

# **The Lock Artist: A Novel Study Guide**

## **The Lock Artist: A Novel by Steve Hamilton**

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# Plot Summary

The Lock Artist by Steve Hamilton is an intriguing story about a silent young man who is led into a life of crime because of his amazing ability to open locks. Years after a family tragedy steals his speech at the age of 8, Mike discovers his talent at picking locks, but when his gift comes to the attention of the wrong people, Mike loses everything. The Lock Artist is a sympathetic tale which shows the devastating effects of a childhood trauma on the narrator.

While incarcerated, Mike decides to write his story since he has not spoken since he was 8 years old. After robbing a safe in Pennsylvania for the Blue Crew, Mike goes to New York in 1999. After the tragedy in 1990, Mike goes to live with Uncle Lito in Milford, Michigan. Back in 1999, he steals diamonds from a house in Connecticut with a group of amateurs, but they alert him that there is a problem the next day. Mike attends school at the Higgins Institute for those with communicative problems, and the summer before he is sent to public school, he learns to pick locks. Because the diamonds were fake, Mike returns to Connecticut with the amateurs to find the real safe, but the amateurs are killed, and the security officers handcuff Mike. At Milford High School, Mike learns that he is artistically gifted, but he makes a mistake by opening Brian Hauser's gym lock. Mike escapes from the handcuffs in Connecticut and returns to his apartment in New York to find the white pager beeping. When Brian and his buddies convince Mike to break into the Marshes' house to play a prank, only Mike is caught and arrested.

After meeting the White Crew in Los Angeles, Mike proves to them that he can open a safe. Mike does not reveal his accomplices to the judge when he is tried for breaking into the Marshes' house, so he is sentenced to work during the summer for Mr. Marsh who makes him dig a pool because Mike still will not reveal his accomplices. While Gunnar waits in the mark's house, Mike accompanies Julian, Ramona and Lucy to a nightclub where they assure the mark, Wesley, is at his club. Then, Mike and Lucy leave to rejoin Gunnar. Amelia confronts Mike while he digs in the Marshes' backyard, accusing him of being able to talk. Mr. Marsh and a locksmith make Mike unlock the Marshes' backdoor, and that night, Mike draws a portrait of Amelia and plans to give it to her. At Wesley's house, Mike and Gunnar rob the safe and manage to sneak past the multiple alarms to rejoin Lucy outside and return to the club. After failing to open a lock with serrated pins at the Marshes the next day, Mike's day worsens when he sees Amelia and her friends drawing him. He buries the portrait in the pile of dirt, but that night, he retrieves the portrait, breaks into the Marshes' house and leaves the portrait on Amelia's dresser. Since she does not tell her father, he draws a comic strip portraying their first meeting the next night, and he and Amelia begin exchanging comic strips as a means of communicating.

Mike feels connected to the White Crew after the first job, and he moves into the apartment attached to their garage. The day after Mike sneaks into the Marshes' house to make love to Amelia, Mr. Marsh decides Mike should spend his time doing art with Amelia instead of digging. He insinuates there is another stipulation, but Mike is only concerned with the fact that Mr. Marsh is now encouraging him to spend time with



Amelia. While in California, Mike receives a page from Harrington Banks, an FBI agent he once met at West Side Recovery, who tries to convince Mike to turn himself in, but Mike disconnects the call. Mr. Marsh convinces Mike to demonstrate his lock-picking talents for his partner, Mr. Slade, and the men are convinced Mike can help them. After being returned by the men who kidnap him, Mr. Marsh sends Mike to the Ghost in Detroit to help him pay off his debt to the man from Detroit by learning to open safes, but Mike is unsuccessful. Gunnar tries to convince Mike to plan a heist on the man from Detroit, and Mike refuses because such a plan is suicide. The red pager goes off. The man from Detroit sends Mike back to the Ghost to try opening safes again, and Mike is diligent in his practice because it is the only way for Amelia to come home. After witnessing Sleepy Eyes kill the assemblyman and his two partners in Ohio, Mike travels to Michigan since it may be his last chance to go home. Mike continues practicing with the Ghost until he is successful.

In Michigan, Mike steals Banks' cell phone from his uncle's kitchen. He visits Amelia at the University of Michigan, and when she insists on knowing what happened to make him this way, he takes her to his childhood home on Victoria Street and draws the horrific scene of his father killing his mother and her boyfriend and trying to kill Mike when he was 8 years old. Mike continues practicing at West Side Recovery after Amelia returns home. He passes the man from Detroit's test to prove his loyalty, and when he receives a job on the blue pager, he leaves a diamond ring on Amelia's pillow before heading to Pennsylvania. Mike and the White Crew plan to rob the man from Detroit's boat, and though they are successful, Gunnar sets them up; he plots with Sleepy Eyes to kill the man from Detroit and the rest of the White Crew. Mike phones Banks when he finds Julian and Ramona dead, and after Sleepy Eyes kills Gunnar, Mike opens the White Crew's safe, and Banks arrives just in time to prevent Sleepy Eyes from killing Mike. Back at the prison, Mike has spent 10 years in jail so far, but he hopes he will be released soon. He writes to Amelia and is sure he will speak again when they are finally reunited.



# Section 1: Chapters 1, 2 and 3

## Section 1: Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Summary

The Lock Artist by Steve Hamilton is an intriguing story about a silent young man who is led into a life of crime because of his amazing ability to open locks. Years after a family tragedy steals his speech at the age of 8, Mike discovers his talent at picking locks, but when his gift comes to the attention of the wrong people, Mike loses everything. The Lock Artist is a sympathetic tale which shows the devastating effects of a childhood trauma on the narrator.

In Chapter 1: Locked Up Tight for Another Day, the narrator addresses the reader, claiming the reader has probably heard of him from the summer of 1990 when he was 8 years old. He was in the news for a few days as the Miracle Boy, and most people felt bad that his story was so horrible. Since then, he grew up, but everything he was good at was either useless or totally illegal which explains the orange jumpsuit he has worn for 9 years. He decides to write his story down, skipping around some, since he has not spoken a word in all these years, and though he cannot start with that day in June 1990, maybe he will be able to face it one day while he is writing. He has been called the Miracle Boy, the Milford Mute, the Golden Boy, the Kid, but he invites the reader to call him Mike.

In Chapter 2: Outside Philadelphia, September 1999, Mike is on his way to his first real job, but when his motorcycle breaks down, it takes two days to hitchhike since he cannot speak, and he arrives tired, hungry and filthy. He meets the Blue Crew, who the Ghost calls steady and reliable, in a motor court outside of Malvern. Both men have heavy New York accents so Mike calls them Manhattan and Brooklyn in his head. After Mike showers, the Blue Crew tells him they must hit the house tonight since their mark will be home in the morning. Three hours later, Mike rides in the back of an Elite Renovations van; Manhattan and Brooklyn did the leg work, and Mike is just the specialist brought in at the last minute to do his part. At the back door, he extracts his leather case of picks from his back pocket and opens the door. Manhattan disables the alarm and leads Mike to the safe. After having no luck with the preset combinations with which safes are shipped, Mike listens against the front door of the safe to determine there are three wheels and the numbers are 13, 26 and 72. Next, he tries the numbers in various orders until 26-72-13 opens the safe about 25 minutes later. Stunned, Manhattan withdraws a dozen envelopes, and after rearming the system, they leave. At the motor court, Mike signals that he needs a new identity, so Manhattan says he knows a guy which is how Mike ends up in New York.

In Chapter 3: Michigan, 1991, Mike is pronounced physically recovered by the time he is 9 years old except he still cannot speak. He is sent to live in Milford with his father's older brother, Uncle Lito. The liquor store is robbed only once, the year Mike moved in with Lito. The robber stops when he sees Mike, and Mike knows he has a gun by the way he nods before walking away. Mike calls 911 and leaves the phone off the hook



since he cannot speak, and then he returns to the front of the store where he hears the robber asking Lito about the boy in the back. After Lito puts all his money in a bag, the robber leaves as Mike simply stares at him. Asking what is wrong with Mike, Lito sinks to the floor, and Mike sits beside him to keep him company.

## Section 1: Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Analysis

This novel begins with an unidentified narrator addressing the reader from prison and offering to share his story. This narrator alludes to a painful past which he is currently unable to share, though he hopes he will be able to confront the trauma while writing his tale, and he also indicates that this event stole his ability to speak. He forewarns the reader that he will not tell his story chronologically. He finally introduces himself as Mike at the end of the first chapter.

Chapter 2 begins in September, 1999 outside Philadelphia with Mike riding his bicycle to his first real job with the Blue Crew. He alludes to his pagers, but these are not fully explained until later in the novel. The fact that the Blue Crew is prepared for the job demonstrates their professionalism as indicated by the Ghost who obviously trained Mike, though he is not yet described. Mike is very good at his job as a safecracker as shown by the quickness with which he opens the safe. The Blue Crew are surprised by Mike's youth and his inability to speak, but their only real concern is that he can open the safe. Manhattan and Brooklyn waited for an unknown kid to come from halfway across the country because Mike will leave no trace of his presence. His need for a new identity leads to traveling to New York which foreshadows his adventures while living in the city. The third chapter goes back in time to 1991 in Michigan, shortly after the traumatic event alluded to from his childhood. When Mike is pronounced physically recovered, he is sent to live with his Uncle Lito in Milford, Michigan. Unfortunately, Milford is only 50 miles from his old home which is not far enough away to escape his old life. Mike moves into the back room of Lito's house behind his liquor store. The doctors all say Mike simply decided to stop talking. Mike indicates that the doctors belittle his inability to speak by suggesting he has simply decided to stop speaking. Because he lived behind a liquor store, Mike is frequently asked about robberies, so he describes the only robbery which occurred at the liquor store during the first year he lived with Uncle Lito. When the robber asks Lito about Mike, Lito insists Mike is deaf and dumb, and as Mike sees the scene, he realizes the robber seems scared of the gun, though it is supposed to make him the instant master of the situation; this is a valuable lesson that Mike never forgets. The robber puts the gun to Mike's head, causing Lito to plead for his nephew's life, but Mike has an advantage over both of them because he is not afraid. This parallels a later situation when Mike is also held at gunpoint.



