore, and is sick of all the arias in the names her girls have got." Part 1, Chapter 1, pg. 15

"My father moves from the mirror to the sideboard, stops his breath as he pulls open the drawer. His eyes stay on the doorway, watching the shadows on the kitchen wall while his hand slides over bills and chits and a soft bundle of knitting. All promises forgotten now, Frankie thinks only of the Race. His fingers trip along the stitches, the sharp point of the needle, and down to the cool metal surface of the Biscuit Tin. Then his hand inside, and the unmistakable greasy slip of money beneath his touch. Frankie feels the edges of the notes - not much, enough - catches them up fast and folds them over, straight into his pocket. It takes five seconds." Part 1, Chapter 2, pg. 23

"At one month old, a baby's hand is the tiniest, most perfect thing. It makes a fist, it spreads wide, and when it burns, that soft skin is petrol, those bones are tinder, so small, so easily eaten in a flame.

"But I think of it as a work of art: a closed white tulip standing in the rain; a cut of creamy marble in the shape of a Saint; a church candle with its tears flowing down the bulb of wrist." Part 1, Tinder, pg. 33

"For the second time in our lives, my father stands over me with a clenched fist. It won't be the last, but he remembers the hospital visits the worst. He's weeping.

"Bambina, he chants. Bambina, Bambina, Bambina.

"In truth, my name has deserted him; he can't remember what I'm called." Part 1, Chapter 5, pg. 67

"This is the deal.

"Frankie gains: the house, enough money to right the damage caused by the fire; enough money to wipe his slate with the Syndicate; just that bit extra so Mary doesn't have to work all hours to make ends meet. And an offer to manage The Moonlight when Joe is away.

"He loses: Marina." Part 1, Chapter 5, pg. 73



"Children burnt and children bartered: someone must be to blame." Part 1, Interference, pg. 75

"We're not allowed to see our mother: she's in the Box Room and the door is kept shut. We should all be in bed but the doctor's due, so we are on display, to show him everything's alright. Except everything is not alright." Part 1, Chapter 7, pg. 117

"My mother moves round the table, slamming down plates and cutlery and plastic beakers spilling Seguna's orangeade. She lays a place for Fran, forgetting, then snatches the knife and fork away and throws them with a wail into the sink: it's been a month since Fran got taken away." Part 1, Chapter 8, pg. 124

"Frankie feels a molten wash of heat tingle through him. It's relief, he thinks, excitement. He gives himself up to it; Frankie can be anyone now." Part 2, Chapter 16, pg. 233

"The rain and the cage and Luca standing in the garden denying everything. The heaving in me comes out as a shout.

"Well I do! You and Rose, locking me in there. Shame on you, Luca!

"She faces me. In the twilight, her own sickness shines like a jewel. Luca closes her eyes; she's tired of not remembering.

"Dol, we were *letting you out*, she says." Part 2, Chapter 19, pg. 274

"Her face looks animated, her lips open as if she's about to say something. Her arms are bruised and liverish, but in the tint of the street-light, I see upon the dirty skin a faded blue crucifix, an inky stain spelling FRAN." Part 2, The List, pg. 282



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss the narrator in part one. Who is the narrator? Is the first part of the book told by an adult or a child?

Discuss the narrator in part two. What is different about the narration in this section of the book? Is the narration reliable or unreliable?

Discuss unreliable narration. How much of this novel is told by an unreliable narrator? What about the narration is unreliable?

Discuss character flaws. How is each of the main characters flawed? Are their flaws justified?

Discuss the time period in which the beginning of the novel takes place. What would have been different for Dolores and her sisters had it taken place in modern times?

Discuss the adult children at the end of the story. Why don't Dolores' sisters want to talk about the past? Is it fair of them to deny Dolores the truth? Is it wrong of Dolores to force the issues?

Discuss the format in which the writer presents the dialogue. Is this format confusing or clarifying? How would it change the flow of the narration if the dialogue were presented in a more traditional format? What does the chosen format suggest to the reader in regards to who the narrator might be and when the events actually took place?