

# Live by Night: A Novel Study Guide

## Live by Night: A Novel by Dennis Lehane

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# Plot Summary

*Live by Night*, published in 2012, is the tenth novel by Dennis Lehane, several of whose books have been made into popular films. Set in Massachusetts, Florida, and Cuba, the novel traces the criminal career of Joe Coughlin, from his youth as a vandal and petty thief through his rise to power in the mafia. The story opens in 1926 in South Boston, where Joe and two cronies hold up a poker game, only to discover that the players belong to the gang of a powerful boss named Albert White. Joe is captivated by Emma Gould, a lovely young woman who is serving drinks at the game. She turns out to be Albert's moll, but Joe commences a dangerous affair with her. After Joe robs a bank with his buddies, Dion and Paolo Bartolo, Joe tries to escape from Boston with Emma, but she double-crosses him. He falls into the hands of Albert, but is saved by his father, Thomas Coughlin, a prominent policeman. Emma disappears, apparently killed by Albert. Joe goes to prison, where he meets mob boss Maso Pescatore, whose gang is at war with Albert's gang. Maso is released from prison and arranges Joe's release, sending him to Florida to build up a rum-running business during Prohibition. Joe's first task is to run Albert out of Tampa, where he now is operating. He does this, and starts building a criminal empire, even as he continues to mourn the loss of Emma.

In Ybor City near Tampa, Joe enters a partnership with Esteban Suarez, a Cuban nightclub owner and supplier of illegal raw materials from Cuba for making rum. Through Esteban, Joe meets Graciela Corrales, a beautiful Cuban who is bent on aiding a revolutionary effort in her home country. Graciela is married to a man in a Cuban prison, who she thinks is a revolutionary but actually is a con man and is not even in jail, as Esteban tells Joe. To cement the new partnership with Esteban, Joe engineers the theft from a Naval ship of munitions that are then sent to the Cuban revolutionaries. Romance develops between Joe and Graciela. They set up shop, and Joe's business booms.

The daughter of Tampa police chief Irving Figgis goes to Hollywood to pursue acting but gets involved with hard drugs and pornography. When Figgis brings her back, she becomes religious and preaches against alcohol and gambling, which turns public opinion against a casino Joe wants to open. The daughter, Loretta Figgis, later commits suicide.

Maso perceives Joe as weak and tries to replace him with Maso's son, Digger, who will be assisted by Albert White. Albert almost kills Joe, but his men rescue him and Albert dies in the gunfight. Joe then kills Maso and has Digger killed. Joe then turns over his empire to his top man and boyhood friend, Dion Bartolo. Joe and Graciela go to Cuba, where they buy a tobacco plantation. Joe meets Emma Gould, who escaped Albert's grasp and is running a brothel in Havana, and he sees that she has become hard and selfish. When Graciela and Joe visit Tampa, where Graciela is to receive an award for charity work, she is shot dead in the street by Irving Figgis, deranged by his daughter's death. Irving then commits suicide. A bereaved Joe ages rapidly, and moves back to Florida with Tomas, his young son by Graciela.



# Chapters 1 and 2

## Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Live by Night, a crime novel by Dennis Lehane, tells the story of a gangster named Joe Coughlin, who rises from a stick-up man in Boston to become a rich and powerful mob boss, largely through establishing an illicit rum-running industry in Florida during Prohibition. Part I is titled "Boston, 1926-1929." Chapter One, "A Twelve O'Clock Fella in a Nine O'Clock Town," begins with a foreshadowing that says some years from now, Joe will find himself on a boat surrounded by gunmen with his feet encased in cement, and all because of a woman named Emma Gould. The story of how Joe and Emma met is then told, beginning with a robbery by Joe and two others of a speakeasy in South Boston that turned out to be owned by a notorious criminal named Albert White. If the three had known in advance that White owned the place, they would not have robbed it, but they had been told otherwise by their boss, Tim Hickey. Emma is serving drinks to five armed men playing poker at a table when the thieves burst in. Joe recognizes one of the men, Brendan "Brenny" Loomis, a former boxer who belongs to Albert White's gang. As Joe's accomplices, brothers Paolo and Dion Bartolo, disarm the other men, Joe tells Emma to fill a sack with the pile of money on the table. Impressed by how unflappable the steely-eyed young woman is, he asks her name. Joe realizes that a padlocked door with a "T" for toilet on it is not a bathroom, because they passed two restrooms on the way into the room. He knows it will be full of cash from Albert White's illegal businesses, but he does not break into the room. Later, Paolo says he knows that Emma is Albert's moll, and Dion becomes worried about Joe's interest in her. A few nights later, Joe follows Emma to another speakeasy where she waitresses. She recognizes him from the holdup and threatens to expose him to White's men at the bar, but instead tells him she gets off at midnight.

In Chapter Two, "The Lack in Her," Joe is in his room at a boarding house owned by his boss, Tim Hickey, who drops by to tell him about a meeting concerning a planned bank robbery at a place called Pittsfield. Joe, who is twenty, has become involved with Emma and thinks he loves her. He takes her to lunch at a restaurant to meet his father, Thomas Coughlin, a high-ranking Boston police officer. Thomas sees the beautiful Emma as a moll, and is openly displeased with her and his son. Later, Emma is distraught and angry about the unpleasant encounter with Thomas. Joe says he loves her, but she replies that she cannot say it back to him, and he tells himself he understands.

## Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Dennis Lehane chooses a time-honored method of crime novelists to pull the reader into the action immediately, by opening the story with his protagonist, Joe Coughlin, in big trouble. In this case, the author makes it clear that Coughlin's life-threatening predicament will neither occur nor be resolved until later in the story, but introducing it



gives him the chance to establish that his protagonist consorts with some very tough types. Joe quickly blames the trouble on a woman, Emma Gould, which is another classic technique of crime novels. The mention of Emma allows Lehane to trace the relationship between Joe and her, which has its origins in yet another classic crime-story situation, the hold-up. Within a few paragraphs, the author has sketched a dangerous world and thrown his characters into the maw of it. The most intriguing aspect of the robbery scene is Joe's silent recognition that the big money lies behind a locked door, which he decides not to break down. Given the mistake thieves already have made in raiding an establishment owned by a notorious criminal, Joe's decision shows that he is a thinker, not merely a greedy thug. This characterization of him as an unusual criminal is further developed when he pursues Emma, despite the obvious dangers. It shows that he can be a risk-taker in matters of the heart, which is not advisable in his business. Dion's concern over Joe's judgment is a foreshadowing of trouble that will develop between the two friends. Emma's decision to meet Joe after work likewise shows that she enjoys courting danger.

In Chapter Two, the introduction of a bank robbery plan helps to advance the plot, as does the revelation that Joe's father is a prominent police officer. Thomas Coughlin's open disapproval of Emma adds further complications, and her inability to tell Joe that she loves him is yet another foreshadowing of trouble, this time between the two lovers.



# Chapters 3 and 4

## Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

In Chapter Three, "Hickey's Termite," Tim Hickey is shot dead in a barbershop. Joe is in bed with Emma when he hears the news by telephone. It makes him think of his childhood of arson and burglary with Paolo and Dion, under the auspices of Hickey. Once, Joe watched Hickey strangle a man to death. Two days after Hickey's death, Albert White and Brenny Loomis approach Joe while he is shooting pool at a casino Hickey had owned. Albert says he owns it now, and tells Joe he can no longer do crimes anywhere within the city limits. He asks if Joe has any jobs planned, but Joe does not tell him about the Pittsfield bank. Later, Joe and Emma decide to leave town right after the bank robbery. Emma is still involved with Albert, but says she does not love him. They agree that Joe will meet her at the grand opening of the Statler Hotel, which she will attend with Albert. During the robbery, Joe is driving the getaway car but is daydreaming about Emma and backs into a lamppost before speeding away. Dion, the smarter of the two Bartolo brothers, is incensed at Joe's inattention. They swap their car for two other vehicles and part ways, but then four police cars appear and chase them. Two police cars flank Joe's vehicle, and one officer fires a Thompson machine gun. Joe slams on the brakes and both police cars crash as Joe's car hits a boulder. Two of the three policemen who were chasing him are dead, but Joe sustains only minor injuries, including a missing earlobe. He escapes with the stolen money.

In Chapter Four, "A Hole at the Center of Things," Joe reads in the newspaper about three dead officers. It turns out the third dead policeman was one of the men chasing the Bartolo brothers. All three are described as slain, although Joe knows the cop with the machine gun had accidentally shot the other two officers and then crashed his own car. Joe goes to his father's house, which is too grand to have been purchased on a policeman's salary. Joe's mother died two years earlier, and Thomas is still grieving. He is not home. Joe decides to escape from Boston by boat. He realizes it is too dangerous to try to get Emma first, but believes she will wait for him to send for her. Joe washes his bloody face, tends his ear, and changes into one of his father's suits. He then enters the office and opens two safes, the combinations to which had taken him a long time during his childhood to discover. He thinks about his brothers, Connor and Aiden, neither of whom live with their father anymore. One of the safes is filled with graft money, but Joe merely folds his dirty clothes and places them, with his muddy shoes, on top of the money, and closes the safes. He goes to the bus station, puts the bag of bank money in a locker and pockets the key.

## Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

If there were any doubts about the seriousness of the game these characters play, it is put to rest at the start of Chapter Three, when Tim Hickey is murdered. The author follows his description of the killing by returning to Joe, allowing him to reflect on his



own youth and the role Hickey, a cold-blooded murderer, played in it. Albert White, the very man Joe robbed, turns out to be the crime boss responsible for Hickey's death, and in another foreshadowing, Joe does not tell him about the planned bank robbery. Already in the novel, the tight plotting is evident. Each appearance of a character or turn of events quickly becomes interwoven in the storyline. The bank robbery, Emma's involvement with Albert, and the grand opening of the hotel are all parts of this interweaving, as is Dion's continuing anger with Joe for not keeping his mind on the bank job. The chase scene at the end of the chapter is pure action, in the tradition of crime fiction, but it is significant that Joe does not deliberately kill anyone. This makes it possible for him to remain likable, even though he is a criminal.