## Section 2: Chapter 4 and 5

### Section 2: Chapter 4 and 5 Summary

In Chapter 4: New York City, late 1999, Mike's new license claims his name is William Michael Smith, and the man who sells him the ID hooks him up with a family who owns a Chinese restaurant and rents out the rooms above the restaurant for cash. All he has are his clothes, art supplies, safe locks and picks, and the five pagers the Ghost gave him to receive jobs. Four of the pagers indicate jobs, but the red pager will always be the man in Detroit, and the Ghost warns Mike to do exactly what he's told or he will die. That night, the yellow pager goes off, and this is the pager anyone can use to reach Mike so the Ghost warned him to proceed with caution. Mike meets three men in a diner in the Bronx, and he nicknames the leader Bigmouth. Bigmouth introduces the other two men as Heckle and Jeckle. Bigmouth tells Mike that his friend works at a fancy uptown bar and found out about a man who has over a million dollars worth of diamonds stashed in a safe in his house in Connecticut. Though he is uneasy about the job, Mike gets in the car because he needs money, and they drive to New Rochelle on New Year's Eve to meet Vinnie who did all the advance work. At the house in Connecticut, they break in, and when Ox shows Mike where the safe is, Mike realizes the safe is unlocked so he sends Ox out of the room for a minute because he does not want them to know they did not need him. He opens the safe and finds over 20 bags filled with glittering stones. When they get back to New York, Mike signals that he has no money so the men collect \$1300 for him now, promising to bring him his share of the theft after they unload the diamonds. Mike pays his rent and goes upstairs to think about Amelia and Lito. The yellow pager wakes Mike in the morning, and when he returns the call, Bigmouth tells him they have a problem.

In Chapter 5: Michigan, 1991-1996, Mike is sent to school at the Higgins Institute for deaf kids and those with communicative disorders. He learns American Sign Language, and psychologists bother him with daily sessions where they tell him they can do whatever he wants. Their big mistake is thinking Mike was too young to process the trauma of June 1990 and not understanding that the memory is his constant companion. After 5 years, they give up on him, and Mike is sent to Milford High School. He is nervous all summer about going to public school. His only distraction is an old lock on the delivery door that Lito replaces. Mike takes the old lock apart and repairs it; he wonders how different his life would be if not for that old lock which allowed him to find the moment when he moves the metal pieces and opens the lock.

### Section 2: Chapter 4 and 5 Analysis

Chapter 4 reverts to New York City in late 1999 as Mike finds an apartment and a new identity which is necessary because he has violated probation in Michigan. Though Mike has not changed his appearance, he is on the run from Michigan VOP and has done his first real job, so there is no turning back. Convinced the police are actively



searching for him, Mike stays inside as much as possible, practicing on his portable safe. By Christmas, Mike is running low on money so he delivers Chinese menus to local buildings so the man who runs the restaurant will keep feeding him. At one building, he catches a man robbing an apartment for anything valuable so he can buy drugs, so he reports it to the doorman. At this point, he describes the five pagers he received from the Ghost, emphasizing the importance of answering the red pager immediately since this is how the man from Detroit will reach him; though this is the first time he mentions the man from Detroit, it is apparent that this man is dangerous and is in charge of Mike's work as a safecracker. When the yellow pager goes off, Mike accepts the job with amateurs because he needs the money, but his interactions with them prove they are amateurs. As they continue on to Connecticut, Mike can tell these men are amateurs, but the chance of a big payoff is better than nothing. He opens the safe and takes the bags to Bigmouth who is at a loss for words when he sees the stones. After the heist on New Year's Eve, Mike draws his day for Amelia, hoping the pages will find their way to her someday. He would give anything to have her with him, even for an hour. This indicates Mike's love for Amelia who has not yet been introduced. At the house in Connecticut, Mike easily opens the safe and is returned to his apartment; however, early the next morning, he receives a page from the amateurs who tell him they have a problem. Returning to Michigan in 1991-1996, Lito buys a gun after the robbery, and though he never talks about it, Mike can tell Lito thinks about the robbery and the strange way Mike reacted to it. Mike describes his feelings of alienation at the Higgins Institute where he learns American Sign Language. He also discusses the error of the psychiatrists in thinking he was too young to process the trauma in June 1990, though it still haunts him in the present as he writes his story. When the Higgins Institute decides to send Mike to public school, he spends the summer in anxiety at the idea of attending a school where he will be even more alienated. His only distraction is learning to pick locks which foreshadows his career path and his associated past since the trauma he experienced at the age of eight is directly related to his interest in learning to open locks and eventually safes.





## Section 3: Chapter 6 and 7

### Section 3: Chapter 6 and 7 Summary

In Chapter 6: Connecticut, New Years Day 2000, Mike returns to the diner that day out of idle curiosity. The men refuse to discuss the situation in the diner, so after they eat, they get in the van where they tell Mike the rocks are fake. They believe the man has a real safe that is better hidden, so they want to go back to Connecticut and try again. At the house, all five men search for the safe, and Mike locates it under a bed. He shoos Bigmouth away as he learns there are five wheels and finds the numbers. As he tries different combinations of 1, 11, 26, 28 and 59, Mike hears popping noises from outside. Through the window, he sees one of the men get shot by a security officer, and when the security officer enters the house, Mike hides in the bathroom. The security guard aims his shotgun at Bigmouth's chest and shoots when Bigmouth reaches for his gun in his belt. Mike charges the guard and runs, but another security guard knocks Mike on the ground and handcuffs him.

In Chapter 7: Michigan, 1996-1999, Mike buys locks from an antique store in Milford and spends the summer practicing. On the Wednesday after Labor Day, he begins high school. No one talks to Mike during his first semester, but his second semester brings art class, and his teacher, Mr. Martie, does not single him out. Mr. Martie watches Mike draw a railroad bridge in the center of town; "so began the only good and decent chapter in [his] life" (page 52). After Mike changes his schedule to take a double period of Advanced Independent Study in Art, he makes a friend, Griffin King, who thinks it is cool that Mike cannot talk. During Mike's junior year and Griffin's senior year, Mike becomes interested in combination locks like the one on his gym locker, so he buys some combination locks from the antique store and begins practicing on them. The week of the big football game against Lakeland in November, Brian Hauser, the school's best football player, cannot open his new lock to change for practice, and Griffin claims Mike can open the lock. Brian mocks Mike until he opens the lock and writes the combination down for Brian.

### Section 3: Chapter 6 and 7 Analysis

Chapter 6 returns to Connecticut on New Years Day in 2000 when Mike meets the amateurs the next day to learn that the rocks they stole were fake and they want to return to the house in Connecticut to find the real diamonds. Though Mike can hear the Ghost warning him to walk away, he cannot because they are driving on the expressway so he lets it run out because sometimes you have to learn the hard way. At the house, the amateurs are killed by security guards who capture and handcuff Mike. During Mike's first semester of high school, his teachers make him stand out by introducing him to the class and explaining his unique circumstances. Luckily, Mike learns he is artistically gifted during his second semester, and he is also befriended by Griffin King. Griffin learns some sign language so they can communicate, and the other



students treat Mike differently because now he is the quiet kid who can draw. Griffin encourages Mike to ask out Nadine, a new girl in their art class, but Mike is scared of the silence. Mike wishes he could end his story there, but it would not be true by a long shot. Mike states that it all begins with opening Brian's gym locker; Mike "hadn't learned that some talents cannot be forgiven. Ever" (page 59). This foreshadows how Brian will negatively affect Mike's life as a result of learning about Mike's talent at opening locks.



## Section 4: Chapter 8 and 9

### Section 4: Chapter 8 and 9 Summary

In Chapter 8: Connecticut, January 2000, the security guard handcuffs Mike to the sink while he checks on his partner, Ron. Seeing how simple the handcuffs are, Mike cuts a thin strip of aluminum from a soda can and uses it to pick the lock on the handcuffs. He runs out of the house and cuts through the woods. At the train station, he asks a cab driver to take him to the city, acknowledging that it will be expensive. During the ride, he worries the dispatcher will call with his description, but he returns safely to his room where he finds the white pager beeping.

In Chapter 9: Michigan, June 1999, the last day of school is a big deal because Griffin is going away to art school, and Mr. Martie tells Mike that art schools are already asking about him. That evening, Mike and Griffin go to Brian Hauser's house where a crowded party is going on. Asking to talk to Mike privately, Brian leads him to a room where Trey Tollman and Danny Farrelly, two more football players, are waiting, and they ask if Mike can open other kinds of locks. When Mike asks for a pin, Brian gives him a safety pin and asks him to pick the lock on the door. Afterward, when Mike goes outside with Griffin, Brian, Trey and Danny follow because they want his help with their awesome idea; they want to play a joke on someone. They drive to Lake Sherwood to the home of Adam Marsh, Brian's archrival from Lakeland High because they want to leave a Milford banner in his room. Ignoring Griffin's suggestion that they stay in the kitchen as lookouts, Mike walks into the living room and watches the aquarium until it bursts because Trey smashes it with an iron poker from the fireplace. Mike runs water and puts the fish in the sink before going upstairs to look around. In a girl's bedroom, he finds an art portfolio and is mesmerized by the drawings. The last drawing is a self-portrait of the girl, and this is the first time Mike sees Amelia. When he hears tires outside, Mike runs out the back door and is tackled by two policemen. Since he is unable to answer their questions, the police take Mike to the police station.

### Section 4: Chapter 8 and 9 Analysis

Chapter 8 returns to Connecticut in January 2000 where the security officer pushes Mike inside the house where his partner, Ron, stands in the foyer with his gun pointed at Mike's chest. Ron surveys the damage while his partner phones the police, warning them the scene is horrific but the last suspect is in custody. As Ron mutters to himself, his partner handcuffs Mike to a sink. While the guard checks on his partner, Mike picks the lock on the handcuffs and escapes. In June 1999, Mike and Griffin attend a classmate's party where Nadine flirts with and kisses Mike. When the girls decide to go to a different party, Mike and Griffin accompany them. Interested in Mike's ability to open locks, Brian Hauser turns the music off and everyone chants as Mike picks the lock using the safety pin and a screwdriver. Mike cannot find Nadine after the demonstration, and Brian and his buddies convince Mike and Griffin to go to the Marshes' house to play



a prank on Brian's archrival from Lakeland High. When Mike unlocks the back door, Brian grows nervous, but Trey encourages him. Trey destroys the Marshes' aquarium, but Mike saves the fish, demonstrating his caring nature. Mike is mesmerized by a self-portrait he finds in Amelia's room, though he does not yet know Amelia, and unfortunately, this leads to Mike being left behind by Brian, Griffin and Trey which results in Mike being arrested.



