

# **Jamaica Inn Study Guide**

**Jamaica Inn by Daphne Du Maurier**

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# Plot Summary

Jamaica Inn is a novel by celebrated author Daphne du Maurier. In this novel, Mary Yellan comes to live at Jamaica Inn with her aunt and uncle after the death of her widowed mother. Mary comes to the inn expecting to be reunited with the kind, carefree aunt she met once as a young child. However, Mary arrives to find Jamaica Inn a cold, foreboding place that has earned a reputation fitting to the abusive man who has come to be its landlord. Mary almost immediately begins plotting an escape for herself and her aunt, but quickly realizes she does not know whom she can trust. A novel of mystery, evil, and intrigue, Jamaica Inn is an exciting adventure for readers of all ages.

Mary Yellan has recently buried her mother and sold the family farm in order to fulfill her mother's dying wish that she go to live with her aunt, Patience, in Bodmin. Mary is saddened at having to leave the only home she has ever known, but excited to reconnect with the vivacious aunt she only met once as a child. On her journey, Mary begins to hear rumors that Jamaica Inn, the place where her aunt and uncle now live, is not a place a respectable woman should visit. The driver of her coach tells Mary that coaches once stopped at Jamaica Inn for refreshments and good conversation, but now no one ever stops there.

Mary arrives to meet Joss Merlyn, her uncle. Joss is a large man, with features that speak of a hard life and excesses in alcohol. There is violence in Joss that Mary recognizes from the moment he opens the door. Mary sees it too in her aunt. Patience is no longer happy and carefree, but a skittish, frightened woman. Almost immediately Mary begins to make plans to escape Jamaica Inn, take her aunt, and buy a farm back in Helford where they could both live the rest of their lives in peace.

The first few weeks, Mary spends her mornings helping her aunt do household chores and her afternoons exploring the moors. Jamaica Inn is easy to care for because most of the rooms are used as storage and no customers ever come. Then, one Saturday night, Joss Merlyn has a group of friends to the bar where Mary is expected to act as barmaid. The men are rowdy and crude, making suggestions to Mary that she knows they would act upon if Joss was not there to protect her. After a time, Mary retires to her bedroom above the front porch, sickened and frightened by the men she has spent the evening serving.

During the night, Mary is woken by the noise of wagons moving in the front yard. Mary has been warned to ignore these sounds, but curiosity gets the better of her. Mary watches as the men from the bar move cargo from wagons to the house while moving other boxes to open carts. After a while, Mary sneaks downstairs to get a closer look. Joss is in the bar with Harry the peddler and another man. Mary listens as the man tells Joss that he no longer wants to take part in Joss's schemes. Harry hits the man and leaves him unconscious on the floor. When Joss is alone, he goes upstairs and is joined by a man who was hiding in an upstairs room. Joss speaks to this man about what they should do with the unconscious man in the bar. Mary listens to the conversation and is



struck with the impression that they intend to kill the man. After they leave, Mary goes into the bar and finds a rope hanging from the rafters.

Mary is shaken by what she has seen and heard in Jamaica Inn and determined to learn all she can to help bring justice down on her uncle. Squire Bassat, the local law, comes to Jamaica Inn and searches it, but finds nothing. When Joss learns of this visit, he goes for a walk in the moors. Mary follows, hoping to learn something she can use to see Joss arrested for his crimes, but only becomes lost. Mary runs into Francis Davey, the vicar of Altarnun, on the road and he takes her home to feed her before returning her to Jamaica Inn. Mary confides her story in Mr. Davey, but he tells her she does not know enough to go to the law about Joss's activities. However, Mr. Davey promises to help her any time she is in need.

About this same time, Mary meets Jem Merlyn, Joss's younger brother. Mary's immediate impression is that Jem is just like his brother. However, when Mary meets Jem again at his family home, she begins to see differences between the two men. Mary agrees to go to a fair on Christmas Eve with Jem. While there, Jem sells some ponies he has raised, including one he claims to have stolen from Squire Bassat's farm. This horse, Jem ironically sells to Squire Bassat's wife. Mary and Jem spend the rest of the day happily together. However, when Jem goes to get his buggy to take Mary home, he disappears. Frightened that Jem has been arrested, Mary begins to walk home in the rain. Mr. Davey once more comes to her rescue and orders his carriage to take her home.

At Jamaica Inn, Joss and his friends are drunk and waiting in the yard. They kill the carriage driver and grab Mary, questioning where she has been and whom she has been talking to. When Mary tells them she has been to the law, Joss forces her back into the carriage and takes her along with him to the sea. Joss and his friends are going to wreck another ship in order to take its cargo. Mary is on the beach as this happens and is forced to see the sailors drowning as the ship falls apart around them. Everything goes wrong, however, when the sun comes up sooner than the thieves expected. Fights break out and Mary witnesses Joss kill several of his companions in an attempt to escape back into town with the cargo.

Joss realizes he has made a mistake by wrecking that final ship and becomes frightened of some unknown person. Joss begins making plans to leave Jamaica Inn. Harry the peddler comes and attempts to extort his half of the cargo from Joss, but instead finds himself locked in a room at Jamaica Inn. Mary plots to sneak out of her room and tell the vicar of Joss's plans before he can escape justice. However, when Mary gets to Altarnun, she discovers the vicar is not at home. Mary continues her journey into North Hill to speak to Squire Bassat only to learn he is already on his way to Jamaica Inn to arrest Joss. Mary quickly returns to the inn, arriving before the squire and his men. Inside, Mary finds the murdered body of her uncle. When the squire arrives, the find Patience, murdered as well. Harry the peddler, Mary's first choice as suspects, is rescued from his locked prison, effectively clearing him of any wrongdoing.



Mary is taken to the home of Mr. Davey where she rests from her ordeal. Over dinner the following day, the vicar tells Mary that he was the mastermind behind Joss's criminal activities and that he killed Joss to keep him from telling anyone of the vicar's involvement. However, Jem has become involved in the investigation and is sure to learn the identity of the killer at any time. Mr. Davey forces Mary to go with him as he escapes through the moors. A fog settles in, forcing Mary and Mr. Davey to stop until daybreak. As dawn breaks, a search party reaches them. Jem kills Mr. Davey, rescuing Mary. Later, Mary moves in with the Bassat family and begins to make plans to return to Helford. Before she can, however, Mary runs into Jem and decides that her future is at his side.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Mary Yellan is a young woman living in England in the early part of the nineteenth century. Mary was raised by her widowed mother and worked side by side with her on the family farm until her mother's death a few short months before the opening of the novel.

Mary is traveling toward Bodmin, sad to leave her home in Helford. Mary's father died when she was only six, leaving her and her mother to run the family farm. Mary's mother was strong, running the farm with little help from friends and neighbors. Seventeen years after her husband's death, Mary's mother finally succumbs to the stress and grief she has suffered in her life. On her deathbed, Mary's mother forces Mary to promise she will sell the farm and go to live with Patience, her aunt, in Bodmin. Mary agrees, but it tears her up inside to sell off the farm and listen to the plans of the new owner. Mary writes to her aunt and learns that she no longer lives in Bodmin, but that she and her husband, Joss, have become landlords of Jamaica Inn on the road between Bodmin and Launceston.