In Chapter Four, Joe's visit to his father's house after reading the newspaper account of the robbery and deaths is surprising. Lehane takes the opportunity to fill in a little of the back story of Joe's family, including his mother's death and its impact on Thomas Coughlin, and a mention of Joe's two brothers. Joe apparently decides not to go back for Emma, which sets up another surprise later. The defiance of Joe's action in leaving his bloody clothes from the robbery in his father's safe is not only unsettling, but makes a clear statement about the tense, competitive relationship between the two. The symbolic connection is obvious between Joe putting the money from the robbery in the locker and Thomas putting his graft money in the safe.



# Chapters 5 and 6

## Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

In Chapter Five, "Rough Work," Joe uses the employee entrance to the sumptuous Hotel Statler, where a huge party is being held, attended by an assortment of politicians, gangsters, celebrities and media. He keeps his hat on, hoping to avoid detection. He sees Albert White, and then spots Emma at a mezzanine balcony. He signals to her, and begins making his way across the crowded room toward the stairs. After almost bumping into a newspaper reporter, Joe makes the mistake of looking into the man's face. When he reaches Emma, he tells her that he has been recognized, and they head for a service elevator. In the elevator, he gives her the key to the locker that holds the money from the robbery, although she protests that she does not want it. When they emerge from the elevator, Brenny Loomis is waiting to beat up Joe. Almost unconscious, he sees Albert, and then realizes that Emma has double-crossed him. Albert sends her away, and then tells Joe he will have her killed because she cheated on him. Albert's men take Joe outside and are about to put him into a car to kill him also when Thomas appears with many police, who chase the gangsters away. Joe tells his father that a hood named Donnie has taken Emma. Thomas just turns his son over to his men, who hit and club him into unconsciousness.

In Chapter Six, "All the Sinners Saints," the ambulance attendants are outraged at Joe's condition, which they blame on the police. Thomas gives his men instructions to chase Donnie, the gangster who drove away with Emma. Disturbed by the sight of his son's blood on the ground, Thomas thinks of his eldest son, Aiden, who writes to him only occasionally, and of his middle son, Connor, a former district attorney who was blinded during a riot, and then became religious, and now works as a janitor at a home for the blind and crippled. The police radio reports that Donnie's car was chased off a bridge and sank. Donnie's body was found, but nobody else. One cop claimed to have seen two or three women in the car, but it later was established that he had been drinking. The media reports on the shootout indicate that Thomas had ordered the beating of his son, who is now in a coma. Thomas is demoted and his chances are ruined of being appointed police commissioner. He learns that one of the Bartolo brothers, Paolo, was shot dead but the other, Dion, is at large. Joe comes out of his coma, and will not believe his father's claim that Emma is dead, despite her betrayal of him. Joe is publicly regarded as a victim because of the beating. The prosecuting attorney, Calvin Bondurant, wants to recommend a sentence of twelve years, but Thomas shows him a surveillance photo of a numbered door where Bondurant conducts homosexual liaisons, and the DA agrees to ask for a sentence of only five years. Two weeks later, a woman's arm and leg wash ashore. Joe, who is sentenced to just over five years in prison, still believes Emma is alive. His father warns him to beware in prison of anyone who wants to protect him from other inmates.





## Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Joe's arrival at the hotel to find Emma is a surprise that Lehane set up in the previous chapter, when Joe decided it was too dangerous to get her. Once again, Joe demonstrates that he is willing to take extraordinary personal risks for love, which makes him a likable thief. Giving Emma the key to the locker full of money foreshadows another plot development. It makes sense that he would be recognized and captured by Albert's men, and Emma's double-cross is a nice twist, because it explains his capture even while making sense in terms of Emma's inability to declare her love for Joe. She does so only when it is too late, as she is being taken away by Albert's men. The arrival of Thomas Coughlin in the nick of time is yet another familiar plot device of crime fiction, in which one dire situation after another is escaped by the protagonist at the last moment. Joe keeps the plot moving by sending his father after the man who took Emma, and Thomas adds another plot twist by allowing his men to beat up Joe, which foreshadows public relations trouble for the department.

Chapter Six introduces numerous events to thicken the plot. First, Lehane establishes that Thomas has had little success in forging good relationships with all three of his sons. Joe is the only one who has not withdrawn from him, and he is a criminal. What's more, Thomas has now been partly responsible for sending Joe into a coma, completing the policeman's fall from grace. The author's apparent point is that the "good" side of the story, concerning law and order, is difficult to distinguish from the bad. This has the effect of making Joe's behavior less outrageous in comparison to the status quo. Two other major plot developments in this chapter are the death of Paolo and the disappearance of Emma. Of course, it is significant that her body is not found, because that leaves open the possibility of her reappearance in the story. The leverage Thomas uses to get Joe's sentence reduced is convenient to the plot, but not unbelievable. The woman's body parts that wash ashore foreshadow a development other than Emma's death, if indeed more than one woman was in the getaway car, as one policeman suggested.



# Chapters 7 and 8

## Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

In Chapter Seven, "The Mouth of It," Joe is transported to the Charlestown Penitentiary with two other inmates. One of them, Norman, is a 17 year-old convicted of statutory rape for having sex with a 15 year-old girl. Norman is terrified and starts crying. The next day in the prison yard, Norman has two black eyes and a broken nose. Without warning, he attacks Joe, who breaks Norman's leg. Joe realizes he is being tested by someone, and worries about protecting his ribs, several of which are broken. Back in the cell, his three cellmates have been moved out. Everyone in the prison avoids Joe, walking away when he approaches and never speaking to him. Joe asks the prison guard what is going on, and is told only that he is "in the mouth of it." In the shower line, a young man stabs Joe twice with a potato peeler before he cracks the man's head against the wall. A doctor patches him up, and then Joe is approached by a feeble old prisoner, who introduces himself as Tommaso "Maso" Pescatore. Joe recognizes the name of the mob boss. Maso hands Joe a slip of paper with an address written on it, and tells him to give it to his father at the next visit. Joe does this when Thomas visits, and his father explains that the address probably is of a warehouse that holds liquor owned by Maso's rival. For two days, Thomas considers whether to call a raid on the address, which would put him in Maso's debt. He is at home when a gangster approaches and threatens harm to Joe if Thomas does not place the call. He goes indoors and calls.

Chapter Eight, "In the Gloaming," mentions the execution at the prison of the famed anarchists, Sacco and Vanzetti, which causes Maso's nightly stroll on the prison roof to be temporarily suspended. Maso has taken to bringing Joe along with him during these walks. That summer, many deaths and maimings occur within the prison, as part of a war over the rum business, which Maso controls from behind bars. The war, between Maso and Albert White, also extends outside the penitentiary. On the roof, Maso gives Joe another note for his father, this one with the name of Brendan Loomis on it. But Joe's father refuses to kill Albert's right-hand man or anyone else at Maso's bidding. He gives Joe an extremely expensive Swiss pocket watch, telling Joe to give it to Maso in an attempt to save Joe's life. Maso takes the pocket watch and tells Joe to repeat his demand for Brenny Loomis's murder. Back in Joe's cell, three of Maso's hired killers wait for him. But it turns out they have been paid by Albert White to make Joe kill Maso on the prison rooftop. The scene shifts to Thomas at home, who thinks about how he got the fancy watch by shooting a bank robber who was holding the banker's son hostage. Thomas recalls his secret, which is that he saw surrender in the robber's eyes a second before he shot him anyway. Joe tells Maso's henchmen his father will kill Loomis, and he has provided Albert's address, which Joe will give to Maso on the roof that night. Later, he gets a visit from his brother, Aiden, whom he calls Danny. He says he went to visit their father, who coincidentally had died the previous day of a heart attack on his porch overlooking the garden.



## Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Lehane's economical style of setting up new situations in the story and briskly moving through them continues in Chapter Seven, when he convincingly sketches Joe's grim new life in prison. A good example of this economy is the introduction of the hapless Norman, who serves as a test for Joe and is dismissed as a character after Joe breaks the boy's leg. After the incident with the potato peeler, the appearance of the supposedly meek old man is full of foreboding, because of the warning in the previous chapter from Thomas that Joe should beware of anyone who wants to be his protector. When Thomas visits, he has to explain to his son the position in which Maso's note places the policeman. Thomas tries to hold out, but the threat to his son demonstrates how effectively the criminal world can wrap even well-meaning people in its tentacles. In this way, the author shows how the boundaries between right and wrong can blur when people are forced to choose between two evils.

Even as the literal war between Maso and Albert White escalates, the war for control of Thomas's soul continues in Chapter Eight. The execution of Sacco and Vanzetti is symbolic of this struggle, because the two were punished for their principles. Thomas demonstrates that his own sense of honor must be preserved when it comes to committing murder for gangsters, even if his refusal means the death of his own son. The coveted watch he gives to Maso is an ironic gift, because Thomas received it for an act of valor that only he knows was an unnecessary killing. Again, the line between good and evil is blurred. The treachery of Maso's men who sell out to Albert White is a deft piece of plotting, because it is both fully believable and gives Joe a chance to somehow alter his situation. Even so, it is hard to imagine how Thomas could escape punishment for his refusal to kill Brenny Loomis. The author deals with this problem by having Thomas die from a heart attack, which is a release from his troubles, rather than the ultimate defeat of being murdered by gangsters.



# Chapters 9 and 10

## Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

In Chapter Nine, "As the Old Man Goes," Joe is frisked by Maso's men, who are supposedly on jail-cleaning duty, before they allow him on the roof. They do not find the small, sharpened screwdriver he has hidden between the cheeks of his buttocks, which he will transfer to his pocket when he reaches the roof. Among Maso's men are the three killers who have secretly crossed over to Albert's side. Joe knows they will kill Maso's loyal men once he's on the roof. Walking with Maso, Joe stoops to pick up his cigarette but instead grabs the old man's ankles and dangles him over the roof's edge. He finds two concealed weapons on Maso, takes his father's pocket watch back, sets Maso on his feet, and says he has decided not to kill him, because he wants revenge on Albert. The tower guard is in Maso's pocket, so Joe tells Albert's men that Maso is dead and he needs help carrying him downstairs. Three traitors, who have killed Maso's loyal men, get onto the roof, and the tower guard shoots them. Maso tells Joe he will get him out of prison soon.