## Section 5: Chapter 10

### Section 5: Chapter 10 Summary

In Chapter 10: Los Angeles, January 2000, Mike shaves his hair and buys glasses and new clothes before going to the bus station the next morning, so he looks like a completely different person. He packs his belongings and takes the bus to Los Angeles. On the third morning, four attractive young men and women knock on the door, introducing themselves as Julian, Ramona, Gunnar and Lucy. Doubting Mike's ability to open a safe, Gunnar wants to see him do it first, so Ramona lets Mike drive her Harley, and they ride to a modest house on Grant Street where the four live together. Julian leads Mike into a secret room behind the bookcase to test if he can open the safe which is the exact model as the safe they are breaking into. When Mike plays with the dial and writes down the combination, Lucy nearly cries because she tried to study under the Ghost but did not have the touch. "It's just something you can do. Or can't do" (page 91).

### Section 5: Chapter 10 Analysis

After changing his appearance, Mike makes the long journey to California since the white pager is what the Ghost refers to as "money in the bank" (page 84). Mike goes to a nice motel in the Glendale area as instructed and catches up on his ongoing story for Amelia. When Mike shows them his license, Julian immediately recognizes it as a fake. Mike points to them to ask who they are, and Julian says the Ghost was skeptical the first time he met them too, but they have made a lot of money for the Ghost and the man from Detroit. Inside, Julian claims Mike is perfect, like a piece of art. Julian explains he met the other three when he spent a month in a youth program after getting two DUIs. He has been with Ramona ever since, and they reconnected with Gunnar and Lucy after they got off drugs. The four of them live in the house together. At the White Crew's house, Mike proves that he can open the safe. When Lucy nearly cries because she does not have the touch necessary to open safes, Mike wishes he could teach her to open safes in that moment, but Julian reminds her she is with them for a reason. Lucy's jealousy of Mike foreshadows her hatred and sexual interest in him. It is time to get into character, so Julian pulls out a map of Los Angeles to show Mike which part they will own tonight.



## Section 6: Chapter 11 and 12

### Section 6: Chapter 11 and 12 Summary

In Chapter 11: Michigan, June and July 1999, Mike sits in the back of the cop car for the first time, studying the handcuffs and wondering how hard it would be to open them. After processing him, they place him in a holding cell while they call Lito. Mike is eventually taken to an interview room to meet with his lawyer who wants to know who was with him and why he broke into the Marshes' home, but she agrees to talk to Mike the following day since he is unwilling to tell her anything for fear of getting Griffin in trouble. The next morning, they meet with the lawyer who tells them Brian is suspected to be one of Mike's accomplices, but Brian's father is a State Trooper who swears Brian was home all night, so no one is anxious to see the case go further. Mike is looking at a year of probation, community service and then disposition of the charges. A few days later, the judge assigns Mike to work for Mr. Marsh that summer as restitution. The next day, Mike drives to the Marshes' house, and in the office, Mr. Marsh explains how angry he is because he feels violated and the break-in scared his daughter. Mr. Marsh wants Mike to tell him who else was involved, but when Mike refuses, he leads Mike outside "to do this the hard way" (page 106).

In Chapter 12: Los Angeles, January 2000, the White Crew puts their motorcycles in the garage, and they drive to Hollywood Hills in an understated gray Saab. Parking past the guardhouse on a private gated road, Gunnar disappears into the brush at the edge of the road while Ramona and Julian track his progress. Once Gunnar reports that he is safely inside the house, Mike, Julian, Lucy and Ramona leave and go shopping in Beverly Hills to dress Mike for the night's events. After Julian, Lucy and Ramona dress, they drive to Hollywood and stop at a club off Sunset Boulevard where they sit at a private, roped-off table. A man leans into their cage, and Julian introduces Mike as Mikhail from Moscow to Wesley, the owner of the club, claiming Mikhail does not speak English. Now that they know Wesley is on the premises, Lucy and Mike leave the table.

### Section 6: Chapter 11 and 12 Analysis

When Mike is arrested, the police think he is deaf, but at the station, the sign language interpreter explains he can hear. After a brief meeting with his lawyer during which Mike refuses to reveal his accomplices, he is sent home. At home, Lito does not yell at Mike, and instead, he states he did not realize it was so bad for Mike. Since Brian's father is a State Trooper and swears Brian was not involved with breaking into the Marshes' house, Mike's lawyer agrees that he should not reveal his accomplices, and Mike is sentenced to a year of probation and a summer of working as restitution to Mr. Marsh. About two weeks after the crime, Griffin stops by to see Mike. He feels guilty and offers to turn himself in, but Mike insists it is not necessary. As Griffin leaves, Mike realizes his only friend will never feel comfortable around him again because of his guilt. On Mike's first day of working for Mr. Marsh, Mr. Marsh is angry that Mike will not relinquish the



names of his accomplices and sets Mike to work digging a pool in his backyard. When Mr. Marsh claims Mike frightened Amelia by breaking into their home, Mike is very bothered by the idea of scaring Amelia. The White Crew drives to a gated community in Hollywood Hills, and while Gunnar sneaks into a house in the gated community, Lucy sets up the jack to look like they are changing a tire in case anyone drives by. They wait and watch until Gunnar calls Julian's cell phone to tell them he is in and he is alright. After getting dressed in nice clothes, Mike, Julian, Ramona and Lucy travel to a nightclub where Mike wonders what the club has to do with the job. The owner, Wesley, greets them, and after Wesley leaves, Julian tells Mike that Wesley thinks Mike is beautiful, making Mike relieved he cannot speak so he will not say the wrong thing. After Julian confirms that Wesley is the man they are taking down tonight, Mike and Lucy leave to return to Gunnar.



## Section 7: Chapter 13 and 14

### Section 7: Chapter 13 and 14 Summary

In Chapter 13: Michigan, July 1999, Mr. Marsh leads Mike into the backyard, hands him a shovel and points to a large rectangle of twine. He expects Mike to dig a swimming pool. He shows Mike the faucet for water, tells him to use the bathroom in the woods, and warns him not to enter the house unless invited. Furthermore, Mr. Marsh forbids Mike to even look at Amelia. When he leaves, Mike starts digging, splashing water on his face as he works because it is hot. Feeling nauseous, Mike reaches for the jug of water and sees Amelia for the first time in real life. She tells him she has heard about him but does not believe he cannot talk if he wants to. As she suggests they could share stories of bad things they saw as children, Mr. Marsh runs across the yard and yells at Amelia to stay away from Mike. The next morning, Mr. Marsh is waiting with a locksmith, Mr. Randolph, who does not believe Mike picked the lock. Mr. Randolph lets Mike use his tools, and Mike quickly unlocks the door and returns to digging. Two hours later, when Amelia insists he can talk, Mike pulls out a pencil and notebook which he brought in case she talked to him again. After he writes that he really cannot talk, Amelia asks for the pencil and paper, but she is interrupted when Zeke, her boyfriend, chides her for talking to the criminal. Amelia crumples the paper and throws it on the ground before leaving with Zeke, and Mike reads, "When's the last time you tried" (page 126). At home that night, he draws a portrait of Amelia after much effort, and the next morning, he decides to hide it in the woods so he can retrieve it if she happens to stop by. Mr. Marsh is waiting with Mr. Randolph again, and they show him a new lock with serrated pins. Mike is unable to open the lock, and they refuse to let him try again.

In Chapter 14: Los Angeles, January 2000, Lucy and Mike return to Laurel Canyon Boulevard, and Lucy makes Mike change into black coveralls and sneakers. At the house, Gunnar lets Mike inside and warns him to move slowly because the house is installed with infrared neutralizers which is why Gunnar has the heat on so high. Gunnar leads Mike to a second room where the safe is located, and after Mike opens the safe, they stick the money in a bag. Noticing it is quieter because the furnace turned off, they start walking, and when the light flashes red as they near the sensor, they stop until the light goes off before proceeding more slowly. Outside, Gunnar calls Lucy, and she drives them back to Sunset Boulevard.

### Section 7: Chapter 13 and 14 Analysis

A little while after Mike begins digging, Mr. Marsh returns to taunt Mike that he cannot do this alone, but Mike still refuses to reveal his accomplices. During his first day of work, Mike meets Amelia face-to-face for the first time when she accuses him of being able to speak if he wants to. When Mike goes home from the Marshes' house the first evening, he tries to draw Amelia from memory but is unable to do so. The next day, Amelia asks why Mike is doing this since they will never use the pool anyway. Mike





decides he needs to find a way to show Amelia he is not a criminal or a freak, and his only chance is to draw something for her. When he fails to open the lock with serrated pins, Mike cannot breathe as he walks away; it is the first time he has tried to open a lock and failed. Before sending Mike to the mark's house, Lucy informs him that Gunnar will call her when they are done, but she tells Mike to call if Gunnar cannot and she will rescue them. Lucy kisses Mike and pushes him toward the wall of the canyon as she tells him she hates him but he is beautiful, fulfilling the earlier foreshadowing that she would hate him and further foreshadowing her sexual attraction to Mike. In the house, Mike and Gunnar are very careful not to set off the man alarms that Wesley has set throughout the house to prevent burglary, and after a few scares, they reach the street and call Lucy who drives them back to the club. Gunnar takes the car and leaves Mike and Lucy to return to the club to finish the plan. Before returning to the club, Lucy musses her hair so she matches Mike, and they return to the club for Phase 2 as Gunnar drives the car home.