Mary's coach arrives in Bodmin and everyone but she gets out. The driver asks Mary if she is continuing on to Launceston and she informs him that she is going to Jamaica Inn. The driver's whole demeanor changes at the mention of Jamaica Inn. The driver tries to talk her out of going there, suggesting a respectable woman such as herself would never stop at Jamaica Inn. When Mary tells him her uncle is the landlord there, the driver stops trying to talk her out of it. Mary asks what is wrong with Jamaica Inn and that driver says that in past years the coaches would stop there for drinks, but now no one ever stops at Jamaica Inn. Mary continues her journey, unsettled by the foreign landscape that unfolds around her and briefly imagining how she could turn around and go back to Helford. When she arrives, the driver drops her at the gate and continues on without making sure she gets inside safely. At the door, a man greets her with a light and a reluctant air.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

The reader learns that Mary Yellan grew up on a farm, the daughter of a widowed woman. The novel is set in the early part of the nineteenth century, therefore the reader is immediately surprised by the circumstances of Mary's childhood. It was unusual for a woman to run a farm on her own. In those days, a widow would often go to live with relatives, allowing a male family member to care for her and her children. In this case, Mary's mother refused to leave the home she built with her father. This presents Mary with a unique role model, a strong woman who makes it clear to her daughter that strength in a woman is a virtue, not a character flaw. The relationship between these two women is also presented as a strong one, especially as the reader feels Mary's



regret in leaving her home to live with her aunt in a distant county. Mary's only reason for doing this is a promise to her mother, making it clear to the reader that Mary is not only strong of character, but fiercely loyal as well.

The first sense of evil comes when Mary arrives in Bodmin and informs the driver she will be continuing to Jamaica Inn. The driver tells Mary that Jamaica Inn is not a suitable place for a respectable woman such as she. This tells the reader that Jamaica Inn has a bad reputation, most likely stemming from the people who live there. Mary has not seen her aunt in many years, not since her marriage to Joss Merlyn, and therefore knows little about the people she is going to live with. The reader can see, however, due to the reputation of the inn that Mary is in for some trouble when she arrives.



## Chapters 2-3

### Chapters 2-3 Summary

In Chapter 2, Joss Merlyn is a large man, clearly capable of terrible violence. Mary follows him into the house where she meets her aunt again for only the second time. This woman, however, is nothing like the vivacious woman Mary recalls from their previous meeting. Patience is a frightened, skittish woman who fusses around her husband like a puppy dog. Mary goes with her aunt and uncle into the kitchen where Joss begins to outline his expectations. Mary is to work in the bar on Saturday nights when Joss has friends to the inn. Mary is also to help Patience with the housework. However, whenever Mary hears noises in the yard in the middle of the night, she is to ignore them. Mary shares a brief meal with her uncle, listening to his instructions and watching the way in which he treats her Aunt Patience. It is as though Patience is an inept servant and Joss her indulgent master. Mary can clearly see the strain marriage to Joss has caused for Patience and she immediately begins plotting to run away, returning to Helford with Patience, and setting up a farm where they can live out their lives in peace.

In Chapter 3, Mary wakes the following morning later than intended. Mary quickly dresses and joins her aunt downstairs for breakfast. Afterward, Mary explores the inn and discovers that many of the guest rooms are used for storage and the outer door to the bar is kept lock. It is clear that whatever Joss uses the inn for, it is not for the convenience of travelers. Mary questions her aunt about this, but does not get a straight answer. Patience says that Joss bought the inn from Squire Bassat through an acquaintance to prevent the squire from knowing the true identity of the buyer until the sale was complete. The Merlyn family has a bad reputation and Joss knew the squire would not sell if he knew the inn would be his. Mary continues to question why Joss would buy an inn if he did not intend to use it as such, but all Patience will tell her is that bad things happen there, things she cannot speak of, and that Mary will soon understand.

### Chapters 2-3 Analysis

Mary meets her uncle and aunt upon her arrival at Jamaica Inn. Patience is not the woman Mary recalls from their previous meeting. It soon becomes clear to Mary that Patience has been abused, verbally and physically at the hands of her husband, a fact no one attempts to hide from Mary. Joss tells Mary clearly that he is the man of the house and that he will beat both women if they ever go against his wishes. Joss then tells Mary what he expects of her, warning her to keep her nose out of his business. This is the second suggestion to the reader that illegal acts take place at Jamaica Inn, things people know about but no one has been able to do anything about. This places Mary in a difficult position. Mary has always been a moral, law-abiding person, but by living at Jamaica Inn she takes on the persona of someone who is immoral or who





allows crimes to take place without attempting to stop it. Mary resents this position she has been put in and begins immediately to plan an escape. However, Mary will not leave without her aunt, causing an obstacle for her that must be overcome.

Mary begins to explore the inn and quickly comes to realize the inn has not accepted guests in a long time. Mary learns that Joss bought the inn through trickery from the local lawman and that he uses it as a cover for his crimes. Once again Mary begins to realize the predicament she has been placed in and she begins to wonder how she might escape with her aunt from this place she has begun to think of as evil.



# Chapters 4-5

## Chapters 4-5 Summary

In Chapter 4, Joss Merlyn leaves Jamaica Inn for nearly a week, which gives Mary time to explore the landscape. Mary begins going on walks in the afternoon after finishing her part of the household chores. The landscape is harsh and Mary must be careful not to get stuck in the moors, but she begins to find a strange kind of beauty in the area. When Joss returns, Mary learns that he is to have people to the bar that night. Mary works hard, making drinks and washing glasses for Joss's friends. They are a curious group, the outcasts of respectable society. Mary finds them vulgar and unpleasant, finally insisting on going up to bed. Joss warns her to keep her mouth shut and her nose to herself. During the night, Mary is awakened by the sound of wagons in the yard. Despite Joss's warning, Mary peeks out the window and sees the men from the bar loading and unloading a group of wagons and open carts. Mary sneaks down the stairs when most of the men have gone and hears Joss in the bar with Harry the peddler and another man. The unnamed man begins to tell Joss that he wants out of their criminal enterprise. Joss tells him no one can walk away and Harry knocks the man to the ground. A short time later, Harry leaves and Joss goes upstairs where he meets with a man who has clearly been hiding in one of the empty rooms. Mary overhears Joss's side of the conversation and gathers that they are trying to decide if they should kill the dissenter. When the men leave, Mary sneaks a look in the bar and sees a rope hanging in a noose from the rafters.

In Chapter 5, Mary struggles with what she heard that Saturday night and tries to convince herself that her uncle is not capable of murder. Nothing happens for a while, just rain that keeps Mary indoors and feeling claustrophobic. Then, one afternoon, a stranger comes to the inn and lets himself into the bar. Mary demands that he leave, informing him that the landlord does not like strangers in his inn. The man laughs and questions Mary's barmaid skills. It turns out the man is Jem Merlyn, Joss's younger brother. Mary speaks to Jem in the yard and learns that he is a horse thief. Jem admits this clearly, not attempting to hide anything. Jem does, however, apologize for his treatment of Mary, explaining that he thought she was the kind of woman Joss normally liked to have around rather than a respectable woman. Mary briefly considers confiding in Jem, telling him about the wagons and the possible murder, but realizes he could be involved in Joss's illegal activities. Mary decides she can trust no one, especially a Merlyn.

## Chapters 4-5 Analysis

Mary helps in the bar on a Saturday night when Joss has his friends over. Mary finds these people to all be criminals or con artists, people who live under the scope of respectable society. Mary is angry at having to serve these people, finding their vulgar words and implications to be unacceptable for a woman of her virtue. This episode



shows the reader that Mary, although living at Jamaica Inn and a woman accustomed to hard work, is still a woman of virtue.

Mary sees the men loading and unloading wagons and knows instinctively that something illegal is going on or the men would have done this work in the light of day. The cargo is clearly stolen. Mary also overhears Joss and an unknown man plotting murder, something that frightens her more than anything else she has seen or heard at Jamaica Inn thus far. What is more significant, however, is the unknown man. It appears, by the way that Joss defers to this man, that he is the leader of this criminal enterprise. The only question is who he is. When Mary meets Jem the following day, it appears that he might be a logical choice as the identity of the unknown man. Jem is a horse thief and he has no fear in revealing this to Mary. Even Mary seems to realize that Jem has the capacity to be like his brother because she chooses not to confide in him. However, the reader has to wonder if Mary is making assumptions, a theme of the novel, on the fact that Jem is Joss's brother.