In Chapter Ten, "Visitations," Joe is not allowed to attend his father's funeral but reads in the paper that he drew a thousand people, including police, politicians, and attorneys. Joe is mournful, but also knows he is now free of his father's influence. Danny visits again, and describes his life for the past eight years, about which Joe knew nothing. Danny had started a construction business in Tulsa, and then moved with his wife, Nora, to New York, where Nora got a job with a small film company. Danny started doing stunts and even wrote short scenarios, while Nora moved into management. They are now about to relocate with the company to Los Angeles. He invites Joe to work with him after he is released, but Joe says he prefers the life of an outlaw to the equally crooked rules of the establishment, which saddens Danny. Maso is released from prison in the spring of 1928, and the war between him and Albert White immediately escalates. In prison, Joe dreams of Emma and has imaginary conversations with his father. He takes over the prison's toilet-gin distillery and reads more than 100 books left to the prison library by a wealthy former inmate. Maso calls and says Joe will be released soon, and will take over the rum business in Tampa. Albert is there, trying to corner the market, and Joe's job will be to run him out of town. His cut of the rum profits will be 25 percent.

## Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

In contemplating the next twist in his plot, Lehane must have realized that if Joe kills Maso, then Joe would be aligned with Albert White, who was Joe's rival for the affections of Emma. This could be interesting, but instead, Lehane decides to have Joe double-cross the men who are double-crossing Maso. The advantage of this twist is that Joe does not have to kill Maso. One of Lehane's main challenges is to maintain the reader's sympathy for his protagonist, which would be very hard to do if Joe were to



murder an old man. At the same time, Joe announces to Maso that he wants revenge on Albert, which foreshadows further conflict between Joe and Albert. But now Joe has placed himself firmly under Maso's wing, which means his rise in the organization will be accompanied by a diminishment of his personal freedom and integrity.

The descent of Joe into the grip of big-time crime is emphasized in Chapter Ten, when he reflects that his father's death has freed him from the influence of Thomas. This becomes even more apparent when Danny visits, describes his exciting life in the burgeoning film industry, and invites Joe to join him when he is released from prison. In dismissing this offer, Joe lays out his credo, which is that he prefers to be an outlaw, because the corrupt establishment pretends to be decent, which is dishonesty worse than that of the criminal world. After Maso's release from prison, Joe develops skills that will play a role in his future life, including distilling alcohol and reading widely. The latter effort underlines Joe's gifts as a thinker, which suit him for leadership in the criminal organization. No sooner is Joe released than he is offered a major opportunity in Tampa, and his rise as an outlaw begins with the perfect revenge assignment, to run his nemesis out of town. But this seeming reward comes at the cost of aligning himself with a ruthless killer, and it is now difficult to see how Joe will avoid descending to that same low level.



# Chapters 11 and 12

## Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Part II is titled, "Ybor, 1929-1933." In Chapter Eleven, "Best in the City," Joe gets off a train in searing West Florida heat. On the platform, he spots a stunning mulatto woman whose fluid movements as she walks captivate him, but she shoots him an arch look for staring at her. Moments later, he sees her again with a man, the two of them speaking Spanish. Dion appears, dressed loudly and grown fat. He has come to pick up Joe, who is now his boss. In the car, he gives Joe a handgun and explains the uneasy local dynamics between the various Latino ethnic groups. Dion drives to the Port of Tampa, where they step down into the hold of a cargo pit and go through a door to a long underground tunnel that takes them into the city, where they emerge in the back of an Italian restaurant. Joe asks about the boss he is replacing, named Ormino, and Dion says he was killed. Both men know that Maso ordered the hit, but both say they do not know what Ormino did wrong. Joe and Dion have lunch at the restaurant, and then visit a man named Gary L. Smith at his office. Smith deals with the organization's suppliers by boat from Cuba of raw materials for distilling rum, and with the distributors by truck of the liquor. Joe tells Smith to set up a meeting for him with the leaders of the supply ring, Esteban and Ivelia Suarez. Joe then reveals that the liquor bottles have been marked, because many shipments were missing. Most of the bottles ended up in Albert White's speakeasies. He slaps Smith hard and tells him to either leave town on the train or he will be put under the train.

In Chapter Twelve, "Music and Guns," Maso has booked a room for Joe in a sumptuous waterfront hotel, but the place makes Joe uncomfortable. Dion tells him that the town they're in, called Ybor, is named after a cigar magnate. They go to meet the Tampa police chief, Irving Figgis, who says if Joe keeps his business within Ybor City, there will be no problems. Joe agrees. On the way out, he meets Figgis's beautiful teenaged daughter, Loretta. That night, Joe and Dion dine at the Vedado Tropicale, and later meet with the suppliers, Esteban Suarez and his older sister, Ivelia. Joe says he heard that the Suarez's best rum distiller is being deported, but says he has fixed the problem. Ivelia phones downstairs and confirms that the distiller has been released from jail and is sitting at the bar. Joe and the Suarezes agree on a partnership that will cut out Albert White, but Esteban says the price is that Joe's men must raid a Navy ship at the docks and steal the weaponry on it. Joe agrees.

## Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Chapter Eleven introduces a beautiful, unnamed woman who will return later in the story. The underground tunnel from the port to the city also will play an important role in the plot. At first, Joe has a little trouble adjusting to the role of boss, especially in the presence of his old friend, Dion, but he quickly becomes accustomed to giving orders. After lunch, when he confronts Gary L. Smith, Joe already has developed the quiet,



unpredictable demeanor of a dangerous mob boss. Smith tries to assert himself and retain control over the rum shipments, but Joe overwhelms him with proof of Smith's treachery and a death threat that leaves no doubt of its sincerity. In this scene, Joe is scary, but there also is something masterful about his performance. The author has developed enough sympathy for the character that it becomes easy to root for him, despite his criminality.

In Chapter Twelve, when Joe negotiates with Esteban and Ivelia Suarez, it is clear that he is in the presence of two much more formidable opponents than Smith was. The Suarezes have their own supply operations and are not beholden to Maso, which puts them on equal footing with Joe. He understands this, and offers them protection from the courts and police, and from Albert White, if they will agree to an exclusive partnership with Joe. This shows the depth of Joe's judgment of character. Rather than trying to threaten or intimidate the Suarezes, he sees that the most effective approach will be to befriend them. When the price they ask for turning against Albert White is for Joe's men to raid a heavily guarded Naval ship, Joe does not hesitate, which again shows the bravado that is as much a part of his personality and his intelligence. The Suarezes' request also sets up another action sequence in this fast-moving novel.



# Chapters 13 and 14

## Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

In Chapter Thirteen, "A Hole in the Heart," Joe still has trouble making himself go into the fancy hotel suite where he is staying. He reflects that heaven does not exist for Emma or his father or anyone who dies, because this life is all one has, and he is embarrassed to be wasting time in this frivolous suite. He meets Dion in Tampa, and they go to a speakeasy where alligators thrash in a swamp underneath the porch. Without even speaking, Dion and Joe know that Dion's secret is out. He betrayed Joe, telling Albert White that Joe and the Bartolos were going to hold up the Pittsfield bank. Albert said he knew a judge who would give all three men only a year in prison, which Dion thought was safer than dealing with Joe's unhinged condition because of his fascination with Emma. Dion says it will be a relief to die, because he feels guilty for his brother Paolo's death. Joe replies that Dion is one of the last people close to him who is alive, and he will not kill him. Back at the hotel, Joe calls Maso long distance and says the Suarezes want him to rob a Navy ship. Maso asks about Dion, and Joe says he discovered that Paolo was the one who ratted them out to Albert, not Dion.

In Chapter Fourteen, "Boom," Joe and Dion go to Ybor's Spanish social club, the Circulo Cubano, where Joe is surprised to be met at the door by the beautiful mulatto woman he had seen on the train platform. She introduces herself as Graciela Corrales and tells Joe it is rude to leer at women on train platforms. She takes them to Esteban. As they discuss the Navy ship, Joe asks why he should not simply take over Esteban's organization. Esteban replies that Joe still would not have the contacts with Cuban suppliers that are vital to the operation. At this, the two men begin to develop respect for one another. Esteban reveals that he wants the naval weapons to arm Cuban revolutionaries in their fight against President Machado. He says a Cuban man on board the ship will start a fire in the engine room as a diversion. Joe agrees, but says the diversion will be a bomb. He has someone make a bomb, but is warned that it has a very short fuse. Joe and Dion drive to the Circulo Cubano, very worried about their safety with a bomb in their trunk. They give the bomb to the Cuban crewman, Manny Bustamente, who is portly, but says he is not worried about getting away after planting the bomb. Joe, Dion, and Graciela watch from a catwalk at the docks as Manny goes aboard. The bomb explodes, and all three of them laugh in exhilaration. And then they wait to discover Manny's fate.

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# Chapters 15 and 16

## Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

Chapter Fifteen reveals that the bombing was so successful, the ship sank. The crewmen have unloaded the weapons, which will be temporarily stowed. In a café near the pier, Joe and Graciela confirm that neither has seen any sign yet of Manny Bustamente. She tells Joe about her husband, Adan, who she says is in a Havana prison for being a revolutionary. Graciela works in Tampa as a cigar-roller, and sends most of her earnings to Adan's family in Cuba. Joe, who is feeling very lustful toward Graciela, tells her Adan is a lucky man. They make a call to a Tampa newspaper. Graciela says the bombing of the ship, the USS Mercy, was done by a group that wants Cuba to be returned to Spain's control. Back at the pier, Dion points out a body bag to Joe that contains Manny's remains. The men get in a flatbed truck and drive to a forest, where they meet Graciela. Joe scratches and slaps her to make her look beaten. Joe and Dion change into sailors' uniforms and drive to the National Guard Armory. They have trouble at the armory gate and must subdue the two guards, but they have Esteban and 30 Cubans in the back of the truck to help them. They then overwhelm the armory itself, but one Cuban is shot dead in the fight. When the truck carrying the weapons arrives, the Cubans posing as guardsmen unload the guns. The petty officer in charge of the weapons tells Joe that they met a suspicious-looking Cuban woman who delayed them along the route, saying she had been beaten up. They decided to kill her but she ran into the woods, pursued by one of the sailors.