## Section 8: Chapter 15 and 16

### Section 8: Chapter 15 and 16 Summary

In Chapter 15: Michigan, June 1999, Mike's day worsens when Amelia comes outside and sits on the patio instead of coming to talk to him. She is soon joined by Zeke and another couple, and when he finally looks up, they are all drawing him. At the end of the day, Mike buries the portrait of Amelia in the dirt pile. He cannot sleep because of the thought that the lock beat him, so at 2 A.M., Mike sneaks out and drives to the Marshes' house, retrieves the envelope with the portrait and picks the lock to the back door. He puts the unsigned drawing on Amelia's dresser and leaves. As soon as Mike gets to the Marshes' backyard the next morning, Zeke runs out and yells at him to stay away from Amelia. A few hours later, a man around Mr. Marsh's age comes outside and talks to Mike about his digging and his ability to keep his mouth shut. At home, Mike designs a comic strip for Amelia of their first meeting. He breaks into the Marshes' house and leaves the comic strip on Amelia's dresser, but he does not see her the whole next day. As he leaves, Mike finds the envelope with an additional page which Amelia drew showing her ignoring Zeke and thinking about Mike. At home, Mike draws the next day, but he allows himself to talk in the comic. Rather than breaking into her house every night, he decides to leave the envelope on his dashboard so Amelia will find it, but his plan unravels when he finds Amelia, Zeke and the other couple sitting on the patio. Near the end of the day, a drunk Mr. Marsh watches Mike work and comments on the irony that though many men work for him, "the one guy doing the best job is the juvenile delinquent who has to do it for free" (page 152), promising to come up with something more rewarding for Mike to do the next day. Page 4 of the comic strip shows the artists drawing Mike as Amelia thinks he has more talent than any of them and then shows Amelia breaking up with Zeke. The final panel reveals Amelia thinking about Mike being in her room two nights in a row and lamenting his cruelty by not coming last night. At home, he draws himself in the bottom corner with a big dream bubble in which he draws Amelia as he sees her in his dreams.

In Chapter 16: Los Angeles, January 2000, Mike and Lucy return to the club and rejoin the others, including Wesley, at the table. Julian explains that Mikhail had to tend to business, and now it is time to do business. Wesley says he just needs to hit the ATM, and when Wesley returns outraged, he and Julian argue for a bit before Julian, Mike, Lucy and Ramona leave and go to another club to celebrate. Mike feels connected to Julian, Ramona, Lucy and Gunnar in a way he hasn't since Amelia.

### Section 8: Chapter 15 and 16 Analysis

Mike did not think his day could get worse after failing to open the Marshes' new lock, but it did two hours later when Amelia and her friends sit on the back patio and draw him. Though Mike is thirsty, he does not dare go near them to the faucet. He continues working as they all laugh. It all seems to come back to that lock as though things would



have turned out differently if he had been able to open it. He buries the portrait of Amelia, but that night, he is unable to sleep so he returns to the Marshes' house and retrieves the portrait. Mike sneaks inside and goes to Amelia's room where he picks another lock. As he drives to the Marshes' house the next morning, he knows that either Amelia showed her father the picture or she kept it to herself, at least for now. Amelia speaks to Mike briefly until they are interrupted by her boyfriend, Zeke, at whom she looks exasperated, but then she looks over her shoulder at Mike as they walk away; it is not much, but it is all Mike needs. At home that night, Mike tries to decide what to draw for Amelia, and recalling her first words to him, he designs a comic strip of their first meeting, ending with his thought that "If she asked me to, I would dig this hole to the center of the earth... God, that's ridiculous. But I think it's true" (page 146). He breaks into the Marshes' house to leave the comic on Amelia's dresser again, and he finds an envelope with the second page detailing their first meeting in his car the next day; Amelia has begun to communicate with Mike through drawing comic strips. Amelia's friends are with her again the next day, but when the other couple leaves, Zeke confronts Mike but leaves when Mike points the shovel blade at his neck. Near the end of the day, Mr. Marsh admits he does not need a pool and asks Mike to shake on being friends. There is no envelope in Mike's car, but he hears a window shut and sees the envelope fall through the air, so he retrieves the envelope. After reading that Amelia likes him as he likes her, Mike can barely breathe as he drives, and at home, he does not know what to draw or what might happen if he slips into her room again. Back at the club, Wesley says he just needs to hit the ATM when Julian says it is time for business, and the setup becomes clear to Mike; Julian makes the target put money in his safe by finding out what he wants and telling him he can have it, then while the mark watches, Julian sets up the deal, Mike and Gunnar rob his safe. As they toast while Wesley retrieves his money, Julian tells Mike that now they must be more outraged than Wesley when he realizes his money is gone. After an exaggerated argument between Julian and Wesley, Mike leaves the club with the White Crew, and they go to another club where Lucy gropes Mike, and though he knows it is part of the act, it still affects him. Lucy tells him "you're one of us now. You belong to us" (page 160).



## Section 9: Chapter 17 and 18

### Section 9: Chapter 17 and 18 Summary

In Chapter 17: Michigan, July 1999, Mike waits until 2 A.M. before sneaking over to Amelia's house where he finds the back door and the door to Amelia's room unlocked, causing him to worry it's a setup since it seems too good to be true. When Amelia looks at Mike's drawing of her as a mermaid, she is amazed and asks how he knew she has always had a thing about being a mermaid before inviting him to kiss her. After they make love, she tells him it is ridiculous for him to sneak into her room in the middle of the night anymore, even though she likes it. The next morning, Mike fears Amelia will tell him it is all a mistake, but when he arrives, he does not see her, though there is a strange car in the driveway. He is surprised to find Mr. Marsh and his probation officer standing under a large white tent in the backyard, discussing the project as Mr. Marsh praises Mike's hard work. After the probation officer leaves, Mr. Marsh tells Mike that Amelia informed him Mike is an amazing artist; therefore, Mr. Marsh now wants Mike to spend him time with Amelia, drawing or whatever else they want. Mike waits for the catch, but Mr. Marsh only invites him to stay for a family barbeque after work tonight to meet his partner at his health club, Mr. Slade. Mr. Marsh wants Mike to demonstrate his skills for Mr. Slade after the barbeque. Mike has no clue what Mr. Marsh wants him to do, but he had played the Amelia card perfectly so he had Mike now.

In Chapter 18: Los Angeles and Monterey, early 2000, Julian and the gang give Mike a beautiful Harley-Davidson Sportster when he turns 18 in February 2000. Mike moves into the little apartment attached to their garage which is the closest thing he has had to a real home since setting out on his own. Julian and Ramona run a wine store, Gunnar owns a tattoo parlor, and Lucy paints during the days. Lucy practices on the safe in the back room for the rest of the month, and though Mike tries to help her, there is no way to make her feel it no matter how hard she tries. When the yellow pager goes off on February 1st, the man introduces himself as Harrington Banks and asks if Mike remembers meeting him at the junk store in Detroit. He claims Mike has gotten himself in too deep and Banks can help him. Mike hangs up and takes the batteries out of the yellow pager. Gunnar grows restless and claims Julian takes too long to set up each score, but Julian is careful in developing contacts. His failed attempt to rob the man from Detroit is why Julian is so careful now. A month later, the next score finally comes together. Julian, Lucy and Ramona have dinner at the man's house, and when they go leave the house with the owner, Gunnar and Mike break in and rob his safe.

### Section 9: Chapter 17 and 18 Analysis

As Mike returns to the Marshes' house and places the envelope on her dresser, Amelia summons him to her bed, telling him she has been waiting for something like this to happen since she first saw him. They hear Mr. Marsh get up to use the bathroom, so they are silent until he returns to his room, and then Amelia undresses both of them and



leads Mike to her bed. She keeps the envelope since it is her turn to draw for him and kisses him goodnight. Mike's whole world changes overnight, and he wishes his story could end there, but prison teaches him that dreaming about how he wishes things were only makes him feel worse when he wakes up. Mr. Marsh wants Mike to meet Mr. Slade because they have a lot going on lately, and Mike has a lot of skills that might be able to help them. As Amelia joins them, Mr. Marsh tells Mike to consider his proposed adjustment to their work agreement, but Amelia does not look convinced since she knows her father is full of it at least half the time. Mr. Marsh tells Mike and Amelia to run along and do their art.

In Chapter 18, it is obvious that Mike has been accepted by the White Crew when they give him a Harley Sportster for his eighteenth birthday and allow him to move into the apartment attached to their garage. Julian spends his days in his wine store which is how he meets most of his contacts, and it also provides him a way to launder some of the money. Ramona spends a lot of time at the store too, Gunnar has a tattoo shop in Santa Monica where he spends his time if he is not working out in the backyard, and Lucy has not found her daytime calling yet, but she tries painting at that point, so Mike spends a lot of time with her. When she sees him sketching, she finds another reason to hate him. Mike becomes Robin James Agnew after Julian convinces his friend's young neighbor to loan Mike his identity for a monthly fee. One day, the green pager which has not gone off in years beeps, but the man on the line curses and hangs up when Mike does not answer his question about being the Ghost. He only miscalculated once when the man from Detroit came to his store and told him about his annual yacht trip along the west coast, bragging about the \$4,000,000 he has on board. Julian had arranged to deliver wine to the yacht, and while Ramona distracted the men, Julian found the safe, but Sleepy Eyes caught him. The man from Detroit heard the White Crew was good and needed to see for himself. He lets them go, giving them the Ghost's contact information. Lucy tried to learn from the Ghost but was unsuccessful. Mike has difficulty opening the safe because he has not been practicing enough lately. As they bag the money, Mike sees headlights through the window so they leap through the window and rush back to the car. At the car, Gunnar warns Mike to stay away from Lucy because she is the only person Gunnar has ever loved. Mike makes himself two promises: to stay away from Lucy and to practice opening safes more often.



## Section 10: Chapter 19 and 20

### Section 10: Chapter 19 and 20 Summary

In Chapter 19: Michigan, July 1999, Amelia asks Mike to teach her some sign language so they can communicate, and then they sit on her bed and draw each other sketching one another. At the barbeque, Mike sits on the picnic table with Amelia who warns him not to believe they are the nice, normal family they appear to be. When it is time to say goodnight, Mr. Marsh calls Mike to his office where he hands Mike a leather case of lock picking tools and asks him to show Mr. Slade what he can do with them now. They are impressed when Mike unlocks the back door, and after he proves he can also open a padlock, they think "he" can use Mike. The next morning, Uncle Lito presents Mike with a Yamaha 850 Special, a helmet and a black leather jacket. After Lito shows him how to use it, Mike spends the morning riding, and he buys an extra helmet for Amelia because he wants her to share this feeling with him. No one answers when Mike knocks on the Marshes' front door, so he goes in and to Amelia's room. She tells him today is the fifth anniversary of her mother's suicide. Then, she confides that some men came and took her father away about an hour ago because he is in a lot of trouble. A car pulls up, and three men, Sleepy Eyes, Fishing Hat and Tall Mustache, get out with Mr. Marsh. Amelia angrily yells at her father for getting involved in this kind of stuff again before storming into the house. Mr. Marsh tells Mike that he owes these people a lot of money, and since they could hurt him or Amelia, he needs Mike to visit a man called the Ghost in Detroit. At West Side Recovery, an older man opens the door and introduces himself as the Ghost. He leads Mike to a clearing in the back where eight safes are arranged in a circle with the locks facing inward. The Ghost angrily escorts Mike to his bike when he realizes the boy cannot open the safe. When Mike reaches the Marshes' house, Amelia wants to know where he went and what he is doing for her father. She claims she cannot be here anymore and tries to push past Mike, but he grabs her and leads her to his new motorcycle. Though he knows he cannot take her away permanently, Mike can take them far from here for a few hours so they set off down the street.