# Chapters 6-7

## Chapters 6-7 Summary

In Chapter 6, the wagons come again in the night. Mary wakes and watches as the wagons are loaded. Mary begins wondering if Jem's visit is a coincidence or if he is the reason the wagons have come again. A few days later, Squire Bassat comes to Jamaica Inn with a servant. They have a warrant to search the inn. Mary lets them in because Patience is frightened and Joss is gone. The squire searches the entire house, including the locked room, but finds nothing. Mary lies to him, insisting that nothing illegal has happened in that inn. The squire does not believe her, but has no choice except to leave. When Joss returns, Patience is too upset to tell her side of the story clearly, so Joss asks Mary to tell it. Mary does and Joss asks why she lied for him. Mary insists she did it for her aunt. Joss is impressed with Mary's strength. Later, Joss slips out of the house and goes across the moors on foot. Mary follows, but becomes lost. Mary turns around and starts to head back to the inn, but quickly realizes she is lost. A man on horseback approaches and offers his assistance.

In Chapter 7, the horseman takes Mary to his home to rest and eat before returning to Jamaica Inn. The man turns out to be Francis Davey, the vicar of Altarnun. Due to his kind disposition and his profession, Mary feels as though she can trust Mr. Davey. Mary tells him all she knows about Jamaica Inn and its landlord, holding nothing back. Mr. Davey listens in silence, asking only the occasional question. Finally Mr. Davey tells Mary she does not have enough proof to accuse her uncle of any criminal activity. However, he assures her, that if she does learn of anything more incriminating, she can always come to him with it. With that, Mr. Davey drives Mary back to Jamaica Inn in his dogcart. Mary cannot help but notice a duality to Mr. Davey's personality, fierceness he uses with the horse that is opposite to his kind, cleric's disposition. When they reach Jamaica Inn, it is late and Mary is afraid she will have to sneak in. However, they discover that Joss has gotten drunk and left the kitchen door open.

## Chapters 6-7 Analysis

When the wagons come again the night after Jem's arrival at Jamaica Inn, Mary begins to wonder if the purpose of Jem's visit was to warn his brother that the cargo needed to be moved. When the squire appears a few days later, it seems this suspicion is well grounded. Mary knows little about Jem except that he is a horse thief and Joss's little brother. These things seem to combine to make Jem a person Mary cannot trust. However, it is not clear to the reader, or to Mary, that Jem is a bad person or in league with his brother. The circumstantial evidence is overwhelming, when combined with the mysterious person who is clearly the leader of Joss's group, but there is still enough for the reader to doubt Jem's involvement.



While following Joss, attempting to learn more about his activities even though Mary has just finished lying to protect him, Mary gets lost. Francis Davey, the vicar of Altarnun, rescues Mary. Mary immediately trusts this man because he is a cleric and he appears to have her best interests at heart. However, Mr. Davey is a strange man and he does not think that Mary's witness testimony is enough to have Joss arrested. The reader is immediately suspicious because it seems that if Mary had told the squire what she told Mr. Davey, Joss would already be in jail. Mr. Davey is an interesting character and Mary's automatic trust in him leaves the reader anxious to see if this trust is earned.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Joss Merlyn goes on a drinking binge that keeps him incoherent for five days. During that time, Patience cares for him as though he is an infant. Mary stays out of the way, once again taking long walks on the moors. Once, Mary wanders out toward Trewartha Marsh and comes across Jem's farm. Jem invites her to make him lunch and teases her for coming to see him alone. Jem tells Mary that he plans to take a couple of ponies to Launceston on Christmas Eve and invites her to go alone. One of the ponies is an animal he stole from Squire Bassat's farm. At first Mary refuses, still reeling from a dark story Jem told her about the Christmas his mother died. However, when Jem accuses her of being afraid, she agrees.

Mary returns to Jamaica Inn and finds that Joss is beginning to come out of his alcoholic haze. Patience goes to bed and Mary finds herself alone with Joss. Joss begins to talk about his criminal experiences. Joss talks about causing ships to crash at sea and watching the sailors die, sometimes killing them when they managed to make it to shore. Joss talks about how he dreams of these men, how they haunt him and he has to drink to make them go away. Mary is mortified by this description, recalling a trip to the shore when she was a small child and she and her father watched a ship wreck on the rocks. It was a horrifying thing and Mary cannot imagine what kind of evil that lives in Joss to make him act with such disregard to human life.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Joss Merlyn is an alcoholic and finally, during an alcoholic binge, Mary learns what fuels his disease. Joss admits to being a wrecker, a man who purposely causes ships to wreck so that he can steal its cargo. Joss tells her how many times he has sat on the shore and watched people die in order to leave no witnesses to the theft. Joss is haunted by these images, the only redeeming quality of a man evil enough to purposely wreck ships and watch men drown.

Mary also meets with Jem once again. Jem tells her a story of how he came home for a home-cooked meal and found his mother dead, depriving him of the meal. Mary is heartbroken that Jem could be so cold, once again seeing in him the same qualities she hates in his brother. However, there is another side of Jem that fascinates Mary and brings him back to her, suggesting to the reader that he is not of the same quality as Joss. The reader begins to wonder if Jem is of a higher quality, personality wise, than Mary originally thought, or if infatuation is affecting her perceptions.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Mary decides to go with Jem to Launceston after all. Mary leaves Jamaica Inn without telling anyone where she is going and meets Jem on the road. Mary tells Jem what Joss told her and he assures her that one day Jem will hang like their father. Jem then assures Mary that he has never killed another human being despite his family connections. In Launceston, Jem easily sells one of his ponies, but the other is so clearly a high breed that a potential buyer recognizes that it most likely is stolen. Jem is about to give up when a woman approaches him, insisting on buying the pony. The woman is Mrs. Bassat, so Jem tries to convince her the pony is already sold. However, the woman offers so much money that Jem cannot pass up the opportunity. Mrs. Bassat buys back her own pony for more than twice what Jem had hoped to get.

Jem and Mary enjoy the holiday fair, sharing drinks and good food. Toward the end of the evening, Jem steals kisses from Mary and asks her to stay the night with him. Mary refuses, insisting she is not that kind of girl. Jem eventually backs down, leaving Mary in the cover of the hotel awning while he ventures out into the rain to get the cart to take her home. Mary waits for more than half an hour before she realizes that Jem is not coming back. Mary walks to the barn where they stored the cart and learns that Jem retrieved the cart already. Mary begins to think that Jem has abandoned her. Mary goes to a saloon to ask for help. There, Mary runs into the horse buyers who recognized Jem as a horse thief. They tell her Jem left more than a half hour before with a man in a carriage. They then invite Mary to join their party, implying that she would be the entertainment. Mary leaves and begins to walk the more than eight miles back to Jamaica Inn in the rain. A carriage comes up on her and stops. Once again, Mr. Davey comes to Mary's rescue.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Mary goes to Launceston with Jem where he, ironically, sells a stolen pony back to the owner. Jem and Mary then have an enjoyable day at the holiday fair, sharing food and drink and a few kisses. Mary's opinion of Jem has changed and the reader is suddenly aware of how deeply her affection for this man already runs, even this early in their acquaintanceship. It seems Mary will begin to trust Jem now, but she still does not tell him the truth about Joss and what she hopes to see happen to him. Mary does tell Jem about Joss' confession and she is disappointed to see that he is not surprised by this. Jem's reaction only works to prove to Mary how different their moral compasses really are.

Jem disappears. Mary immediately believes he has abandoned her out of spite for not sleeping with him. Later it appears as though Jem was arrested for stealing horses. Either way, Mary is left alone. This causes Mary to once again think of Jem as



untrustworthy, perhaps suggesting she will never again confide in him. In his place, Mr. Davey comes to Mary's rescue. Jem and Mr. Davey are the only two friends Mary has made and therefore the only two she can possibly confide in. Mary has chosen to confide in Mr. Davey because he is a cleric. However, the reader wonders why Mr. Davey is on the road this rainy night and what it might mean to Mary's safety.