In Chapter Sixteen, "Gangster," Esteban and Joe race back to the forest while Dion takes care of the weaponry. On the way, Esteban reveals that he has known Graciela most of their lives and used to love her, although now he loves someone else. He says her husband, Adan, is a thief and con man who has been out of jail for two years, but Graciela will not believe it. In the forest, they spot Graciela running from the seaman, who is shooting at her. They drive to within 10 feet of the sailor and Joe shoots him dead. Graciela says the man was laughing and taunting her as he hunted her. As they drive away, alligators attack the sailor's body. Graciela thinks Joe feels bad about the killing, and comforts him. Joe silently reflects that he is no longer an outlaw but a gangster, and this is his gang.

## Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Graciela's story in Chapter Fifteen about her husband establishes that she, like Joe, is intensely loyal to her partner. In terms of the plot, this revelation throws a roadblock in the way of the developing romance between Graciela and Joe, whose mutual attraction is clear. On the other hand, the death of Manny removes a plot complication that could have been developed if he had been captured. The author has to make many such choices during the course of the story and at this point he has proven to be adept at moving the plot along quickly. Lehane does not immediately reveal why Joe slaps and



scratches Graciela to make her look beaten, but he makes it clear that the two are in collusion. The death of one of the Cubans when they overwhelm the guardsmen at the armory underscores the seriousness of the crime, even it makes the point that Joe tries to prevent any shooting, in keeping with his characterization as a thief who is not a killer. No sooner does the author resolve the riddle of Graciela's role, which was to delay the weapons truck long enough for the Cubans to get in place, than Lehane poses another problem with the news that Graciela is being pursued by a sailor bent on killing her.

In Chapter Sixteen, Esteban's revelation that Graciela's husband is a faker eliminates any ethical qualms Joe might have had about wooing her, although the more minor problem remains of her continuing loyalty to Adan. This renewed possibility of romance sets up the next scene, in which the threat to Graciela's life is what it takes for Joe to abandon his avoidance of killing and shoot the sailor. The man hunting Graciela was white, and clearly regarded her as a member of a degenerate, darker race. This combination of defending Graciela against a racist would-be killer goes a long way toward justifying the killing, but the author creates even more sympathy by showing how somberly Joe, Graciela and Esteban react to the shooting. Joe's silent reflection that he is now a gangster shows that he realizes he has crossed a threshold, but his characterization of Esteban and Graciela as his gang is more like joining a real family than a mob family. In all these ways, the author takes pains to ensure that his outlaw characters remain likeable.



# Chapters 17 and 18

## Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

In Chapter Seventeen, "About Today," Joe takes Graciela back to her modest apartment, where she changes into a cigar worker's outfit. She asks about the woman Joe loves, saying that women can sense such things, and he replies that she died. He asks if she is happy about the guns, and she says yes, because she loves her country in her heart, the way he loves the dead girl. Later, they watch as the guns head for Cuba in fishing boats. That night, they go to a speakeasy with Dion and Esteban. Watching Esteban dance, Graciela tells Joe he danced professionally in Cuba to pay his way through law school, which startles Joe. Graciela and Joe dance and flirt, but she says they will never be lovers, because they love other people. The next scene finds them in bed together, after which they agree to be lovers only until Graciela returns to her husband in Cuba. They are in a café when Albert White approaches. Incensed that Esteban will no longer do business with him, Albert says he will leave Graciela alone if Joe comes quietly with him. Joe produces a paper that has on it the names of Albert's top soldiers, all missing. Joe says Albert must have a snitch who told him where to find Joe. At this, Dion arrives with other armed men, and Dion announces that he has double-crossed Albert. Joe commands Albert to leave Tampa and never return.

By the opening of Chapter Eighteen, "Nobody's Son," Joe and Graciela have built a house and are having good years together, although Dion warns Joe several times that luck ends. Graciela holds many charity fund-raisers for the poor. Joe and Esteban set up a distillery and their business booms, even in the midst of the Great Depression. Graciela still refuses to divorce Adan, which bothers Joe, who thinks she is confused. Esteban explains that being with Joe has made her lose her commitment to revolution, which is difficult for her to accept. Robert Drew Prewitt, a Ku Klux Klansman with a prison record, starts robbing Joe's speakeasies, supposedly in support of Prohibition. At a meeting with Police Chief Figgis and Prewitt, Joe offers Prewitt 15 percent partnership in a nightclub. Prewitt accepts, but then bombs another speakeasy and shoots people in yet another one. Joe meets Kelvin Beauregard, the leader of the local KKK. Beauregard says he will destroy Joe. He nods to Dion, who shoots Beauregard dead. Joe meets with Figgis, who will not help to send Prewitt away, because Prewitt is the brother of Figgis's wife. Joe then shows Figgis compromising photos of his daughter, Loretta, who went to Hollywood to become an actress, but has ended up in pornography. He says Loretta is safe now, and he will tell Figgis where she is as soon as Joe gets another meeting with Prewitt. The enraged and crushed Figgis calls and sets it up.

## Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

Graciela's declaration in Chapter Seventeen of her love for Cuba is yet another demonstration of her loyal nature. This commitment, which makes her happy about the guns, also ties her closer to Joe because of his role in securing the weapons. The onset



of their love affair is portrayed as an attraction she could not deny, even though she remains tied in spirit to her husband. The author's exploration of loyalty continues in the next scene, when Albert White's attempt to trap Joe fails because Dion has remained faithful to Joe. For this plan to work, Joe obviously had to trust that Dion would not double-cross him again. But Joe understands the nature of Dion's earlier betrayal, which stemmed at least in part from Dion's desire to protect his rather dim-witted brother, Paolo. In this case, Dion has no motive to double-cross Joe, which makes Joe's risk quite small. Significantly, Joe only exiles Albert rather than having him killed. His explanation is that exile is more humiliating to Albert, but by now it is obvious to the reader that Joe's reluctance to kill people is also a factor.

In Chapter Eighteen, Graciela's ambivalence about her life during the good years she and Joe have is in keeping with her essentially honorable nature. As Esteban intimates, Graciela has been compromised by her relationship with Joe, not only because she is married but because he is a gangster rather than a revolutionary. This is why she cannot fully commit to him. The introduction of Prewitt and the Ku Klux Klan to the story is how the author ends his very brief description of the calm years and begins new troubles, by replacing the vanquished Albert White with a new opponent to Joe. The initial response of Joe, to try to placate Prewitt, is true to Joe's character. But when that ploy fails and he goes over Prewitt's head to Beauregard, the KKK leader's personal threat to Joe and his family is met with the classic gangster response. Joe does not hesitate to order Dion to kill Beauregard, which is the first instance in the story of outright murder sanctioned by Joe for business purposes. He follows this with the vile tactic of manipulating Figgis through the pornographic photos of Loretta. Joe has become a true mob boss. Whatever honor he had has now been completely compromised by the nature of his work.



# Chapters 19-21

## Chapters 19-21 Summary

In Chapter Nineteen, "No Better Days," Joe goes at night to meet Prewitt at a luxury hotel that was never finished and sits abandoned on the barrier island of Longboat Key. He knows the place because he has used it to store contraband from Cuba. Despite the skills of his pilot, Farruco Diaz, in spotting law enforcement officers, avoiding them remains a constant challenge. As he waits for Prewitt, he reflects that Prohibition will end some day, but he and Esteban are preparing for the switch to legal liquor distribution. Suddenly, he gets the idea to develop the abandoned hotel as a casino. Prewitt appears with two henchmen. Prewitt says he is going to take everything Joe has. He then rushes Joe and stabs him. Joe gives a command, and Dion and his men turn on searchlights they installed in the ceiling earlier that afternoon. They kill all three of the men. Joe is badly hurt, but his men brought a doctor, who already is coming from the boat.

In Chapter Twenty, "Mi Gran Amor," Joe spends five weeks in two Ybor hospitals, undergoing four surgeries. The Ku Klux Klan discover he is at the first hospital and try to break in, but Dion and his men beat eight of the KKK leaders almost to death. During his recovery, Joe hallucinates the sight of a panther at the end of his bed. After he is released, the reunion with Graciela is so powerful that she declares he will be her husband for life, even though technically she cannot divorce because the church does not allow it.

In Chapter Twenty-One, "Light My Way," Joe begins bribing key people to pave the way for legislation that will allow gambling in Florida, so he can open the casino. Maso visits, and commands Joe to get rid of a moonshiner named Turner John Belkin who will not pay monetary tribute to the mob. After Maso leaves, Joe sends two men to frighten Belkin, but instead he beats them up. Joe then visits Belkin, who explains that he will not pay tribute because his family has sold moonshine for generations, and his father would be ashamed of him for such cowardice. This argument strikes Joe forcibly, and he agrees to let Belkin keep operating, so long as he stays within a small geographic area, to which Belkin agrees. Graciela buys a cluster of buildings to open as a shelter for abandoned wives and their children. Joe and Graciela discuss other good causes toward which they have put a great deal of money, and agree that it is important to produce good deeds with money earned from bad deeds. Joe says he believes in God but he also believes in greed. Chief Figgis's daughter, Loretta, returns from Hollywood with her father and becomes extremely religious. She encounters Joe and tells him she is sure he will renounce his evil path and accept Christ. Loretta becomes a well-known speaker at religious rallies, and preaches against the sins of liquor and gambling. Dion wants to kill her before she ruins the gang's chances of opening a casino. Joe considers murdering her but refuses.