In Chapter 20: Los Angeles, Arizona, July, August, September 2000, the green pager sends Mike to a gas station in Scottsdale, AZ, but no one arrives so he returns home without profit. Gunnar begins teaching Mike how to properly work out, and they work out together every other day. On one such day, Gunnar confides that he wants to take down the man from Detroit when he comes through California on his boat this summer. Gunnar has a contact on the boat who can help, and though Mike insists it is suicide, Gunnar brings it up every time they are alone. Near the end of the month, Banks pages Mike again on the green pager. Banks now knows that Mike cannot speak, and he tells him the guys from Arizona are now out of the game and soon everyone will be, but Mike still has choices. In September, Lucy looks through Mike's drawings one day, and when she finds the drawing of Amelia, she instantly knows this is the girl Mike loves. Lucy kisses him and undresses, but it is over too quickly, and as they lay in Mike's bed, he hears beeping from under the bed. He looks in the box, and since it is the red pager,



Mike thinks, "It's the master calling. If you'll excuse me, I have to run barking all the way home" (page 204).

## Section 10: Chapter 19 and 20 Analysis

When Mr. Marsh suggests a new work arrangement in which Mike spends his days doing art with Amelia, Mike knows the catch is coming but does not care because he is allowed to spend time with Amelia with her father's approval. When she asks Mike if he will take her away if she requests it, he feels lightheaded as though anything could happen tonight. As dark approaches, Mr. Slade, who Mike recognizes as the man who watched him dig the one day, arrives, and Mr. Marsh introduces Mike to his partner. Mr. Marsh wants Mike to show Mr. Slade what he can do, but they are interrupted when Amelia returns to Mike. Mr. Marsh and Mr. Slade think Mike might be their ticket out of hell after seeing his ability at opening locks. At home, Mike wonders what he has gotten himself into; he "didn't know that once you've proven yourself useful to the wrong people, you'll never be free again" (page 187). When Amelia knocks the hat off one man's head, Mike interferes, but Sleepy Eyes watches Mike through the back window as they drive away. He urges Mike to open one, and Mike is unsure how to communicate that he does not know how and was sent here by mistake by two idiots. As he drives away, Mike honestly believes he will never return. She believes she is Mike's prize and warns him her father will drag them both down. Mike gets on the bike and waits until Amelia climbs on the back and tells him to take her far away. The White Crew return to their normal daily business as summer arrives, and since Lucy begins spending a lot of time at Gunnar's tattoo shop, Mike spends a lot of time alone, drawing, practicing and riding his bike through the city. After driving to Arizona for a job for which no one shows up, Mike returns to California to find Julian and Gunnar fighting about money, so Mike slaps the few twenties he has against Gunnar's chest and walks out. Warning Mike that he will not be able to help him for much longer, Banks tells Mike that Lito is worried and wants him to come home. As he starts to give Mike an address to meet him, Mike hangs up and walks back to the house. Lucy tells Mike how hard it was for her to get off drugs, but when she touches his throat and ponders why he cannot talk, he pushes her away; he could not even talk for Amelia though he tried so hard. After Mike sleeps with Lucy, the red pager goes off, signifying that he must respond immediately since it is the man from Detroit.





## Section 11: Chapter 21 and 22

### Section 11: Chapter 21 and 22 Summary

In Chapter 21: Michigan, July 1999, Mr. Marsh introduces Mike to "another business associate" (page 206) who claims he has heard good things about Mike. He further explains that Mr. Marsh and Mr. Slade have obligations they are not fulfilling, but while Mr. Slade seems to have disappeared, Mr. Marsh is facing his responsibilities so the man is willing to work with him; however, he has nothing of value except Mike, so the man wants Mike to give it another try with Mr. G. When he insinuates that Mike would be helping Amelia, he registers Mike's reaction and is happy they are all on the same page now. Mike does not find Amelia in her room, and Sleepy Eyes tells him that daddy sent her away. Mike returns to West Side Recovery where Mr. G is sarcastic about giving him another chance. Since Mike knows nothing about opening safes, the Ghost asks what he can do, and when Mike pantomimes picking locks, the Ghost provides a cylinder with a key lock and has Mike open it. After resetting the combination, the Ghost tells Mike to work on it while he goes to lunch, and he sends it home with Mike that night to practice as homework. That night, Mr. Marsh explains he sent Amelia somewhere safe because the men might kill Mr. Marsh, Amelia and Adam. He knows it is a terrible thing to put on Mike, but he has no choice.

In Chapter 22: Ohio, September 2000, Mike calls the number back immediately because the Ghost had made the rules about the red pager very clear. The voice on the phone tells him to be in Cleveland in 2.5 days but not to fly because things are very hot right now. On Friday morning, Mike drives to the bar and sees the same long, black car from Michigan. They drive to a farmhouse outside of Chagrin Falls, OH, and when they knock on the door, Sleepy Eyes punches the assemblyman in the stomach. Sleepy Eyes orders Tall Moustache and Fishing Hat to find the safe, and when they find the safe in the basement, Sleepy Eyes pushes the assemblyman down the stairs. The three men argue as Sleepy Eyes continues to beat the assemblyman who finally tells them the combination. After extracting the money, Sleepy Eyes shoots the assemblyman in the head before turning to kill his partners because they were secretly meeting with FBI agents. Sitting on his bike for a long time, Mike thinks, "I will never be free of this... There is no way out" (page 225). Contemplating the long trip back to California, Mike realizes this may be his last chance. Two hours later, he is in Michigan.

### Section 11: Chapter 21 and 22 Analysis

The same long black car is parked outside the Marshes' house the next day, and inside the house, Sleepy Eyes tells Mike that Mr. Marsh and another man, the man from Detroit, are waiting for him in the office. The man from Detroit knows things did not go well when Mike visited Mr. G, but since he is impressed that Mike refused to give up his accomplices, he suggests that Mr. G can be abrupt at times. He persuades Mike to visit the Ghost and try learning again by threatening Amelia. At West Side Recovery, the





Ghost tells Mike that his eyesight is going, his hands shake and his daughter's husband ran out on her and their children which is all Mike needs to know about him. After Mike opens a lock, the Ghost resets it, mocking Mike for working so slowly, and he pulls out a padlock, telling Mike to feel for the sticky points; "either you can feel it or you can't" (page 213). Mike visits the Marshes' house that evening and finds Amelia still is not there. He enters the office where Mr. Marsh informs him that he sent Amelia away for her safety, but he promises to send Mike's regards and put in a good word for Mike when he talks to her. Mr. Marsh thanks Mike for helping him get out of debt with the man from Detroit. In response to the red pager, Mike packs and leaves a note that he will be back in a few days. At a hotel in Nebraska, Banks pages Mike again, warning him that he is almost past the point where Banks can help him. Realizing Banks can trace the call, Mike leaves quickly and reaches Cleveland after midnight on Thursday. As they drive down the expressway, Sleepy Eyes, Tall Moustache and Fishing Hat argue about menial things. At the farm in Ohio, Sleepy Eyes informs the assemblyman that Mike is there in case he refuses to give them the combination or they kill him first. Mike tries to detach himself as though he is not really there. Sleepy Eyes suggests a race: Mike will try to open the safe while he tries to get the combination first. Mike wonders how big of a head start he can get if he runs. After Mike opens the safe and they extract the money, Sleepy Eyes offers his gun to Mike since he got off easy with the safe, but when Mike refuses to touch the gun, he shoots the assemblyman before shooting his two partners, Fishing Hat and Tall Moustache. Sleepy Eyes kills his partners for talking to the FBI, and he recommends Mike decline the invitation if anyone like that ever contacts him. When he drops Mike off at the bar, Sleepy Eyes tells him it is good to remember who they both work for and to keep the pager close because they will be talking again soon. Thinking about how close he is to Michigan, Mike decides this may be his last chance to visit his home.



## Section 12: Chapter 23

### Section 12: Chapter 23 Summary

In Chapter 23: Michigan, July, August 1999, Mike's only way to bring Amelia back is to learn how to open safes, so he practices all night and finally opens it. The next morning, he shows the Ghost that he has figured out how to open the lock, so the Ghost throws him a new lock and leads him outside, but he is irritated to see that Mike still has not opened the new lock. After explaining the artistry of opening a safe instead of forcing entry, the Ghost takes Mike to his circle of safes and compares a safe to a woman's heart: one must understand her in order to open her. He removes the panel from the locking mechanism and shows Mike how the notches line up perfectly by using the correct combination. No matter how hard he tries, Mike cannot feel it that day or for several more. Mike returns to Detroit and resumes practicing until one day, while the Ghost leaves Mike alone while he runs errands, a man comes to the shop, introduces himself as Harrington Banks and asks for the owner. Mike forgets to tell the Ghost because later that afternoon, he hears a distracting beeping noise, and when he shows the Ghost the box of pagers that was beeping, the Ghost tells him to leave because company is coming over. After an altercation with Zeke, Mike begins to feel it, so he returns to West Side Recovery, pushes past the Ghost and, at the safes, listens as he spins, imagining that he hears someone breathing inside. Mike pulls the handle and opens the safe; Amelia comes home the next day.