# Chapter 10-11

## Chapter 10-11 Summary

In Chapter 10, Mr. Davey gives Mary a blanket and has her take off her wet clothes. They sit close together in the back of the carriage and Mary tells Mr. Davey how she came to be alone in Launceston. Mary then tells him everything Joss confessed to her, admitting that she is no longer sure she can continue to live at Jamaica Inn. Mr. Davey tells Mary she is young and impatient, that she should not jump to conclusions about people. Mr. Davey then assures Mary that Joss can no longer cause ships to wreck because the local law officials have decided to post guards along the coast. Mr. Davey then gets out of the carriage at the turn to Altarnun and sends Mary on her way. The ride is quiet and almost pleasant until they approach Jamaica Inn. Joss is outside with his friends, all of them drunk. They shoot and kill the driver before pulling Mary from the carriage. Joss demands to know where Mary has been. Mary tells him she went to Launceston and told the squire all about Joss's illegal activities. Joss forces Mary back into the carriage and tells her she will be a witness to his crimes so that she can no longer testify against him.

In Chapter 11, Mary travels to the coast with her uncle and several other men shoved into the back of the carriage. It is clear the men would like to take advantage of Mary, but Joss's presence forces them to keep their hands to themselves. At some point, Mary falls asleep. When she wakes, she finds herself alone, locked in the carriage. Mary slips out through the window and quietly begins making her way up the road. Unable to see, Mary trips over Harry the peddler who is more than happy to entertain her for a while. Mary and Harry struggle until Mary is able to get free.

Mary goes down to the beach where she can see a fake signal light designed to draw the ships onto the rocks. Mary sees a ship coming toward the rocks, and she tries to scream, to warn them away. Someone grabs Mary and forces her to the ground, tying her hands and placing a cloth in her mouth. Mary is forced to watch as the ship comes apart on the rocks and the sailors begin to drown in the water. Chaos breaks out, and the scene mortifies Mary. The wreckers begin gathering the cargo, but the sun comes up sooner than they expected. All the thieves head to the carriage and cart, but the carriage is stuck in the soft earth at the side of the road. They burn it to hide their trail, but that leaves them without enough room to transport all the men and the cargo. A fight breaks out. Mary watches as Joss kills two of his own men before loading her, himself, and Harry in the cart with the majority of the stolen cargo.

## Chapter 10-11 Analysis

Mary arrives home after a strange conversation with Mr. Davey, in which he once again refuses to help Mary go to the law about her uncle, and she finds herself in the middle of a group of drunk and excited thieves. Mary shows her strength of character once



more when she stands up to Joss, claiming to have gone to the squire to report his illegal activities. Rather than beat her as the reader suspects, Joss forces her to go to the coast with him where he and his gang plan to wreck another ship.

Mary is nearly raped by Harry, who attacks her when he finds her wandering the road alone, without Joss. Joss has thus far protected Mary from his friends, showing the reader a surprising concern for another human being. The reader might assume his concern is based on the fact that she is family, a theme of the novel, and that he feels a certain amount of responsibility for Mary. Later, Mary is mortified when she sees the ship wreck and the sailors drown. Mary's reaction shows her sense of morality, but it also allows the reader to understand just how horrifying Joss's actions are. Finally, Joss is sober when things begin to fall apart. Mary watches as he shoots down his own friends in cold blood because there is not enough room in the cart to transport everyone home with the cargo. Apparently, there is nothing more important than the cargo.



# Chapters 12-13

## Chapters 12-13 Summary

In Chapter 12, Mary wakes in her room at Jamaica Inn. Patience comes to check on her and Mary learns she has been asleep for two days. Mary quickly dresses, intent on going to the vicar with this latest news, but Patience begs her not to upset Joss again. Mary goes downstairs and discovers that Joss has locked all the doors and shutters. Joss is frightened, talking about how he should not have wrecked this ship on his own and how there is someone more dangerous than the lawmen. Patience suggests they leave, but Joss insists it is too late. Joss then questions Mary, asking why she was in Launceston, whom she was with, and whom the carriage belonged to. Mary lies, telling him she went to Launceston alone and hired the carriage. Before Joss can question her further, they hear a noise outside. It turns out to be Harry, hoping to find the cargo Joss has hidden in the locked room. They argue and Harry accuses Joss of working for someone else rather than being the mastermind himself. Finally Joss takes Harry and locks him in the room so he cannot turn on him. Joss decides then that he will run away.

In Chapter 13, Mary is locked in her room when she hears something hitting the window. Mary looks outside and finds Jem there. Jem wants Mary to let him in, but she explains that she is locked in the room. Jem climbs up to the window and Mary tells him what happened to her Christmas Eve, but he offers no explanation for his disappearance that same night. Jem sees the bruises and scratches on Mary's face and demands to know who put them there. When Jem learns Joss is responsible, he promises Mary he will take care of everything. Mary begs Jem to go away and tells him she plans to take care of Joss, but he refuses and tells her goodbye. Mary watches him go and decides that she must go to the vicar and tell him all she knows. Mary goes downstairs and helps Patience prepare for their departure. In the afternoon, Mary convinces Joss to let them take a nap. Once alone in her room, Mary sneaks away. Mary believes she can make it to Altarnun and back before Joss knows she is gone. However, when she arrives, the vicar is not home.

## Chapters 12-13 Analysis

Joss has become very paranoid and no one knows for sure why. Joss says something about a person more powerful and frightening than the law. Later Harry the peddler shows up and begins accusing Joss of being someone's puppet. The reader is already aware that there is someone else involved in the planning and execution of the crimes, therefore it seems logical that someone more powerful or intelligent would be the mastermind of the crimes. It is most likely this person is the one that Joss is frightened of. However, the reader does not know at this point what this person is capable of, though it seems murder would not be out of the question.



Mary begins to plan to go to the law and tell them what Joss has done and that he plans to escape. Mary is hoping justice, a theme of the novel, will finally be done. However, she reaches Altarnun and her confidant, the vicar, is not home. Now Mary must turn to someone else. Jem does not seem like the logical choice because Mary has already seen him and begged him to leave the moors, afraid he is involved in Joss's crimes. Jem refuses to go, but what Jem has in mind is also something the reader is unclear about at this point.



# Chapters 14-15

## Chapters 14-15 Summary

In Chapter 14, Mary leaves a note for the vicar with his housekeeper, Hannah, and then decides to continue on to North Hill where Squire Bassat lives. There is no hope that Mary will get back to Jamaica Inn before Joss realizes she is gone, so she decides she must continue until she finds someone who can help. At the Bassats, Mary learns the squire is not home, but she is shown into the library where his wife is. Mrs. Bassat listens before telling Mary that Squire Bassat is on his way to Jamaica Inn to arrest the landlord. Mary insists she must return to the inn to see to her aunt, so Mrs. Bassat provides a trap and driver. When they arrive at Jamaica Inn there is no sign of the squire. The driver offers to check things out, but Mary is afraid he will tip off Joss, so she goes herself. Mary discovers the horse is still in his stall, so she knows they have not left yet. Mary goes into the house and searches the lower floor. Joss is lying in the passageway, a knife wound in his back.

In Chapter 15, Mary goes back out to the trap and tells the driver what she has found. A short time later, the squire arrives with a group of men to arrest Joss. Mary tells them what has happened and they instruct her to wait in the yard while they check the yard. The driver keeps Mary company. When the squire comes out, he informs Mary that her aunt has also been killed. Mary tells the squire all she knows, accepting his disappointment in her previous lies. Mary tells him that she believes that Harry the peddler is responsible, but Harry is found in the locked room so it is clear he is not the guilty party. It occurs to Mary that Jem might be responsible, but she chooses not to tell the squire this. It is at that point that the vicar of Altarnun arrives.