## Chapters 19-21 Analysis

Joe's plans to start a legitimate liquor operation after Prohibition and his brainstorm about opening a casino show once again that he has imagination and foresight beyond that of the typical crook. It is easy to envision him as an "honest" businessman, particularly given that payments to legislators are often made by entrepreneurs working on the safe side of the law. Even so, evil doings under the cover of night continue to plague him, and to save his own life, he orders the killing of the three men. He also feels remorse that he showed the pornographic pictures of Loretta to her father, which he tells Dion was the wrong price to pay. In Chapter Twenty, his discussion with Graciela about doing good things with bad money continues the author's exploration of the gray areas between good and evil. Once again, the comparison cannot be missed of Joe to robber barons throughout U.S. history who made fortunes while exploiting others, and then burnished their reputations by giving generously to good causes.

Loretta's conversion in Chapter Twenty-One and her rise to prominence in Tampa as a religious crusader against liquor and gambling are significant principally because of the position in which her strategy places Joe. By now, he has ordered several killings and has shot a man himself, albeit to protect Graciela from almost certain death. The nature of his business regularly puts him in situations that require him to either eliminate someone or lose his power or even his life. He remains a reluctant killer, but he is a killer nonetheless. And now his most logical move as a leader of gangsters would be to eliminate Loretta, but he still cannot bring himself to give the order, no doubt because only business is at risk, not life. His decision costs him not only the casino but the entire gambling industry in Florida, which is a price to pay that does not bode well for his standing in the mob.



## Chapters 22-23

### Chapters 22-23 Summary

In Chapter Twenty-Two, "Quench Not the Spirit," Maso schedules another trip to Florida, which worries Joe. Graciela tells him she is pregnant, and they are both delighted, but both secretly are concerned about Joe's safety. Joe enters a small café one day and accidentally encounters two tables full of KKK men. Loretta sits at the only other table. She invites him to sit with her. The KKK men taunt him but leave peaceably. Loretta says what she has learned over the past two years of preaching is that heaven is here on Earth, but it is a paradise lost. She says at first she felt certain of her calling by God, but now she believes certainty is the biggest falsehood. She then says her mother died a few days ago, which Joe did not know. She claims she is not despairing, and Joe tries to cheer her up by pointing out that she killed gambling in Florida. Loretta says her father now stalks the house in the dark, whispering only one word, "Repent." Prohibition is repealed, but Joe is still worried about Maso. One day, Joe visits Esteban, who tells him that Loretta apparently went back to taking heroin and committed suicide. She cut off her genitalia and slit her own throat. Esteban, who takes photos as a hobby, shows him a shot of the recent opening of a nightclub in Havana. In it, Joe recognizes the face of Emma Gould.

Part III, "All the Violent Children, 1933-1935," begins with Chapter Twenty-Three, "The Haircut." Joe shows Esteban's photo to Dion, who confirms that the woman in it definitely is Emma. Dion says Chief Figgis badly beat up one of Joe's distillers while telling him to repent. Dion is worried about Maso's imminent arrival, because he is bringing an unusually large group of men with him on the train and has made stops along the coast, as if consulting with other crime bosses. Joe meets with Maso at the Romero Hotel in Tampa, where Maso's men have taken over an entire floor. With Maso is one of his sons, Santo "Digger" Pescatore, a vicious buffoon. Maso is displeased that Joe did not get rid of Loretta, and did not kill the moonshiner, Turner John Belkin. He says Joe is not a killer, which is a problem. He announces that Digger will replace Joe as leader in Tampa. He adds that Joe must now kill Dion, because Maso knows that Dion, not his brother Paolo, was the one who betrayed Joe years earlier. Joe denies this, and Albert White walks into the room.

### Chapters 22-23 Analysis

The news of Graciela's pregnancy in Chapter Twenty-Two is quickly contrasted to the apparent loss of Loretta's faith, a failed rebirth. Loretta's reflection that the only heaven is on Earth is exactly what Joe said earlier in the novel that he believed. This is a bad comparison for Loretta, given Joe's degraded morality, which is why the self-mutilation and suicide of Loretta is not a huge surprise. The author's point appears to be the rather bleak one that a spiritual outlook is often no match for the world's relentless corruption, particularly when that spirituality is embraced as an escape from trauma and guilt. The





reappearance of Emma in the story is a long-awaited development, foreshadowed when a body identifiably hers was not found in the car that went off the bridge.

A number of plot threads are picked up in Chapter Twenty-Three. It becomes clear that Joe will go to Havana to search for Emma, but not until he has dealt with the problem of Maso. Also, the violence of Figgis in response to his daughter's suicide foreshadows continuing troubles he will present in his quest to make sinners like Joe repent. Maso's announcement that he will replace Joe with Digger is a bad idea, because Digger is a fool, and only cunning men like Joe and Maso can effectively lead a bunch of ruthless gangsters. This decision amounts to the first strategic mistake Maso has made throughout the novel, but he partially reverses it the very next moment, by bringing Albert White back into the picture. This is another clever twist in the story, especially because it begins to tie up the loose ends of the rivalry between Joe and Albert.



# Chapters 24-26

## Chapters 24-26 Summary

In Chapter Twenty-Four, "How You Meet Your End," Albert White is holding a machine gun that Joe recognizes as belonging to one of his key men. Albert says he was down and out when he encountered one of Maso's men. During a conversation, Albert realized that Maso thought Paolo had been the rat, but Albert knew it was Dion, because Albert was the one Dion reported to. When Maso heard this news, he decided to reinstate Albert, because he knows Tampa well. Out the window of the hotel, the police arrive and join Maso's men in shooting at Joe's men, who scatter and disappear. Albert realizes they have escaped into the tunnels under the streets.

In Chapter Twenty-Five, "Higher Ground," Joe awakens in the dark, his hands cuffed, his mouth taped, and his head hooded. From the sound of engines and fish smells, he realizes he is lying on the deck of a boat. The hood is removed and he is tied to a chair. Albert has the watch that belonged to Joe's father. Albert puts Joe's feet in wet cement. As the cement begins to dry, two boats appear on the horizon. When the cement is dry, Albert is about to toss Joe overboard but Joe convinces him to look in his pocket, where Albert finds the photograph of Emma Gould in Havana. Joe says if Albert kills him, he will never find her. Albert's men mount a Gatling gun to fire at the two boats. Just then, a plane emerges from the clouds, piloted by Joe's man, Ferruco Diaz. The gunners fire at the plane, while Dion and his men shoot from the approaching boats. Joe is grazed by a bullet but is rescued by his men. Albert White has been shot dead.

In Chapter Twenty-Six, "Back to Black," Joe and his men take the tunnels from the Port of Tampa to the Romero Hotel. The steel door into the back of the hotel is locked, so Dion shoots it off its hinges, but a ricochet kills one of his own men. Several policemen on Joe's payroll are summoned, and are told to find Maso. Joe calls Graciela, who is aware of the war and tells him to be careful. Maso and Digger are waiting for a train when they hear an explosion and realize that Joe's men have blown up the tracks. They check into the Tampa Bay Hotel with their men, but Joe is waiting in Maso's room. Joe has convinced Maso's men to join him, because they see that Maso has no chance of winning. Joe shoots Maso dead. In another room, Dion shoots Digger. A week later, Joe and Dion meet the top crime boss, Lucky Luciano, in New York City. Joe says he wants Dion to take over the operation, and Joe will be his adviser. This surprises Dion, but Lucky likes the idea. He intends to set up casinos in Cuba, and wants Joe to go there.

## Chapters 24-26 Analysis

Two nifty pieces of plotting occur in Chapter 24. First, Albert's explanation of how he learned that Joe had lied about Dion's betrayal neatly places Albert back in a position of power, setting up a resolution of his battles with Joe. Second, the escape of Joe's



outnumbered men during the gunfight is deft, because it brings the tunnels back into the story, and they will play a key role in the climax.

Chapter 25 finds Joe in the very situation that had been foreshadowed at the opening of the novel. Just as Maso had taken Joe's pocket watch, now Albert has it. Throughout the novel, the watch has been symbolic not only of Joe's close but fractious relationship with father, but also of the finite nature of life, which can end on any tick of the clock, particularly for gangsters. Joe's delaying tactic of inducing Albert to look in his pocket for the photo of Emma is typical of this author, who manages time and again to extract a detail from earlier in the story and put it to important use later. It seems apparent that the approaching rescue boats will never reach Joe in time, and that becomes even clearer when the gangsters mount a Gatling gun. A good thriller always manages to put the protagonist in a seemingly impossible situation just before extracting him, and in this case, help literally comes down from the sky. Lehane had mentioned Joe's pilot earlier in the book, and his help in diverting fire from the Gatling gun is all it takes to save Joe.

In Chapter 26, the tunnels that were recently reintroduced to the story are put to good use by Joe and his men. Joe's call to Graciela appears to be a way to reinforce Joe's essential humanity and the deep personal danger he faces. This is important, because once he traps Maso, he murders him point blank. It is the first time in the novel he has personally shot an unarmed man, and if this had not happened earlier in the story, before Joe's character had been fully developed, such an outright murder would be insupportable in terms of making the reader care about the protagonist. Joe's retirement as boss of the gang is fitting, because his moral decline could only accelerate if he continued as leader.



# Chapters 27-29

## Chapters 27-29 Summary

In Chapter Twenty-Seven, "A Gentleman Farmer in Pinar del Rio," nine years have passed since Joe first met Emma Gould. He and Graciela have been living in Cuba almost a year, with Joe occasionally returning to Tampa for business. They buy a bankrupt coffee plantation in the Pinar del Rio province and hire a man named Illario "Ciggy" Bacigalupi to manage it. Ciggy says the plantation was a major employer before the previous owner took to drink. The area is now impoverished, but with Ciggy's help, workers are employed again and the plantation begins to flourish. Meanwhile, Graciela renovates the house. Listening to the sounds of the peasant boys playing stickball in the field, Joe watches his little son, Tomas, and thinks about having another child. His father's watch is no longer keeping good time, and he reluctantly sends it from Havana to Switzerland for repairs. In Havana, he visits a brothel owned by Emma Gould. He sees her outside the place, but she is cold and indifferent toward him. He asks about the body parts of the woman that were found after the robbery, and she says another woman, Albert White's new girlfriend, was in the car with them. She nonchalantly invites him to come around for old time's sake, but he says goodbye and leaves.