### Section 12: Chapter 23 Analysis

Mike is diligent in his practice with the Ghost because opening the safe is the only way for him to bring Amelia home. One day, the Ghost retrieves a dolly from the storage room containing a safe that has been torn apart. He is appalled by the damage done through forced entry, and after explaining the various means of forced entry to Mike, the Ghost claims such men cannot face the challenge of a safe on its own terms. Making Mike wheel the safe back into storage, he points out how heavy it is and tells Mike to imagine the difficulty of stealing the safe to break it open at home. He shows Mike how to picture the notches while turning the dial to figure out how many wheels there are and find the contacts areas for each wheel to get the numbers in the combination. Then, he tries those numbers in various orders until he gets the correct combination. He takes a break one day to go to an appointment with his probation officer who reminds him school is about to start and perfect attendance is a part of his probation. When Mike drives by the Marshes' house, he sees Zeke leaving a note and a red rose on the doorstep, and Zeke follows Mike to the liquor store parking lot and hits Mike. Mike hits Zeke, causing Uncle Lito to come outside and ask when Mike started hitting people. In the backroom, Mike works on the practice safe lock the Ghost gave him as sirens approach. Mike can finally feel it, and after he demonstrates to the Ghost that he can open the safe, Amelia comes home the next day.



## Section 13: Chapter 24

### Section 13: Chapter 24 Summary

In Chapter 24: Michigan, September 2000, Mike cannot resist the unexpected chance to see Amelia, though it is strange to be back in Michigan. First, he breaks into Lito's house where he finds a cell phone with only Banks in the contact list, so he steals the phone and leaves a stack of money for his uncle. When he arrives at the Marshes' house, he finds a party in the backyard, but Mr. Marsh claims Mike should not be there, though he owes Mike a lot. Though Mr. Marsh lies that Amelia is studying art in London, Mike realizes she is at the University of Michigan because of the sticker on Mr. Marsh's car. Forty miles later, Mike parks in front of the art building in Ann Arbor, and the lady at the front desk directs him to Amelia's room so he can leave a note; however, Mike waits until Amelia returns. She cries as she reads his pages, and understanding Mike got involved because of her father, she asks why he agreed, but Mike does not want to tell her he did it for her. She asks about what happened to him as a child, swearing she will never see him again if he does not tell her now. Mike offers to show Amelia where it happened instead. They drive to Victoria Street and park in front of the empty house where Mike spent the first eight years of his life. After leading Amelia to the back room, Mike begins drawing on the wall, and after retrieving his art supplies from the bike, Amelia follows behind him, filling in the details.

On June 17, 1990, Mike reads a comic while his mother watches television with her boyfriend, Mr. X. Then, Mike's father comes in the back door and beats Mr. X. He sends Mike to his room while slapping Mom. Mike tries to climb out the window, but the lock is jammed, so he peeks out of his door to see his father raping his mother while Mr. X lays on the floor with his genitals cut off. Mike runs to the spare bedroom and hides in his father's old gun safe, not realizing there is no handle on the inside until he shuts the door. His father finally searches for him, begging him to open the safe and promising it will not hurt because it will be so quick; he wants them to die together. Running out of air, Mike passes out and wakes to hear tires under the safe. His father throws the safe in the river, and Mike passes out as water fills the safe. Amelia cries as she fills in the details of the last panels. Holding Mike for a long time, Amelia asks him to leave the safe at the house. Eventually, Mike takes Amelia back to Ann Arbor where she tells him she tried to stop caring about him after he left, but she still wears the ring he gave her on a chain around her neck. Though they cannot be together now, Mike promises he will find a way to return to Amelia. Halfway back to Los Angeles, Mike decides to take a plane the rest of the way because it may be his last chance to be free.

### Section 13: Chapter 24 Analysis

Once he returns to Michigan, Mike steals a cell phone from his uncle's kitchen counter since the only contact saved in the phone is Harrington Banks, and this foreshadows the usefulness of the phone in Mike's future. At the Marshes' house, Mr. Marsh tells



Mike that Amelia is studying art in London, but as Mike leaves, he sees a University of Michigan sticker on Mr. Marsh's car, and since Adam attends Michigan State, Amelia is the only reason for Mr. Marsh to have a University of Michigan sticker. Mike cannot even blame Mr. Marsh for trying to keep him away from his daughter. Amelia is angry when she learns what Mike has been doing since he left her, and she demands he tell her about his childhood trauma so she can understand why he is the way he is. When they reach Victoria Street, Mike picks the lock and leads Amelia to the extra room in the back of the house, but when she encourages him to draw the events, he realizes there is not enough room on his pad of paper. On the wall, Mike draws the scene of the traumatic event that stole his speech for Amelia, showing how his father murdered his mother and her boyfriend before trying to kill Mike by throwing the safe in which Mike had hidden into the river. Amelia asks what happened next since someone obviously saved Mike, but he was not conscious for that part; "in my own mind, the safe was and always would be at the bottom of the river. With me locked inside forever. That was the only real part for me. As real as anything had ever been real" (page 259). Mike promises Amelia that he will return to her, and halfway to Los Angeles, he decides to take a plane since this may be his last chance to be free, indicating that he is indirectly alerting Banks to his location and foreshadowing his pending encounter with the FBI agent.



## Section 14: Chapter 25

### Section 14: Chapter 25 Summary

In Chapter 25: Michigan, August, September, 1999, Amelia is already home when Mike gets to the Marshes' house that morning, and though she wants Mike to take her out on his bike, Mr. Marsh covers for him, claiming he needs to work in the health club. By the end of the week, Mike is able to open all eight safes at West Side Recovery, and he practices getting better and faster. He visits Amelia every evening. In the middle of August, the Ghost advises Mike to work with people he trusts, to walk away if it feels wrong and to never carry a gun because he is an artist and can call his own shots because there are not many of them left. He explains the pagers to Mike, claiming Mike is ready and giving him the keys to the store which actually belongs to the man from Detroit. Mike continues practicing at West Side Recovery until school reopens. When he gets home after the first day of school, the red pager is going off, and he is told to go to Beaubien Street at 11 P.M. when he returns the call. At the steak house in Detroit, Mike meets up with Sleepy Eyes, Fishing Hat and Tall Moustache who drive him to a check-cashing place. When Mike finally opens the safe to find it empty, a car pulls up, and the three men run outside, leaving Mike alone in front of the empty safe. An older man confronts Mike with a gun, threatening to shoot him if he does not reveal his accomplices, and when Mike remains silent, the man lowers the gun and hugs Mike. The three men return with the Ghost who brags that he told them Mike could open the safe and not talk. After two more days of school, the blue pager goes off, and a man with a thick New York accent gives Mike an address in Pennsylvania. Mike packs and hugs Lito before leaving. Next, he stops at the antique store where he bought his first locks and purchases a diamond ring which he places on Amelia's pillow.

### Section 14: Chapter 25 Analysis

Mike continues practicing to open safes after Amelia returns home. Mike knows that he will be expected to open someone's safe eventually, but he thinks he can walk away after only one. One day, the Ghost decides Mike is ready and gives him advice, the five pagers and the keys to West Side Recovery before leaving to help his daughter in Florida. As Mike takes the pagers and leaves, he notices Banks watching from a parked car across the street, and he considers writing everything down and giving it to Banks before things go further. Instead, Mike goes to see Amelia who is angry because she stopped at the health club where no one has even heard of Mike. She demands to know what Mike is doing for her father, but Mike says he cannot tell her because he is trying to protect her. After receiving a summons from the man from Detroit via the red pager, Mike eats dinner with Amelia who can tell something is obviously going on when he leaves early, and then, he drives to the address he was given to meet Sleepy Eyes, Tall Moustache and Fishing Hat. Mike accompanies them to a check-cashing place where they abandon him when a car pulls up. When Mike does not reveal his accomplices even when the man points a gun at his head, the three men and the Ghost return to



congratulate him. The whole thing is very choreographed, but Mike is relieved that he passed the criminals' test. After the Ghost tells Mike goodbye again, the men lead Mike to a table where the man from Detroit sits, and Sleepy Eyes gives Mike \$500 before showing him Mr. Slade's corpse in the trunk as a reminder of loyalty. Two days later, Mike receives a message on the blue pager which summons him for his first real job. He packs and buys a ring for Amelia which he leaves on her pillow. He considers taking her with him but knows he cannot let any of this touch her. As he leaves her room, Mike thinks "I did all of this for you, Amelia. And now I have to do one more thing" (page 280).



## Section 15: Chapter 26 and 27

### Section 15: Chapter 26 and 27 Summary

In Chapter 26: Los Angeles, September 2000, Julian and Ramona initially refuse to go along with Gunnar's idea because it is suicide, but eventually everyone agrees because \$4,000,000 is too much money to turn down and it is possible to get away with if they do it just right. When they gain access to the boat, Julian and Ramona set up the bar while Gunnar, Lucy and Mike deliver baskets to each stateroom as a way of searching for the safe. Mike finally locates the safe behind the door at the end of the hall, but he is distraught when he realizes it is an electronic safe which requires a computer to break into; however, as Mike places a basket in the man from Detroit's room, he grabs the can of talcum powder of the basket and blows it on the touchpad of the safe, revealing fingerprints on four numbers. The girls distract the guards while Mike, Gunnar and Julian load wine crates with money, \$6,000,000 in total. Since there is still \$2,000,000 left in the safe, Gunnar tells Julian to wait with the car while he and Mike retrieve the girls and the rest of the money. As Gunnar and Mike finish packing the money, they hear noises from upstairs, and as a limo pulls up at the gangway, Ramona and Lucy slip away as the guards greet Sleepy Eyes and the man from Detroit as they get out of the limo. They jump into the water from the top level of the boat and wait for the boat to leave the marina before joining the others. They reach the house 2.5 hours later, and Julian worries about the second part of the plan since this is the part they have no control over, but Gunnar assures him that his contact will sell the story. Just after 10 P.M., Gunnar's contact calls, and Gunnar tells the group that the man from Detroit and Sleepy Eyes were fed to the sharks as they wanted. In his apartment, Mike is glad his "days as a safecracker for hire were over. I was free" (page 296).

The next morning, Mike writes Amelia that he is on his way home, deciding they can figure everything out when he gets home since he has money now. After mailing the letter, he drives home to say goodbye to the crew, but he can tell something is wrong as soon as he gets there because things are knocked over and no one is in their rooms. Hearing water running, Mike enters the bathroom and sees Julian and Ramona bent over the tub with their heads blown off. Only one thing left to do, Mike retrieves the cell phone he stole from his uncle's kitchen and calls Banks, but he hangs up when he notices the bookcase door is slightly open. In the hidden room, Mike sees Gunnar kneeling by the safe with Sleepy Eyes standing over him, and Sleepy Eyes points the gun at Mike's chest when he sees him. When he mocks Mike for not realizing he had a traitor in his midst, Mike realizes Sleepy Eyes is Gunnar's contact and they set the whole thing up. When Mike ignores Sleepy Eyes' demand that he open the safe, Sleepy Eyes shoots Gunnar in the head and threatens to riddle Mike with holes until he opens the safe. Just as Mike unlocks the safe, a voice tells Sleepy Eyes to drop the gun. Banks steps into the room with three men behind him, and Sleepy Eyes smiles at Mike before dropping the gun. As the police arrest Sleepy Eyes, Mike can only think that he cannot keep his promise to see Amelia again.