## Chapters 14-15 Analysis

Despite the fact that Jem encouraged Mary not to do anything, she goes to Altarnun to alert the vicar that Joss is planning to flee the area. The vicar is not home, so a desperate Mary turns to Squire Bassat. This situation changes Mary's entire plan, but she risks it because she is desperate to protect her aunt, the only family she has left. Mary's choices illustrate the theme of family by showing the reader that family is the most important thing to Mary, even above her own safety.

Mary learns that Squire Bassat has gotten some sort of information that has allowed him to be able to go arrest Joss. Before he arrives, Mary discovers Joss's dead body. It appears that Joss's paranoid fears were actually justified. It also seems that Mary's choice to go tell someone about Joss's activities and intention to flee the area may have saved her life. Now the mystery looms over who might have committed these murders. Mary's mind immediately turns to Jem, as the reader wonders who was the mastermind of Joss's criminal activities and could that person be the killer. Perhaps that person was hoping to keep Joss from telling anyone about him. However, the question still remains,

could Jem be that mastermind or is there someone else out there who might still be a threat to Mary.



# Chapters 16-18

## Chapters 16-18 Summary

In Chapter 16, Mary wakes the following afternoon in the vicarage at Altarnun. Mr. Davey insisted she stay at his home the night before and he gave a medication in her drink to help her sleep. Mary goes downstairs and finds the house empty. Curious about the vicar, Mary looks at his paintings and in the drawers of his desk. Mary finds a caricature of Mr. Davey and his congregation that is disturbing. A moment later, Mr. Davey comes in. Mr. Davey directs Mary to set dinner on the table. During dinner, Mary finds it hard to look at Mr. Davey because the drawing has changed her opinion of him. Mr. Davey recognizes this and begins to tell Mary the truth about the murders of her aunt and uncle. Mr. Davey tells Mary that Jem has a nail that fell off the shoe of the murderer's horse. Jem has gone to interview the only furrier open on that Sunday to find out the identity of the killer. Mr. Davey tells Mary that Jem will learn that he, the vicar of Altarnun, is the killer and the mastermind behind Joss's criminal activities.

In Chapter 17, Mr. Davey forces Mary to run away with him. Mary tries to convince Mr. Davey to let her go, but he will not even entertain the idea. Mr. Davey has developed feelings for Mary and he tells her she will learn to care for him as well. As they make their way through the moors, a fog rolls in. Finally Mr. Davey decides they must stop for the night so that they do not become lost. Mr. Davey leads Mary up onto a granite tor where he encourages her to get some rest. Mary does not think she can sleep, but does fall asleep for a short time. When Mary wakes, Mr. Davey is forcing a gag into her mouth. Mr. Davey has heard some men on horses approaching. Mr. Davey releases the horses, sending them into the moors with the hope that they will misdirect the men searching for them. Mr. Davey then forces Mary to begin climbing the hill. A fire rings out and Mary realizes that Jem is firing at her. Mr. Davey is hit and killed.

In Chapter 18, Mary is staying with Squire Bassat and his family. However, Mary does not feel comfortable there and dreams of returning to Helford. Mary imagines that she could stay with friends until she makes enough money to buy her own little farm. As Mary thinks this through one afternoon while walking the moors, she runs into Jem Merlyn. Jem is driving a cart filled to overflowing with all his belongings. Jem tells Mary that he is a nomadic person who does not feel comfortable staying in one place for too long. Jem is heading to Tamar. Mary decides to go with him, even though Tamar is the opposite direction as Helford. Mary has realized that she belongs at Jem's side.

## Chapters 16-18 Analysis

Mary is staying at the vicarage in Altarnun when she discovers a drawing the vicar has done that is very disturbing. Mary begins to wonder if she underestimated Francis Davey's cruel streak that she noticed the first time she met him. Mary made assumptions, a theme of the novel, about Mr. Davey's personality and trustworthiness



based on his job as a cleric and took him into her confidence regarding her Uncle Joss. Now Mary learns that Mr. Davey is actually the mastermind behind Joss' illegal behaviors. Mary is stunned, but soon comes to realize she should have seen the signs. It was Jem she did not trust when in reality Jem turned on his brother and helped the squire in order to protect Mary.

Mr. Davey attempts to escape, taking Mary as hostage, but is soon tracked down by Jem. Jem once again proves himself to be honorable by saving Mary from her capture. However, Jem is not the kind of man who wants to settle down with a wife and children. Mary dreams of returning to Helford, but when she sees Jem again, she realizes her future lies with him. Mary gives up her own dreams and her virtue to go away with Jem. Mary once again has proved herself to be strong and to live her life according to her own desires rather than what society might dictate for her.





# Characters

## Mary Yellan

Mary Yellan is a strong young woman who has been raised on a farm, working alongside her mother on the farm chores. Mary has never known violence or cruelty, except for the violence that occasionally takes place in nature. When Mary's mother becomes sick, Mary takes care of her, sitting vigil at her bedside for nearly a year before the older woman succumbs to her illness. Before she dies, Mary's mother makes her daughter promise that she will sell the farm and go to live with her Aunt Patience in Bodmin. Mary loves the farm, the area, and all her friends, therefore she is reluctant to leave. However, Mary takes her promises to her mother seriously. Mary sells the farm, saddened by the plans the new owner is making, and begins to prepare for a new life at Jamaica Inn.

Mary recalls her aunt as a vivacious, perky woman who always had a smile to share. This memory helps soothe Mary's reluctance in moving to Jamaica Inn where Patience now lives with her husband, Joss Merlyn. However, when Mary arrives at Jamaica Inn, she instantly realizes that marriage has created a change in Patience, erasing the carefree youth and in its place leaving a frightened, abused woman. Mary quickly comes to realize that evil things take place at Jamaica Inn and she is determined to find a way to take her aunt and return to her familiar Helford. Mary does not know who she can trust, but she fights to get justice and to rescue her poor, frightened aunt, showing the reader the depth of character and strength this young woman has.

## Joss Merlyn

Joss Merlyn is a large man who has a cruel streak as long as his arm span. Joss owns Jamaica Inn and uses it not as a hospitable place for travelers, but as a den for thieves. Joss keeps Jamaica Inn locked up tight, sending away would be customers while entertaining his own friends in the bar until they are all so drunk they cannot see straight. In the middle of the night wagons come to Jamaica Inn and move strange cargo that comes from the blood of innocents. Mary comes to learn that Joss is the leader of a gang of thieves who cause shipwrecks with the intention of stealing the ship's cargo. Mary witnesses one of these attacks, watching as the poor sailors drown in the sea as Joss and his friends watch.

Joss comes from a family with a bad reputation. Joss's own father was hanged for crimes against the crown. Joss has lived a hard life and suffered many losses, including the death of his brother, Matthew. As a result of this hard life and his thieving ways, Joss has become an alcoholic. During his alcoholic binges, Joss is known to talk of the things he has done. It is through one of these alcoholic binges that Mary learns of his murderous ways. It is also through this alcoholic confession that the reader comes to realize that Joss regrets some of what he has done in his life and that he feels as



though his family's reputation and his lack of skills have forced him into this way of life. The reader finds some sympathy for Joss Merlyn, but not enough to grieve for a man who would stand on the beach and watch sailors drown.

## Jem Merlyn

Jem Merlyn is Joss's younger brother. Jem is much younger than his brothers, therefore he is not close to Joss. Jem, however, has not grown far from the bad apples. Jem is a horse thief, a profession he does nothing to hide. Jem is also a gypsy type, preferring to be constantly moving rather than creating roots in one place. Jem comes to Jamaica Inn and speaks with his brother from time to time, giving the impression that he knows of Joss's activities and approves of them. In reality, Jem does not approve and expects one day his brother will hang like their father. This does not, however, mean that Jem Merlyn would turn on his brother and give the law what they need to hang him.