In Chapter Twenty-Eight, "How Late It Was," Joe continues to learn from Ciggy about the rigors of growing tobacco. Joe has the workers plow up a disused field to make a baseball diamond, and buys equipment for the peasant boys. Ciggy learns about a regional youth baseball league they could join. Tomas loves to watch the bigger boys practice. He takes them to their first movie, in Havana. It's a Western, and to his surprise, the screenwriting credit is that of his brother, Danny. Graciela learns she has been named Woman of the Year in Ybor for her charity work. Joe and Graciela fly to Florida for the ceremony, but someone fires at them in the street. Joe's two bodyguards are killed. He shoots their assailant in the foot, and sees that the downed man is Irv Figgis. Irv apologizes and limps into the path of a bus, which kills him. Joe turns around, and sees that one of Irv's bullets has hit Graciela, who dies. In the very brief Chapter Twenty-Nine, "A Man in His Profession," Joe has aged greatly in a short time. He now lives in Florida with Tomas. Sometimes they fish from the seawall, and Joe points across the ocean to Cuba.

## Chapters 27-29 Analysis

The first part of Chapter Twenty-Seven is a pastoral idyll. Joe and Graciela begin to live like benevolent royalty on their tobacco plantation, doing nice things for the impoverished local people, and they are respected by everyone. Joe's brief meeting with Emma underscores the mistake it would have been for him if she had not disappeared and they had stayed together. Now he is happy with his wife and child, he is largely removed from the crime business, and he even has the thrill of seeing his brother's name on the silver screen. To top it off, Graciela is to receive an award for her



charity work. And then the idyll ends, with a bullet from the aggrieved Figgis. This is the punishment Joe must take for all his wrongdoing. The author does not directly address whether this punishment comes from on high, as Figgis would argue, or is simply random and without meaning. In the context of the novel, it must come because luck ends, as Dion warned Joe. Nothing good stays good forever. Joe still has the compensation of his son, his wealth, and his life in Florida, but Cuba is now, for him, the paradise on Earth that has been lost and can never be regained.



# Characters

## Joe Coughlin

Joe Coughlin is the novel's protagonist. He is a complicated man, intelligent, often charming, and soulful, yet wild and dangerous, whose personal difficulties are rooted in his problematic relationship with his father. The youngest of three brothers, Joe is the stereotypical rebel, but he also is more firmly tied to his father than his siblings are. He has developed a philosophy that scorns what he sees as the ruse of conventional life's respectability, embodied in his father, a prominent police officer. Joe knows that Thomas Coughlin has been on the take for a long time, and he regards this activity as theft concealed under the guise of law enforcement. He thinks that being an outright criminal, or as he puts it, an outlaw, is less hypocritical than pretending to uphold the law while secretly breaking it. Yet Joe also loves his father, and this love-hate emotion is the basis of his own ambivalent self-regard. Joe's essential goodness, despite the criminal path he takes, is demonstrated by his devotion to the two loves of his life in Emma, who betrays him, and Graciela, who becomes everything to him. Another important indicator of Joe's fundamental decency is his avoidance throughout much of the story of killing anyone, even though he is surrounded by killers and his own life is at risk. This reluctance to commit murder eventually becomes a sign of weakness among the thugs with whom he does business, precisely because it shows he has a core of decency. As a boy, Joe is an unbridled vandal and petty thief, but this rebellion grows over time to the proportions of major crime, bringing with it Joe's central problem of how to live outside conventional law without forfeiting his personal ethics.

## Emma Gould

Emma Gould is a temptress to whom Joe unfairly attributes all his problems. When they first meet, they are both about 20 years old. Emma, already the mistress of crime boss Albert White, is the crime novel's classic, icy blonde. Rarely frightened or even disturbed by the violence surrounding her, Emma has a taste for danger and an anti-authoritarian streak that appeal greatly to Joe. She is also beautiful, and much-beloved by the murderous Albert. Once she takes up with Joe, right under Albert's nose, she proves to be an enthusiastic lover but also prone to drifting away emotionally from him, as if unable or unwilling to commit. Indeed, she admits that she is incapable of telling Joe she loves him. Not long after that scene, she betrays Joe to Albert, apparently condemning him to death. After Joe's escape from Albert, for a long while it looks like Emma has been killed, but she resurfaces late in the novel. By then, Joe has long been involved with Graciela, and has finally let go of the haunting memory of Emma. When he finally does encounter her again, he finally realizes that she is a selfish exploiter, just as his father warned she was. She was either incapable or unwilling to ever truly love him, and the years have turned her into a bitter, callous person, her outward beauty just as damaged as is her inner self. Emma is the novel's exemplar of how rebellion against



the established order must be accompanied by an inner core of decency, a set of principles, because without it, only the emptiness of nihilism awaits.

## Graciela Corrales

Graciela Corrales is a spectacularly beautiful mulatto woman from Cuba who becomes the great love of Joe's life. He meets her after the disappearance and apparent death of Emma, whose loss he still mourns. Graciela is married to a Cuban man she believes to be a revolutionary hero. This means that both Joe and Graciela are committed to other people, which makes their romance slow-burning. Graciela is intensely loyal to her husband and has a deep love for Cuba. She sees herself as a revolutionary, bent on removal of the current Cuban president. The first time she formally meets Joe is to discuss a plan to raid a U.S. Navy ship for its armaments, which will be sent to help the Cuban revolutionaries. Yet after Graciela and Joe become a couple, her revolutionary fervor fades. She does have concern about this change in her focus but nevertheless adjusts without too much consternation to life with a gangster. She does not like the violence and crime but makes no attempt to persuade Joe to mend his ways. Instead, she uses his money to set up a number of useful charities. Eventually, she accepts that her husband is a con man, not a hero, and commits herself fully to Joe. She has his child and their life together is beatific, until near the end of the novel, she is suddenly shot dead in the street. Graciela represents the perfect dream of a mate for a gangster. She is sexy, smart, warm, and concerned only in a non-threatening, rather philosophical way about his life of crime.

## Dion Bortolo

Dion Bartolo is Joe's childhood friend and right-hand man. A pudgy youth, he grows fat as a man, even as his lawless behavior as a boy turns into thuggery as an adult. He is a clever and cautious man with a dislike of policeman, the florid dress sense of a classic gangster, and skill with a machine gun that grows as the novel progresses. Dion becomes concerned early in the story over Joe's fascination with Emma, the mistress of the powerful gangster Albert White. This concern causes him to betray Joe to Albert, although not for money. He naively believes that Albert will arrange to have Joe, Dion, and his brother incarcerated for a year. Later, Dion is willing to be killed by Joe without resistance as punishment for this betrayal. When Joe forgives him, Dion's loyalty is redoubled. Even so, he does not hesitate to criticize Joe, who is now his boss, for any decisions Dion believes are wrongheaded. Dion, who suffers guilt over the death of his brother, Paolo, regards Joe as his brother, and often plays the voice of reason in his presence. Even so, Dion is a ruthless killer and a gangster to the core. When Joe retires as boss of the gang, he appoints Dion as his successor.



## Tommaso

Tommaso "Maso" Pescatore is a mafia boss who takes Joe under his wing while the two of them are in prison. Maso is a cunning old man who will do seemingly anything to remain in power. Initially, he forces Joe to use his father, Thomas Coughlin, to promote Maso's criminal activities. Later, Maso sets up Joe to build a rum-running empire in Florida, which makes Joe rich while making Maso even richer. Eventually, when Maso decides that Joe has made several mistakes, he tries to replace him with his own son, Digger. This is the one mistake Maso makes in the novel, and it proves to be his downfall. His readiness to murder Joe after years of partnership demonstrates his complete corruption, and it seems like no great loss when Joe finally corners and kills him.

## Thomas Coughlin

Thomas Coughlin is Joe's father. A prominent Boston policeman when the novel opens, he at first seems to be an incorruptible lawman, but that perception is soon swept away by the opulence of his house and the revelation that he has been on the take for years. Even so, something in his character has remained removed from criminal activity. He sees himself as on the right side of the law, and deplors his son's criminal activities. When Joe is captured by Albert White's men, Thomas and his officers save Joe, only to beat him and send him to prison. Thomas pulls strings to get a reduced sentence for Joe, and he even does Maso's bidding to protect Joe in prison, but he draws the line at murdering a gangster for Maso. Thomas, who tellingly has the same first name as Maso, is a love-hate figure for Joe. The policeman, a widower, has alienated all three of his sons, none of whom he seems to have tried hard to understand. Midway through the novel, Thomas dies quietly on his back porch, alone.

## Albert White

Albert White is a gangster who vies with Joe for the attentions of Emma Gould. At the novel's start, Albert is a powerful figure in the Boston crime scene, and Joe is taking a risk to be consorting with Albert's mistress. Albert loves Emma, yet when he discovers her infidelity, he orders her killed. He also intends to kill Joe. After Joe returns from prison and runs Albert out of town, Albert returns much later with the intention of taking over Joe's operations. He almost succeeds in killing Joe, but is diverted by a photo Joe has of Emma Gould, apparently still alive. Just like Joe, the downfall of Albert is Emma, and Albert's failure to kill Joe quickly leads to his own death.