In Chapter 27: Still Locked Up Tight but Another Day Closer, Mike is back to the beginning, in the cage where he has spent nearly ten years. Mike's lawyer got him a deal by playing on his traumatic past and because Mike was able to inform the police about the jobs he had been involved with; they were especially interested in the assemblyman from Ohio. At the age of 19, Mike is sentenced to 10-25 years, but he hopes it will be closer to 10 years. About 4 years after he was locked up, Mike received a page of comic panels from Amelia. The first panel showed her in a wedding dress, and Mike could barely stand the idea that she had moved on with her life, but in the second panel, Amelia cannot stop thinking about him, so she drives to the old house on Victoria Street. There, she walks to the riverbank, takes the dress and dives into the water where her legs become a tail. Amelia swims to the bottom of the river, finds the safe and unlocks the door to reveal Mike as an adult with bars across the door asking her what took her so long. This is how it begins between them again. For 5.5 years, Mike and Amelia have communicated this way, and though it is not easy to be incarcerated, Mike knows he will make it because Amelia is waiting for him. He still has not spoken, and he refuses to try while he is in prison; however, he knows he will something the first time he sees Amelia again.

## Section 15: Chapter 26 and 27 Analysis

Back in California, Mike helps Gunnar convince the rest of the White Crew to plot against the man from Detroit, planning to rob his boat. They spend several days preparing by casing out the marina and organizing the gift baskets, but on the morning of the hit, Gunnar's contact informs him they are heading straight to Mexico instead of docking at Marina del Rey; however, his contact calls again that night to tell Gunnar the boat is docking in San Diego in the morning, so they drive toward San Diego as the sun comes up. On the drive, Gunnar and Julian argue about whether their idea will work until Lucy tells all of them to shut up. When they reach the marina, they retrieve the gift baskets from the trunk but are surprised to find that the boat is different from last year. Still, they approach the guards who allow the men on deck to deliver their gift baskets while the girls stay behind to flirt and serve as a distraction. Gunnar and Julian are in a state of disbelief when Mike tells them the safe is electronic, but they continue their deliveries. Mike blows powder on the keypad of the safe to reveal fingerprints on the combination numbers, and Lucy tells the others to stall while Mike tries eight combinations before the safe opens. When the man from Detroit arrives with his associates, Gunnar and Mike are trapped because they have seen Mike before and will suspect he is robbing them. When they jump from the boat, Mike drops his crate at the bottom of the bay, and he hides against the hull of the ship with Gunnar until the boat's engine starts. When the boat leaves the marina, Gunnar retrieves the crate with \$1,000,000 that Mike dropped. After Gunnar's contact informs them that Sleepy Eyes and the man from Detroit are dead, Mike is relieved to be free of his servitude to the man from Detroit, and he writes Amelia to tell her he will be home soon. He returns to the White Crew's house to say goodbye to his friends but can tell something is wrong immediately. Mike is distraught when he finds Julian and Ramona's corpses in the bathtub, and he assumes someone figured out they stole the money and is hunting them down. Using the cell phone, Mike contacts Banks, fulfilling the earlier





foreshadowing. He notices the door to the secret room is open and enters to find Sleepy Eyes and Gunnar. Mike is upset to learn Gunnar betrayed him, Julian and Ramona, but Gunnar refuses to apologize to Mike because he warned him to stay away from Lucy. When Sleepy Eyes asks about Lucy, Gunnar tells him he sent her away. After Sleepy Eyes shoots Gunnar in the head to convince Mike to open the safe, Mike intentionally mis-spins several times until Sleepy Eyes tells him to quit stalling, and as Mike opens the safe, Banks arrives to rescue him before Sleepy Eyes kills Mike. Banks is glad Mike called, and he stops a policeman from handcuffing Mike, claiming there is no reason to embarrass themselves. The final chapter returns to Mike in jail where he has spent nearly ten years. Mike describes how he got off easy because of his traumatic past and his willingness to inform the police about jobs he had been involved with. Though he has had a lot of time to think about it, he does not regret anything that happened with Amelia, and he would do it all over again if he could be with her. After being incarcerated for four years, Mike receives a comic panel from Amelia. Mike and Amelia use this means of communication for five and a half years, and knowing Amelia is waiting for him makes Mike's time in prison easier. He refuses to try speaking while he is in jail, but he is certain he will speak again when he is reunited with Amelia.

# Characters

## Mike

Mike is the main character and narrator of *The Lock Artist*. While incarcerated, Mike decides to write his story since he has not spoken since he was 8 years old. After robbing a safe in Pennsylvania for the Blue Crew, Mike goes to New York in 1999. After the tragedy in 1990, Mike goes to live with Uncle Lito in Milford, Michigan. Back in 1999, he steals diamonds from a house in Connecticut with a group of amateurs, but they alert him that there is a problem the next day. Mike attends school at the Higgins Institute for those with communicative problems, and the summer before he is sent to public school, he learns to pick locks. Because the diamonds were fake, Mike returns to Connecticut with the amateurs to find the real safe, but the amateurs are killed, and the security officers handcuff Mike. At Milford High School, Mike learns that he is artistically gifted, but he makes a mistake by opening Brian Hauser's gym lock. Mike escapes from the handcuffs in Connecticut and returns to his apartment in New York to find the white pager beeping. When Brian and his buddies convince Mike to break into the Marshes' house to play a prank, only Mike is caught and arrested.

After meeting the White Crew in Los Angeles, Mike proves to them that he can open a safe. Mike does not reveal his accomplices to the judge when he is tried for breaking into the Marshes' house, so he is sentenced to work during the summer for Mr. Marsh who makes him dig a pool because Mike still will not reveal his accomplices. While Gunnar waits in the mark's house, Mike accompanies Julian, Ramona and Lucy to a nightclub where they assure that the mark, Wesley, is at his club. Then, Mike and Lucy leave to rejoin Gunnar. Amelia confronts Mike while he digs in the Marshes' backyard, accusing him of being able to talk. Mr. Marsh and a locksmith make Mike unlock the Marshes' backdoor, and that night, Mike draws a portrait of Amelia and plans to give it to her. At Wesley's house, Mike and Gunnar rob the safe and manage to sneak past the multiple alarms to rejoin Lucy outside and return to the club. After failing to open a lock with serrated pins at the Marshes the next day, Mike's day worsens when he sees Amelia and her friends drawing him. He buries the portrait in the pile of dirt, but that night, he retrieves the portrait, breaks into the Marshes' house and leaves the portrait on Amelia's dresser. Since she does not tell her father, he draws a comic strip portraying their first meeting the next night, and he and Amelia begin exchanging comic strips as a means of communicating.

Mike feels connected to the White Crew after the first job, and he moves into the apartment attached to their garage. The day after Mike sneaks into the Marshes' house to make love to Amelia, Mr. Marsh decides Mike should spend his time doing art with Amelia instead of digging. He insinuates there is another stipulation, but Mike is only concerned with the fact that Mr. Marsh is now encouraging him to spend time with Amelia. While in California, Mike receives a page from Harrington Banks, an FBI agent he once met at West Side Recovery, who tries to convince Mike to turn himself in, but Mike disconnects the call. Mr. Marsh convinces Mike to demonstrate his lock-picking



talents for his partner, Mr. Slade, and the men are convinced Mike can help them. After being returned by the men who kidnap him, Mr. Marsh sends Mike to the Ghost in Detroit to help him pay off his debt to the man from Detroit by learning to open safes, but Mike is unsuccessful. Gunnar tries to convince Mike to plan a heist on the man from Detroit, and Mike refuses because such a plan is suicide. The red pager goes off. The man from Detroit sends Mike back to the Ghost to try opening safes again, and Mike is diligent in his practice because it is the only way for Amelia to come home. After witnessing Sleepy Eyes kill the assemblyman and his two partners in Ohio, Mike travels to Michigan because it may be his last chance to go home. Mike continues practicing with the Ghost until he is successful.

In Michigan, Mike steals Banks' cell phone from his uncle's kitchen. He visits Amelia at the University of Michigan, and when she insists on knowing what happened to make him this way, he takes her to his childhood home on Victoria Street and draws the horrific scene of his father killing his mother and her boyfriend and trying to kill Mike when he was 8 years old. Mike continues practicing at West Side Recovery after Amelia returns home. He passes the man from Detroit's test to prove his loyalty, and when he receives a job on the blue pager, he leaves a diamond ring on Amelia's pillow before heading to Pennsylvania. Mike and the White Crew plan to rob the man from Detroit's boat, and though they are successful, Gunnar sets them up; he plots with Sleepy Eyes to kill the man from Detroit and the rest of the White Crew. Mike phones Banks when he finds Julian and Ramona dead, and after Sleepy Eyes kills Gunnar, Mike opens the White Crew's safe, and Banks arrives just in time to prevent Sleepy Eyes from killing Mike. Back at the prison, Mike has spent 10 years in jail so far, but he hopes he will be released soon. He writes to Amelia and is sure he will speak again when they are finally reunited.

## Amelia

Amelia is the girl Mike loves, and he begins opening safes to help her father and Amelia, by extension. Amelia is first mentioned when Mike draws his day for her after stealing diamonds from the house in Connecticut, and he mentions her again when he describes breaking into the Marshes' house because he sees her for the first time in a self-portrait she drew in her bedroom. Amelia confronts Mike while he digs in the Marshes' backyard, accusing him of being able to talk. Mr. Marsh and a locksmith make Mike unlock the Marshes' backdoor, and that night, Mike draws a portrait of Amelia and plans to give it to her. At Wesley's house, Mike and Gunnar rob the safe and manage to sneak past the multiple alarms to rejoin Lucy outside and return to the club. After failing to open a lock with serrated pins at the Marshes the next day, Mike's day worsens when he sees Amelia and her friends drawing him. He buries the portrait in the pile of dirt, but that night, he retrieves the portrait, breaks into the Marshes' house and leaves the portrait on Amelia's dresser. Since she does not tell her father, he draws a comic strip portraying their first meeting the next night, and he and Amelia begin exchanging comic strips as a means of communicating.