Jem meets Mary and they are instantly attracted to one another. Jem takes Mary with him to a Christmas fair where they spend a few hours of happiness before Jem suddenly disappears. Mary is left alone, frightened that Jem has been arrested for selling stolen horses. In truth, Jem is taken in by Squire Bassat for selling his wife a pony Jem stole from the Bassat farm, but the purpose is not to arrest him, but to encourage him to turn on Joss. Jem refuses until he learns that Joss forced Mary to go along on one of his criminal excursions and allowed her to be injured. It is then that Jem turns on Joss, reports his crimes to the squire, and learns the true identity of Joss's partner in crime. After learning all this, Mary allows herself to feel the emotions for Jem she has always known were just below the surface. Mary and Jem go off together at the end of the novel.

## Patience Merlyn

Patience is Mary's aunt, the sister to her mother. Patience was once a carefree, fun-loving woman, but when Mary meets her again she is a skittish, frightened shell of a person. Patience does not have the strength to live with the truth about her husband's criminal ways, but she also does not have the strength to leave him. Patience, despite all the abuse he offers her, loves her husband, Joss. Patience would do anything for him and lives for the day when he drinks so much he has to be catered to every moment of the day. Mary is determined to take Patience away from Jamaica Inn and provide a safe place for her to live, but the reader instantly recognizes that Patience would rather remain frightened and wracked with guilt at her husband's side than to face life without Joss.

## Francis Davey, Vicar of Altarnun

Francis Davey is the Vicar of Altarnun. Mary meets Mr. Davey on the moors one day when she attempts to follow her uncle, Joss. Mary becomes lost and Mr. Davey picks her up in his carriage. Mary finds Mr. Davey to be odd, not just because of his strange



appearance caused by being an albino, but his disposition and his apparent enthusiasm for danger. However, Mr. Davey is a man of the church, therefore Mary feels as though she can trust him. Mary tells Mr. Davey all she has seen at Jamaica Inn, hoping he can help her go to the law. Unfortunately, Mr. Davey convinces Mary that she has not seen enough to begin making accusations. It never occurs to Mary to wonder why Mr. Davey is so reluctant to do something about Joss Merlyn, until it is too late. Eventually Mary is confronted with the fact that Mr. Davey is the mastermind behind Joss's crime and that it is he who broke into Jamaica Inn and killed both Joss and Patience Merlyn.

## **Squire Bassat and Mrs. Bassat**

Squire Bassat was the original owner of Jamaica Inn and is the closest magistrate to the area surrounding Jamaica Inn. Squire Bassat is a good man and he knows that Joss Merlyn is a criminal. The squire attempts on several occasions to prove Joss's guilt, but it seems Joss is always a step ahead of the squire. Mary is both afraid of the squire and in awe of him, hoping he will one day bring Joss down. Eventually, with Mary and Jem's help, Squire Bassat finds himself in a position to arrest Joss, but by the time he reaches Jamaica Inn, Joss and Patience have been murdered.

Mrs. Bassat is a kind woman who willingly takes Mary into her home when she finds her standing at her door in need of help. Mrs. Bassat informs Mary of everything her husband is doing to bring Joss down and provides Mary with the means to return to Jamaica Inn to check on her Aunt Patience. When everything is said and done, the Bassats welcome Mary into their home.

## **Harry the peddler**

Harry the peddler is one of the thieves who works with Joss. Harry appears to be Joss's second in command. When Joss forces Mary to go with the men to wreck a ship on Christmas Eve, Harry attempts to rape Mary. Mary manages to force him off of her, but if Joss had not been around, Harry most likely would have tried again. Later, after the wreck on Christmas Eve goes wrong, Harry comes to Jamaica Inn and demands half the cargo so that he can run away. Joss becomes so angry and frightened by Harry's demands, that he locks Harry into the room where the cargo is often kept. Harry is found still locked in this room when the bodies of Joss and Patience Merlyn are found murdered, proving he could not be the murderer as Mary originally suspects.

## **Saturday Night Visitors**

On Saturday nights, two or three times a month, Joss Merlyn has a group of friends come to the bar at Jamaica Inn. Mary is to act as barmaid during these times. The men are a strange group, most thieves and con artists, some poor business men. Mary finds all the men vulgar and unpleasant. After the first Saturday night after Mary has come to Jamaica Inn she hears wagons in the yard. Mary watches as these visitors help to load and unload wagons, moving some sort of cargo from and to a room in the back of the



inn. Later, Mary sneaks downstairs and listens as Joss plots to murder one of these men with Harry the peddler and an unknown man.

## Mary's Parents

Mary's father dies when she is six, leaving her and her mother alone on their farm. Mary recalls her father as a strong, kind man who worked hard and cared deeply for his family. Mary's mother recalls him as the love of her life. Mary's mother never remarries, but remains on the farm, working hard to keep it running until one day the stress of this difficult and unconventional life takes its toll. Mary's mother suffers what appears to be a stroke and lingers on her death bed for nearly a year. During this time, Mary's mother makes her promise she will sell the farm and go to live with her aunt, Patience. Mary agrees and keeps her promise, showing the reader how important her mother was to her. However, Mary's mother could never have known the danger she sent her daughter into.

## Hannah

Hannah is Mr. Davey's housekeeper. Normally the housekeeper would have a room in the vicar's house so that she could care for his needs day and night. However, Mr. Davey does not like to have Hannah around after dark, therefore she has a home of her own. Mary meets Hannah on the day she comes to Altarnun to tell the vicar Joss Merlyn plans to run away. Mr. Davey is not home, but kindly Hannah promises to give him a message from Mary. Hannah is a kind woman, cautious of strangers but warm hearted and welcoming to those who need help from the vicar. Hannah is exactly what a vicar should be, creating a contrast that makes the vicar's shortcomings all that more obvious to the reader.



# Objects/Places

## Wagons

Joss Merlyn and his partners move the cargo stolen from wrecked ships with wagons. Mary Yellan hears the wagons one night and watches as cargo is unloaded, loaded, and moved out of Jamaica Inn's front yard.

## Rope

On the night Mary witnesses the wagons in Jamaica Inn's yard, she sees a rope hanging from the beams in Jamaica Inn's bar.

## Drawing

Mary finds a drawing in a drawer of Mr. Davey's desk that shows a sinister caricature of his congregation. This drawing helps Mary realize that Mr. Davey is Joss Merlyn's partner in crime.

## Squire Bassat's Pony

Jem Merlyn stole Squire Bassat's pony and attempts to sell it in Launceston. The pony is bought by Squire Bassat's wife under the assumption that it is a different horse. This sale gives Squire Bassat the leverage he needs to force Jem to turn on his brother, Joss.

## Mr. Davey's Carriage

Mary gets a ride home on Christmas Eve from Mr. Davey, who is dropped off in Altarnun and gives her use of the carriage. Mary is accosted by her uncle and his friends, forced to go with them as they cause another ship to wreck. The carriage is used to transport the criminals and their stolen cargo.

## Locked Room

There is a room in Jamaica Inn that Joss Merlyn keeps locked at all times. Inside this room is where the cargoes of many wrecked ships are kept. Squire Bassat breaks into this room in the hopes of proving Joss guilty of these crimes, but the room is empty. Later in the novel, Joss locks Harry the peddler in this room and he remains locked there as Joss and his wife are murdered.



## **Bar at Jamaica Inn**

The bar at Jamaica Inn remains locked except for the occasional Saturday night when Joss Merlyn invites his friends to the bar. Mary is expected to act as barmaid on these rare nights.