## Esteban Suarez

Esteban Suarez is a Cuban living in Tampa who is working for Cuban revolutionaries when he first meets Joe. Esteban is suave, intelligent, and moves fluidly. He worked as a professional dancer in Cuba to earn his way through law school. He owns a nightclub





in Tampa and controls the supply routes by sea of contraband from Cuba used in manufacturing rum, which is illegal in the Prohibition years. Esteban becomes a partner with Joe in the Florida rum business, and the two grow rich together. His interest in the revolution falls away as his wealth from illegal activities grows. A childhood friend of Graciela, Esteban once loved her, but now has another romantic interest. He ends up being a loyal friend and partner to Joe.

## Irving Figgis

Irving Figgis is the Tampa chief of police when the novel begins. He's a slight, steely-eyed, hard man, who is incorruptible but understands that he cannot quell all the crime in the city. He accepts that Joe has too many armed men and too much power to be stopped, and asks only that he contain his activities within the city of Ybor. In this way, he and Joe forge a truce. But when Figgis's daughter strays from the straight and narrow, Figgis becomes unhinged. He decides that criminals like Joe are responsible for his daughter's troubles, and becomes bent on forcing them to repent. This coercion takes the form of beatings and, eventually, he shoots two of Joe's men and accidentally kills Graciela before stepping in front of a bus and killing himself. Figgis represents the darkest extent of righteous indignation.

## Loretta Figgis

Loretta Figgis is the lovely and happy teenaged daughter of Irving Figgis when the story begins. She is so fresh and charming that nobody is surprised when she goes to Hollywood to become a film star. Instead, she gets involved with heavy drugs and pornography. After Joe reveals this situation to her father, he brings her back to Tampa, where Loretta undergoes a religious conversion and becomes a public preacher, whose main targets are alcohol and gambling. She succeeds in turning public opinion against proposed legislation to permit casinos in Florida, ruining Joe's business plan. But after two years of preaching, Loretta loses her faith and returns to heroin. She cuts off her genitalia and slits her throat, dying in her father's bed.

## Paolo Bortolo

Paolo Bortolo is the elder brother of Dion. A dull-witted fellow, he is watched over by Dion, but after a robbery early in the novel, Paolo is killed by police. Afterwards, his role in the story is as the brother who apparently betrayed Joe, although Joe soon enough discovers that the actual turncoat was Dion.

## Aiden

Aiden "Danny" Coughlin is Joe's eldest brother. He leaves home and rarely writes for eight years. Coincidentally, he returns just a day after their father dies. Danny visits Joe in prison, and tells him he was a building contractor and then became involved in the



film business as a stuntman. He is beginning to write screenplays, and urges Joe to join him after he released from jail, but Joe declines. Later, Joe sees a Western that credits Danny as the screenwriter. He represents the kind of life Joe might have had, if only he had decided to go straight.

## **Brendan**

Brendan "Brenny" Loomis is the right-hand man of Albert White. A former boxer, he is extremely powerful, and at one point hands out a beating to Joe that almost kills him. Brenny is the man that Maso tries to force Thomas Coughlin to murder, but Thomas refuses, even though he knows his refusal might mean the death of his own son, Joe.

## **Robert Drew Pruitt**

Robert Drew Pruitt is a Ku Klux Klansman with a criminal record who tries to take over Joe's operations in Florida. A dim-witted killer, he meets his end at the hands of Joe's men, but not before he stabs and almost kills Joe.

## **Tim Hickey**

Tim Hickey is Joe's boss when he is a young thug. Hickey does not last long in the story. He is murdered in the barbershop by one of Albert White's men, and Albert takes over Hickey's criminal operations.

## **Turner John Belkin**

Turner John Belkin is a moonshiner in rural Florida who refuses to pay monetary tribute to Joe's gang. Maso orders Joe to kill Belkin, but when Belkin explains to Joe that he cannot pay tribute because his deceased father would be ashamed of him, Joe's own complicated relationship with his father induces him to let Belkin off the hook.

## **Santo**

Santo "Digger" Pescatore is Maso's son. He is a dullard and a thug whom Maso intends to place in control of Joe's operation. This is a mistake that ends in the death of both Maso and Digger.

## **Tomas**

Tomas is the young son of Joe and Graciela. It is significant that his name is a variant spelling of Tommaso and Thomas, the first names of two key figures in Joe's life.



## **Illario**

Illario "Ciggy" Bacigalupi is the manager of Joe and Graciela's tobacco plantation in Cuba. He's a straight-talker who knows the business well and soon has the plantation thriving.

## **Lucky Luciano**

Lucky Luciano is a historical figure who also is the top crime boss in this novel. Joe and Dion go to visit Lucky in New York toward the end of the story, and Lucky gives his permission for Dion to take over the Florida operations while Joe goes to Cuba to work on developing casinos there. Lucky is depicted as an impassive, intelligent killer.

## **Ivelia Suarez**

Ivelia Suarez is Esteban's elder sister. She helps him in his work, but does not have a large role in the novel.



# Objects/Places

## South Boston

South Boston is where Joe, Dion, and Paolo hold up a poker game at the start of the novel. The players turn out to be Albert White's men, which creates a big problem for the robbers.

## Hotel Statler

The Hotel Statler is a luxurious hotel in Boston that has a grand opening attended by celebrities, dignitaries, and underworld figures. Joe goes there to try to retrieve Emma, who is at the function with Albert White.

## Charlestown Penitentiary

Charlestown Penitentiary is a harsh Massachusetts prison where Joe spends two years after being convicted of robbery. He meets Maso there, and his career in big-time crime is launched.

## Ybor City

Ybor City is the town in southern Florida where Joe goes after prison to set up a rum-running business during Prohibition.

## Port of Tampa

The Port of Tampa is where the tunnels begin that lead to locations within the city. The tunnels are used by Joe's men for transport of contraband and other illegal activities.

## Tampa Bay Hotel

The Tampa Bay Hotel is a sumptuous lakefront hotel where Joe stays when he first arrives in Florida. Later, Maso checks in there, where Joe is waiting to shoot him.

## Vedade Tropicale

Vedade Tropicale is the name of the nightclub in Tampa owned by Esteban Suarez. This is where Joe first meets Esteban and his sister, Ivelia.



## **Circulo Cubano**

Circulo Cubano is the Cuban social club in Tampa. Joe meets Esteban and Graciela there to plan the robbery of the U.S. Naval vessel.

## **USS Mercy**

The USS Mercy is the name of the ship that Joe's gang bombs and sinks, with help from Esteban and Graciela. Eventually, they steal caches of weapons that were aboard.

## **National Guard Armory**

The National Guard Armory is where the armaments from the USS Mercy are temporarily stored after the ship sinks. Posing as sailors, Joe, Esteban, and their men steal the guns from the armory.

## **Longboat Key**

Longboat Key is a Florida barrier island that holds an abandoned luxury hotel, which Joe wants to turn into a casino. He has a bloody showdown there with Robert Drew Pruitt.

## **Pinar del Rio**

Pinar del Rio is a province in Cuba where Joe and Graciela buy a bankrupt tobacco farm and restore it to operational condition. They live there happily for a short while with their son, until Graciela's death.

## **Havana**

Havana is the Cuban city where Graciela and Esteban lived before coming to Florida. It also is the city where Emma Gould owns and operates a brothel years after her disappearance from Florida.



# Themes

## Morality and Hypocrisy

The defining characteristic of this book's protagonist, Joe Coughlin, is his contempt for the established order. Throughout much of the book, he refers to himself as an outlaw, which he carefully differentiates from a gangster. He takes the philosophical position that wrongdoing is not confined to criminals, and that at least outlaws are not hypocritical about what they do. They do not pretend to follow the rules and then secretly break them, as do politicians, businessmen, policemen, clergy, and many others who purport to be on the righteous side of the law. Joe refers to himself and his cronies as people who "live by night," doing things that the careful masses who live by day and consider themselves to be law-abiding would never dare to do. He paints a romantic picture of himself as the feisty rebel, but as the novel progresses, he is inexorably drawn deeper into the moral compromises of the criminal world. Eventually, he is forced to admit that a life of crime has turned him into something worse than a mere outlaw. He has become a gangster. Joe clings to belief in God, which means he still believes in the possibility of goodness, but he states that he believes equally in greed. He has no illusions about the evil people do, yet he comforts himself that good deeds often are achieved with money acquired through bad actions. This rationalization is identical to that of magnates who make their fortunes legally, albeit from the suffering of others, and then donate to charities to polish their reputations. Joe despises their hypocrisy, yet his own path not only has led him to a similar end, but has forced him into murder and havoc, which ends in the death of Graciela, the most important person in his life. The author's message is that although law and order is shot through with compromise and hypocrisy, throwing it aside leads to chaos. It is better to be a greedy hypocrite than a cold-blooded murderer.

## Fathers and Sons

One of the most prevalent themes in literature is the relationship between a father and son. Given that most societies are patriarchal, this relationship symbolizes the passing of power from one generation to the next, which in turn symbolizes a people's progress or regress, as the case may be. In this novel, the central father-son relationship depicts a morally compromised father, Thomas Coughlin, who attempts to preserve something of his personal honor in the midst of wrongdoing. As a policeman, Thomas believes in the rule of law, but his associations with criminals have tainted his honesty. His son, Joe Coughlin, sees this moral compromise and is contemptuous of it, but his reaction is the hotheaded one of flaunting the law entirely. It is as if the failure of Thomas to be perfect is interpreted by Joe as an excuse to become a criminal. The other two sons of Thomas, who play minor roles in the story, also reject or avoid their father, which indicates that his failings are emotional as well as moral. An even darker version of the father-son theme is that of crime boss Maso Pescatore and his evil son, Digger. Maso is deeply committed to his son, even while realizing that Digger is stupid and brutal. This shows



that the father-son relationship can be perverted by the father into an extension of his own ego, which only damages the son. The moonshiner, Turner John Belkin, risks his life by refusing to pay tribute to Joe's gang, simply because his late father, also a moonshiner, would have disapproved of such obeisance. The influence of a father on his son is a fundamental educative process in society, but a theme of this novel is that when such influence is tainted by moral corruption, the son in particular and the society in general will suffer.