## **Jamaica Inn**

Jamaica Inn is a small hotel on the road between Bodmin and Launceston in Cornwall, England. In this novel, Jamaica Inn is owned and run by Joss Merlyn, a brutal man who supplements his income by causing ships to wreck on the rocks and then stealing their cargo. This cargo is then hidden in Jamaica Inn until it can be safely moved.

## **Trewartha Marsh**

Trewartha Marsh is where Matthew, another Merlyn brother, was found drowned.

## **Kilmar**

Kilmar is where the Merlyn boys were born and raised. Jem continues to live in the family home in Kilmar.

## **Launceston**

Launceston is a village a few miles up the road from Jamaica Inn. Mary Yellan goes to Launceston with Jem Merlyn on Christmas Eve in order to attend a Christmas Festival.

## **North Hill**

North Hill is a prosperous village near the Cornwall Moors where Squire Bassat lives with his family.

## **Altarnun**

Altarnun is a tiny village between Launceston, North Hill, and Jamaica Inn where Francis Davey is the vicar.



# Themes

## Family

Family is a theme of this novel for many reasons. The first reason is because family is what has brought Mary Yellan to Jamaica Inn and what keeps her there. Mary's mother dies slowly on their farm and Mary administers to her every need. As her time draws near, Mary's mother makes Mary promise she will not try to run the farm on her own, but will sell everything and move to Bodmin to be with her Aunt Patience. Mary reluctantly agrees, preferring to remain on the family farm and finding it difficult to watch it sell a piece at a time. Despite her reluctance, Mary writes to her aunt and learns that she has moved to Jamaica Inn where her husband is the landlord. Mary is welcome to live with them there. Mary goes, expecting to find her aunt the same vivacious, caring woman she met many years before. However, Mary finds instead a shell of a woman who has lived with fear and abuse for so long that she can no longer function as an independent woman. Mary feels it is her place to care for her aunt, making plans to escape Jamaica Inn with her, refusing any plan that will require she leave her aunt behind.

The second reason is Aunt Patience. While Patience is happy to have her niece with her again, she cannot imagine life without her husband. Patience wants to remain at her husband's side despite his frequent verbal and physical abuse. Mary watches as Patience repeatedly places herself in harm's way in an effort to be a good wife to her abusive husband, slowly coming to the realization that there is nothing she can do for the poor woman. Patience eventually is murdered because of her vow to stay at her husband's side.

The third reason family is a theme of this novel is Joss and Jem Merlyn. Joss and Jem are brothers, but there is such a large age difference between them that they are not close. Despite being aware of Joss's defiance of the law, Jem has no desire to help the law officials prove his guilt. Jem feels that Joss should be allowed to go on as he pleases, expecting he will one day make a mistake that will get him put in jail. Therefore, when Squire Bassat comes to him and threatens him with jail if he does not turn on his brother, Jem initially refuses to help. However, after learning that Joss placed Mary in danger, Jem changes his mind. Jem helps Squire Bassat with some information regarding Joss, leading to the murder of Joss and his wife, Patience.

## Justice

Squire Bassat knows that Joss Merlyn is behind a recent rash of shipwrecks. However, despite the rumors of Joss's illegal pursuits, the Squire cannot prove it. The Squire is also unhappy because he sold Jamaica Inn to Joss Merlyn, believing another man to be the buyer, and by doing so, left it to become a place of ill repute and a storage place for ill gotten gains. Squire Bassat is determined to bring Joss to justice, but he is repeatedly lied to and cannot find anyone willing to cross Joss and tell the truth.



Mary turns to Squire Bassat when she realizes that Joss Merlyn is intent on fleeing the area. Mary hopes Squire Bassat will arrest Joss and help her and her aunt escape his abusive clutches. However, Joss and Patience are killed by Joss's unknown partner in crime before they can arrest him. Justice is a theme of this novel because it is something that many people seek in this novel, including Mary and Squire Bassat, and something Joss Merlyn hopes to evade. Eventually justice is achieved, but it is through the murder of Joss and the death of his murderer.

## **Stereotypes or Assumptions**

This novel presents several characters whose behaviors and basic morals are implied by their job or their family name. When Mary meets Jem, she automatically thinks he is a dishonest, abusive man because of his brother, Joss. When Jem tells her that he is a horse thief, this only serves to strengthen Mary's belief that Jem is just like his cruel, abusive brother. Mary is determined to stay away from this man even though their every meeting begins to show her that Jem is a much different person from his brother. While Jem is a thief, he has never harmed another human being and he would never treat a woman the way in which Joss treats both Mary and Patience. In fact, Jem turns on his brother when he learns that he has placed Mary in a situation that has harmed her, both physically and emotionally.

At the other end of the spectrum, when Mary meets the vicar of Altarnun, she believes him to be a pious, kind man. Mary tells the secret of what she has seen at Jamaica Inn to this man without once stopping to wonder if it might be dangerous for him to tell him such secrets. Mary never wonders, as well, why this man does not go to the law to discuss the crimes Mary has testified to seeing. Due to the fact that Francis Davey is a man of the cloth, a man who ministers to the sick and guides the spirituality of his congregation, that he is an honest, law abiding man. In truth, Francis Davey proves to be the mastermind behind Joss Merlyn's crimes and a murderer. Mr. Davey kidnaps Mary and forces her to cross the marsh with him in the middle of the night, placing both their lives in danger. It is not until Mr. Davey is gunned down by Joss' own brother that Mary is safe again. Mary's habit of believing stereotypes, or making assumptions about someone because of their family or career, is what makes this a theme of the novel.





# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view. The novel's narrator appears to be Mary Yellan, a young woman who has come to live at Jamaica Inn after the death of her mother. Mary's thoughts and emotions are shared with the reader throughout the novel. However, at times there are comments made within the narration that do not appear to originate with Mary, suggesting the third person point of view is more of an authorial voice that has been hidden in an omniscient viewpoint.

The point of view of this novel is unique for most modern readers who have grown accustomed to third person narration that often drifts from character to character, giving the reader a fully rounded view of the events taking place within the plot of a novel. This point of view is slightly different in the fact that the narration appears to be the voice of one character, but small comments made throughout the novel lead the reader to believe that the story is that of a person who is simply telling it through Mary's viewpoint. This type of narration, the authorial voice, was quite common during the time period the novel was written, and in no way impedes the flow of the novel. In fact, the reader will often obtain information through this type of narration that might not have been available had a different point of view been utilized.

## Setting

The novel begins in the early nineteenth century as a young woman travels from the beautiful farmlands of Helford to the marshlands of Cornwall. This young woman has never been far from her home, therefore the landscape of the marshlands proves to be a traumatic experience for her. Mary walks daily through the marshlands, aware of how easily she could be sucked into the wet, swampy land and drowned before anyone found her. The landscape is dark, foreboding, and the complete opposite of her familiar farmlands. However, it is a thriving area where many small villages have sprung up, providing sustenance to those who are strong enough to survive its harsh realities. This setting reflects the behaviors and personalities of the people who populate the novel, dark people who commit terrible crimes and get away with them.

The setting of the novel is gothic, beginning on a dark night in which the heroine cannot see the harsh landscape that awaits her as she arrives at her new home in Jamaica Inn. The time period is early nineteenth century, a time when young women did not live alone and were often dependent on the men of the family to support and care for them. Mary Yellan grew up with her widowed mother, already breaking this mold by running the farm side by side with her mother. However, her mother's death has plunged Mary back into reality where she finds herself dependent on an uncle she has never met. When they finally meet on this dark, forbidding night, Mary finds a man who is cruel and abusive toward her timid aunt. In the morning, dawn rises above a landscape that is as



harsh and cruel as the uncle Mary has come to serve and depend upon. The setting of this novel is ideal for the story line and becomes a character itself as Mary struggles to escape the bog of Jamaica Inn.

## Language and Meaning

The author of this novel has used words in her narration and dialogue that reflect the time period in which the novel is set. The exposition uses formal words in place of slang and has a stiff quality that one might expect to find in a Jane Austen novel, though not the same tone. The dialogue is more formal than the exposition, using words and grammar common to the setting of the novel. The author chooses her words carefully, using words not only common to the setting but also to the education level and economic status of the characters in question.

Aware that Mary and the Merlyns are not highly educated people, the reader might expect to find their language broken and simple. However, Mary speaks with a firm knowledge of proper grammar and with surprising grasp of language skills. Joss Merlyn, as well, speaks with less slang than a reader might suspect of a man who makes his living stealing and murdering people. There is some contrast between Mary and the Merlyns speech and that of Mr. Davey, suggesting the vicar has some education beyond that of his congregation. While stiff and at some points difficult to understand, the language is appropriate to the setting and to the characters who populate the book.

## Structure

The novel is divided into eighteen chapters. The chapters vary in length, but many of them are more than twenty pages long. The story is told in a linear fashion, beginning with Mary's arrival at Jamaica Inn and continuing through her experiences there, the death of her aunt and uncle, and her decision to leave the area with Jem, her uncle's brother. The novel is written in both exposition and dialogue, including some sections in which the reader watches as Mary fights with herself through internal dialogue.

The novel contains a main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Mary as she learns about her uncle's criminal activities and she begins to search for ways to bring him to justice. One subplot centers on Mary's meeting of and budding relationship with Jem Merlyn, her uncle's brother. At first Mary assumes Jem is just like his brother and she wants nothing to do with him. However, as they continue to spend time with one another, Mary is able to separate the two men and find herself falling in love with Jem. In another subplot, Mary meets the vicar of Altarnun, Francis Davey. Mary believes this man to be honest and law abiding, but soon realizes that he is a criminal mastermind who killed her uncle and aunt. These subplots flow beside the main plot and they all come to a satisfying end at the conclusion of the novel.



## Quotes

"There would never be a gentle season here, thought Mary; either grim winter as it was today, or else the dry and parching heat of midsummer, with never a valley to give shade or shelter, but grass that turned yellow-brown before May had passed." Chapter 1, pg. 3

"He was a great husk of a man, nearly seven feet high, with a creased black brow and a skin the color of a gypsy. His thick dark hair fell over his eyes in a fringe and hung about his ears. He looked as if he had the strength of a horse, with immense powerful shoulders, long arms that reached almost to his knees, and large fists like hams. His frame was so big that in a sense his head was dwarfed, and sunk between his shoulders, giving that half-stooping impression of a giant gorilla, with his black eyebrows and his mat of hair. But for all his long limbs and mighty frame there was nothing of the ape about his features, for his nose was hooked, curving to a mouth that might have been perfect once but was now sunken and fallen, and there was still something fine about his great dark eyes, in spite of the lines and pouches and the red blood flecks." Chapter 2, pg. 13

"Mary could see that her aunt was eager to speak of things unconnected with her present life; she seemed afraid of any questions, so Mary spared her and plunged into a description of the last years at Helford, the strain of the bad times, and her mother's illness and death." Chapter 3, pg. 25

"Jamaica Inn was a nest of thieves and poachers, who, with her uncle as leader apparently, worked a profitable smuggling trade between the coast and Devon. So much was clear. But had she seen only part of the game, and was there still more for her to learn? She remembered the terror in Aunt Patience's eyes, and those words spoken in the hush of that first afternoon, when the shadows of early twilight crept across the kitchen floor: 'There's things happen at Jamaica Inn, Mary, that I've never dared to breathe. Bad things. Evil things....I dare not even admit them to myself.'" Chapter 4, pg. 41

"What a vile breed they were, then, these Merlyns, with their studied insolence and coarseness, their rough brutality of manner." Chapter 5, pg. 55

"His hair was white, too, under his black shovel hat, and Mary stared back at him in some perplexity, for his face was unlined, and his voice was not that of an elderly man. Then, with a little rush of embarrassment, she understood the reason for his abnormality, and she turned away her eyes. He was an albino." Chapter 6, pg. 77



"He had gone to the kingdom of heaven, and the little world was lost to him. She blew out the light beside him and left him alone in the darkness." Chapter 7, pg. 86

"'Have you ever seen flies caught in a jar of treacle?' he said. 'I've seen men like that; stuck in the rigging like a swarm of flies. They cling there for safety, shouting in terror at the sight of the surf. Just like flies they are, spread out on the yards, little black dots of men. I've seen the ship break up beneath them, and the masts and yards snap like thread, and there they'll be flung into the sea, to swim for their lives. But when they reach the shore they're dead men, Mary.'" Chapter 8, pg. 105

"'Women are frail things, Mary, for all their courage.'" Chapter 13, pg. 175

"A spider had settled on her uncle's hand; and it seemed strange to her that the hand stayed motionless and did not seek to rid itself of the spider. Her uncle would have shaken it free." Chapter 15, pg. 197

"Mary shook her head. 'I've only seen the evil,' she said; 'I've only seen the suffering there's been, and the cruelty, and the pain. When my uncle came to Jamaica Inn he must have cast his shadow over the good things, and they died.'" Chapter 15, pg. 200

"She thought of these things as she walked alone on Twelve Men's Moor, and she knew she must go away from North Hill very soon, for these people were not her people, and only amongst the woods and streams of her own Helford valley would she know peace and contentment again." Chapter 18, pg. 239



## Topics for Discussion

What is Jamaica Inn? Who owns it? Why do the coaches no longer stop there? Why is Mary warned not to go to Jamaica Inn? Why does Squire Bassat search Jamaica Inn? What is he hoping to find? What kind of business does Jamaica Inn get? Who cares for the inn? What might happen to the end when the owners are gone?

Who is Mary Yellan? Why is she traveling to Jamaica Inn? Who does Mary hope to find there? Does Mary want to move to Jamaica Inn? Is Mary happy once she arrives? What does Mary learn about the inn as she travels toward it? What does Mary learn about the landlord and his wife her first night at the inn? Does Mary plan to spend the rest of her life at the inn? Why or why not? If not, where would Mary prefer to live? With whom?

Discuss the Merlyn family. Why does Mary make the assumption that all Merlyns are bad? Are they? How is Jem like his brother, Joss? How is he different? How many of these similarities have to do with genetics? How many have to do with circumstance?

Discuss Aunt Patience. What kind of person was Patience before her marriage? Why does Mary's mother want her daughter to move in with Patience? What does she hope Patience can provide for Mary? How has Patience changed? What has caused this change? Should Mary have known something had changed? How? Why does Mary swear not to leave Jamaica Inn without Patience? Would Patience go with Mary and leave Joss behind? Why or why not?

What are wreckers? What do these people do? Why? How do they commit their crimes? Why did people in Mary's childhood only whisper about these people and not talk about them in polite company? Who in this novel is a wrecker? Why? Who helps him? Who is the mastermind?

Discuss Francis Davey. Who is Frances Davey? Why does he befriend Mary? What are his intentions toward Mary? Why does Mr. Davey not go to the law when Mary tells him about the wagons and the possible murder at Jamaica Inn? Why is Mary not suspicious of his reluctance to go to the law? Why does Mr. Davey invite Mary to his home after the deaths of her aunt and uncle? What does Mary find in his desk? How does this make her feel about Mr. Davey? Why does Mr. Davey take Mary and run into the marshlands? What does he hope to accomplish? How is Mr. Davey killed? By whom? For what reason?

Discuss alcoholism. What is alcoholism? How does it affect a victim? Who is an alcoholic in this novel? How does alcohol affect this person's behaviors? Can alcohol be blamed for all of this person's problems? Why or why not? What does this person do while under the influence of alcohol? How does this endanger his life? How does it endanger Mary's life?