## Love Is Blind

A redeeming trait of many characters in the novel is their love and loyalty toward family members or close friends, although as is typical in this tale of moral compromise, even such warm feelings have their drawbacks. Love's blindness, in the sense that the lover idealizes the loved one, springs from good intentions but is a flawed way to assess human nature. Maturity in love is the ability to weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of a person and then decide to love that person, anyway. In this novel, all loving relationships are blind, which generally spells trouble. As a young man, Joe blindly loves Emma, who betrays him and turns out to be utterly selfish. Later, he realizes that Dion also betrayed him but he forgives him. This stems not so much from perfect love between friends as from the fact that Joe's criminal life has left him with almost nobody else to trust. Dion claims that his betrayal was motivated by love for his brother, Paolo, but he clearly is not facing the fact that his primary motive was self-preservation. When Graciela meets Joe, she is suffering from blind love for her con man husband, but eventually her eyes are opened. The love between Joe and Graciela is marred by their rationalizations about the wages of sin. They try to lead a benevolent and charitable life even while Joe remains in the mob. Graciela never fully faces his criminality, and consequently their life has a dream-like quality of unreality. Thomas Coughlin is not blind to the failings of his son, but he cannot see clearly into his own heart. The love between Irving Figgis and his daughter, Loretta, is based on an idealized view of each other that evaporates, leaving them both bereft. In this story, clear-eyed love is a saving grace bestowed upon no one.



# Style

## Point of View

This novel is presented in third person, almost exclusively from the viewpoint of the protagonist, Joe Coughlin. He is in almost every scene, although when Joe is in prison, his father goes home after visiting him, and a brief scene is depicted from Thomas Coughlin's point of view. The author appears to have made a good choice in deciding to tell the tale in third person, rather than using first person for Joe's voice. One technical difficulty that would have presented itself is the story would have been filled with the use of "I," given the almost constant presence of Joe in it. Also, a drawback of first person is that the voice can become generic-sounding. With the exception of characters who are insane or extraordinary in some other way, first-person narrative has a tendency to sound alike. By looking at Joe from the distance of third person, the author can paint a vivid portrait of this complex personality. Third person also creates a sense of the author's detachment from characters, which is a good idea when the characters are deadly criminals. Not only does third person eliminate any perception that the author is the "I" in the story, but it helps to forge emotional distance from the actions of the characters. This novel contains a good deal of gunplay, robbery, bloody beatings, and murder. Showing all that from the coolly detached view of third person emphasizes the action while downplaying the emotional content of it, which is a good thing in a crime novel, whose principal goal is entertainment.

## Setting

The principal setting for this novel is southern Florida, although Massachusetts and Cuba also figure strongly. Joe Coughlin, his family and friends all come from Boston, and that is where the story begins. Joe's exploits as a young man in South Boston revolve around a life of petty crime. Speakeasies, backroom poker games, dark allies, and rundown boarding houses are his haunts. His father, a policeman, lives in a stately home in a nice part of town, but Joe goes there only once in the story, to break into his father's safe. The next setting is the Charlestown Penitentiary in Massachusetts, where Joe spends two years. This grim place, full of stabbings and other forms of violent intimidation, is so psychologically repressive that it is all Joe can do to stay sane. Upon his release, he goes to Tampa to become a rum-runner, setting up in nearby Ybor City. Here, he lives in a hotel whose opulence makes him uncomfortable. Also significant in his environment now is a series of wet, rat-infested tunnels that run from the Port of Tampa under the streets into the city center. He and his men transport contraband through these tunnels, which symbolize the dark nature of criminal enterprise. South Florida also is full of swamps and alligators, which similarly represent the sinister underpinnings of Joe's life. Even the numerous luxury hotels in Florida are settings for murder and other mayhem. Nowhere in Joe's world is free of evil. When he and Graciela move to Cuba toward the end of the story, it seems at first like a reprieve for them, but they are drawn back to Florida, where it ends badly for Graciela while ruining





Joe's hopes for happiness. Joe and others in this novel are products of their environment, as the settings in the story amply demonstrate.

## Language and Meaning

The most obvious trait of the language in this book is its adherence to the clipped and tough diction of so-called hardboiled fiction. People speak in short sentences that are meant to convey more than they actually say. The full range of anger, threat, loyalty or love is made implicit in a few words. Most of the characters are gangsters, and they accordingly call their superiors "sir" and their girlfriends "doll." Their views on life are often reduced to short phrases or epigrams, with which they seem to be trying to clarify a world made murky by corruption and lack of trustworthiness. Occasionally, the author dips into semi-technical language. Examples include when the distillery process used by the illegal rum trade is described, when Thomas Coughlin gives orders to his subordinate policemen, when Joe Coughlin is badly injured and requires complicated medical procedures, and when Joe and Graciela buy a plantation in Cuba and learn how tobacco is grown and processed. Another distinguishing aspect of the language is the occasional use of Spanish phrases to emphasize the Cuban roots of Graciela, Esteban, and a few other characters. Joe and Esteban are both intelligent and literate gangsters, which allows the author to use a few words that are not entirely run-of-the-mill, but for the most part the vocabulary is fairly simple. The society depicted in this book is violent, grasping, and rooted in Italian and Latino heritages, and the language is carefully selected to reflect these attributes.

## Structure

This novel is divided into three parts, subdivided into 29 chapters. Each part and chapter is numbered and titled. The parts are arranged chronologically, beginning with 1926-1929, followed by 1929-1933, and ending with 1933-1935. This total of nine years comprises the core of Joe Coughlin's career as a mob criminal. Generally, the story progresses through these years, but it begins by alluding to an event in 1933, when Joe is about to be killed by a rival. Joe reflects that Emma Gould was the source of his problems, and the story then returns to 1926, when Joe first met Emma. As the romance between Joe and Emma is developed and Joe's biggest troubles begin, the author fills in the back story of Joe's youth through the character's memories, which often are sparked by his encounters with his father. No other character's past is explored to a significant degree, which allows Dennis Lehane to keep the story on a straightforward course. This is useful for a crime novel, whose emphasis on action is best served by a headlong narrative, rather than by meandering through the pasts or family lives of numerous characters. Lehane's relatively uncomplicated structure in this book helps him to concentrate on creating suspenseful twists and turns. Often, seemingly unimportant events crop up again later in the story, where they exert powerful effects on the plot. A chronological structure makes it easier to trace these effects, which also increases the force of their impact. In other words, the surprises of the plot are enhanced by the story's comparatively simple structure.



## Quotes

"When she found his eyes, hers were fuller and sharper, lit with something that had entered the world centuries before civilized things." Page 19

"That's what it took to stay on top in the rackets—everyone had to know you'd long ago amputated your conscience." Page 23

"Some men wore their power as if it were a coat they couldn't get to fit or to stop itching. Thomas Coughlin wore his like it had been tailored for him in London." Page 30

"For a moment he feared she'd jump over the balcony rail, but then the sickness in her face turned to a smile. And he realized what had placed the grief in her face: she'd never expected to see him again." Page 63

"Luck is life and life is luck. And it's leaking from the moment in lands in your hand." Page 91

"When two men pointed their guns at each other, a contract was established under the eyes of God, the only acceptable fulfillment of which was that one of you send the other home to him." Page 122

"Joe knew what the nod meant—this was why they became outlaws. To live moments the insurance salesmen of the world, the truck drivers and lawyers and bank tellers and carpenters and realtors would never know." Page 213

"No wonder the nuns had railed so vehemently against the sins of lust and covetousness. They could possess you surer than a cancer." Page 216

"Something was getting lost in them, something that was starting to live by day, where the swells lived, where the insurance salesmen and bankers lived, where the civic meetings were held and the little flags were waved at the Main Street parades, where you sold out the truth of yourself for the story of yourself." Page 284

"Graciela dreamed of land reform and farmers' rights and a fair distribution of wealth. She believed in fairness, essentially, a concept Joe was certain had left the earth about the time the earth left diapers." Page 303

"Ilario turned to his left and Dion's bullets blew off his ear and moved through his neck like a scythe and the ricochets bounced off the gun and bounced off the deck mount and the deck cleats, and collided with Fausto Scarfone. Fausto's arms danced in the air by his head and then he tipped over, spitting red everywhere." Page 360

"We're not God's children, we're not fairy-tale people in a book about true love. We live by night and dance fast so the grass can't grow under our feet." Page 388

"Good deeds, since the dawn of time, have often followed bad money." Page 394



## Topics for Discussion

Joe Coughlin believes that the law-abiding establishment is just as corrupt as the world of gangsters, but criminals are not hypocritical about it. Based on evidence in this novel, do you think the author agrees with his protagonist's position? Cite clues from the story to support your argument.

Joe says he believes in God and in greed. What does this tell you about him? At heart, is he a good or bad man, clear-eyed or confused, straightforward or devious?

Loretta Figgis and Joe come to hold the same opinion that if heaven exists, it is only here on Earth, and this life is full of depravity. In the context of the story and of what happens to these two characters, what does this conclusion they have in common tell us about the nature of evil?

Joe likes to think of himself as an outlaw, but after he shoots a sailor dead to protect Graciela, he begins to consider himself a gangster. Explain the significance of this change of self-opinion, and how it relates to subsequent acts of wrongdoing by Joe.

Originally, Esteban appears to be in the rum-running business to raise money for revolution in Cuba, and he demands Joe's help in a risky theft of armaments from the U.S. Navy to supply Cuban revolutionaries. Yet he seems to lose interest in revolution and turns exclusively to crime. Do you think he changes as a person? What do you think motivates and excites him?

Joe says he believes everyone is afraid. Frequently, he perceives fear in the eyes of his rivals, although sometimes he sees nothing more than sheer meanness. What is the author's point in emphasizing that everyone is afraid in Joe's world? What does all this fear symbolize, and do you think it could ever be replaced by something else?

Plenty of people get beaten up, shot, and stabbed in this story. What is your impression of how all this violence is depicted? Why has the author shown it in the way he has? What is the role of violence in this novel?