The day after Mike sneaks into the Marshes' house to make love to Amelia, Mr. Marsh decides Mike should spend his time doing art with Amelia instead of digging. He insinuates there is another stipulation, but Mike is only concerned with the fact that Mr. Marsh is now encouraging him to spend time with Amelia. Mike begins learning how to open safes from the Ghost in order to help Mr. Marsh get out of debt with the man from Detroit, primarily because the man from Detroit insinuates that he may hurt Amelia otherwise. Mike visits Amelia at the University of Michigan, and when she insists on knowing what happened to make him this way, he takes her to his childhood home on Victoria Street and draws the horrific scene of his father killing his mother and her boyfriend and trying to kill Mike when he was 8 years old. Mike continues practicing at West Side Recovery after Amelia returns home. He passes the man from Detroit's test to prove his loyalty, and when he receives a job on the blue pager, he leaves a diamond ring on Amelia's pillow before heading to Pennsylvania. A few years after Mike is incarcerated, Amelia begins sending him comic strips again, and this is how they communicate while he is in jail. Mike is sure he will speak again when they are finally reunited.

## Uncle Lito

Uncle Lito is Mike's father's older brother who becomes Mike's legal guardian after the tragedy Mike experiences at the age of 8.

## The Blue Crew

The Blue Crew is two men with heavy New York accents whom Mike nicknames Manhattan and Brooklyn. They call Mike for his first real job, robbing a safe in a house outside Philadelphia. After the job, the Blue Crew take Mike to New York so he can get a fake ID.

## The Amateurs

The Amateurs consist of a group of four men, Big Mouth, Heckle, Jeckle and Ox, who page Mike on the yellow pager to steal diamonds from a house in Connecticut. Their lack of professionalism makes Mike nervous, but he accepts the job because he needs the money. After stealing the diamonds, the amateurs call Mike again when they realize the diamonds are fake. They return to the house in Connecticut and locate the real safe, but the amateurs are killed by security officers and Mike is handcuffed but manages to escape.

## The Ghost

The Ghost is an expert safecracker who trains Mike for the man from Detroit. He gives Mike the pagers once Mike learns how to open safes. The Ghost retires to move to Florida and help his daughter whose husband abandoned her and their children.



## **Mr. Martie**

Mr. Martie is Mike's art teacher at Milford High School.

## **Griffin King**

Griffin King is Mike's only friend in school, and he is with Mike when they break into the Marshes' house. Griffin feels guilty for not turning himself in to the police, and Mike never sees him again after Griffin goes away to art school.

## **Brian Hauser**

Brian Hauser is the Milford High School football star who convinces Mike to break into the Marshes' house to leave a banner in Adam's room. Since Brian's father lies that Brian was home all night after Mike is arrested, Mike does not reveal his accomplices.

## **Mr. Marsh**

Mr. Marsh is the man whose house Mike breaks into for Brian and his buddies. Mike is sentenced to spend his summer working for Mr. Marsh who forces him to dig a pool since Mike will not reveal his accomplices. Realizing Mike's value as a lock-picker, Mr. Marsh offers Mike's services to the man from Detroit as a way to pay off some of his debt. When Mike visits some time later, Mr. Marsh tries to protect Amelia by telling Mike that she is studying art in London, though she really attends college at the University of Michigan.

## **Julian**

Julian is the leader of the White Crew with whom Mike stays after doing a job in Los Angeles. Julian is very attractive and plans jobs cautiously. He owns a wine store which is how he meets the man from Detroit when he attempts to rob him. Julian is hesitant when Gunnar plans to rob the man from Detroit's boat, and he is eventually betrayed by Gunnar. Mike finds Julian and Ramona bled out in the bathtub after being shot in the head.

## **Ramona**

Ramona is Julian's beautiful, Mexican girlfriend and a member of the White Crew. She is also killed when Gunnar betrays them to Sleepy Eyes.



## **Gunnar**

Gunnar is the member of the White Crew who does the grunt work. He loves Lucy and threatens Mike to stay away from her. He betrays Julian and Ramona to Sleepy Eyes who double-crosses Gunnar, shooting him in the head.

## **Lucy**

Lucy is Gunnar's girlfriend and a member of the White Crew. She is jealous of Mike's artistic ability and his ability to open safes, but she sleeps with him. Gunnar sends Lucy away before Sleepy Eyes comes to kill Julian and Ramona, so Lucy is the only member of the White Crew to live.

## **Man from Detroit**

The man from Detroit is the dangerous, rich criminal Mike works for. Mr. Marsh convinces Mike to help him get out of debt by learning to open safes for the man from Detroit. When Mike's red pager beeps, it requires his immediate response since only the man from Detroit has that number. The man from Detroit kills Jerry Slade for trying to evade his debt. Each summer, he takes a boat trip along the West Coast which is how he meets the White Crew. Mike and the White Crew conspire with Gunnar's contact on the boat to rob the man from Detroit of \$6,000,000 after which the contact turns the rest of the boat against the man from Detroit who is fed to the sharks.

## **Jerry Slade**

Jerry Slade is Mr. Marsh's partner who is killed when he tries to evade his debt with the man from Detroit. Sleepy Eyes shows Slade's corpse to Mike to inspire loyalty to the man from Detroit.

## **Harrington Banks**

Harrington Banks is an FBI agent who tries to convince Mike to turn himself in periodically. Mike steals the cell phone Banks gave to Uncle Lito and uses it to call Banks when he finds Julian and Ramona dead. Banks arrives just in time to prevent Sleepy Eyes from killing Mike.

## **Fishing Hat and Tall Moustache**

Fishing Hat and Tall Moustache are two of the man from Detroit's men, and Sleepy Eyes kills them after shooting the assemblyman in Ohio because they were secretly meeting with the FBI.



## Sleepy Eyes

Sleepy Eyes is the man from Detroit's right-hand man who kills Fishing Hat and Tall Moustache for talking to the FBI. He conspires with Gunnar to kill the man from Detroit after the White Crew robs his boat. Sleepy Eyes then kills Julian and Ramona, and he kills Gunnar to convince Mike to open the White Crew's safe. He is prevented from killing Mike by Harrington Banks' timely arrival, and Banks arrests Sleepy Eyes.



# Objects/Places

## Prison

Mike tells his story from prison where he has spent the past nine years. Prison is the setting of the first and last chapters in this novel. For his crimes, Mike has been sentenced to 10-25 years, but he is hoping to be released after 10 years.

## Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania is where Mike goes to meet the Blue Crew for his first real job in September, 1999. They rob a safe in the suburbs of Philadelphia, and then, the Blue Crew takes Mike to New York City so he can acquire a fake ID.

## Milford, Michigan

Milford, Michigan is where Mike moves with Uncle Lito after June 1990. Mike lives in the back room of Lito's liquor store until age 17 when he leaves home to work as a boxman.

## Higgins Institute

The Higgins Institute is a school for deaf children and those with communicative disorders which Mike attends until they give up on him and send him to a public high school.

## Antique Store

The summer before starting high school, Mike first buys several locks to practice opening from the antique store near Lito's liquor store. Before leaving Milford, Mike returns to the antique store to buy a diamond ring for Amelia.

## New York

Mike gets a ride to New York with the Blue Crew after their job in Pennsylvania because he needs fake identification since he violated probation in Michigan. He rents a room above a Chinese restaurant. While living in New York, Mike takes a job with a group of amateurs, Big Mouth, Heckle, Jeckle and Ox which nearly leads to his arrest. He leaves the city when he receives a page from the White Crew in California.





## Connecticut

Mike breaks into a house in Connecticut with Big Mouth, Heckle, Jeckle and Ox, a group of amateurs, to steal diamonds. When they learn the diamonds are fake, they return to Connecticut and find the real safe, but security officers kill the amateurs and handcuff Mike. Mike picks the handcuffs and escapes.

## West Side Recovery

West Side Recovery is the shop in Detroit, owned by the man from Detroit, where the Ghost teaches Mike to open safes. The shop becomes Mike's once he is ready because the Ghost moves to Florida to help his daughter.

## Victoria Street

Victoria Street is where Mike lived until he was 8 years old. He takes Amelia to Victoria Street and draws on the wall to show her what happened to make him lose his ability to speak. Returning home after 2 years, Mike's father kills Mike's mom and her boyfriend while Mike locks himself in a gun safe. His father throws the safe into the river in an attempt to kill Mike, but Mike is rescued while unconscious from a lack of oxygen.

## California

Mike goes to California to accept a job with the White Crew after the fiasco in Connecticut. He stays with the White Crew for nearly a year before he is summoned home to watch Sleepy Eyes kill the assemblyman, Tall Moustache and Fishing Hat. When he returns to California, Mike plots to kill Sleepy Eyes and the man from Detroit with the White Crew, but Gunnar betrays them to Sleepy Eyes who kills Julian and Ramona. Mike calls Harrington Banks, an FBI agent, who saves Mike from Sleepy Eyes but arrests both Sleepy Eyes and Mike.

## Grant Street

The White Crew lives in a modest house on Grant Street in California, and Mike moves into an apartment attached to their garage.

## Man from Detroit's Boat

Julian and Ramona try to rob the man from Detroit's boat one year, but they work for him when he allows them to escape with their lives. Gunnar develops a contact on the boat, and the White Crew plans a heist which is supposed to result in the deaths of the man from Detroit and Sleepy Eyes; however, Gunnar betrays his crew because his contact is Sleepy Eyes.



## Milford High School

Mike attends Milford High School where he learns of his artistic talents. This is where he meets Brian who convinces him to break into the Marshes' house. Mike only attends three days of his senior year before receiving a page that summons him to Pennsylvania.

## Cell Phone

Harrington Banks gives Lito a cell phone which Mike steals from his uncle's kitchen when he stops by Milford. When he finds Julian and Ramona bled out in the tub, Mike calls Banks who is able to track the phone and arrive with police before Sleepy Eyes can shoot Mike.

## University of Michigan

Amelia studies art at the University of Michigan, and Mike visits her there after the assemblyman job. This is when she demands to know about his past, so he takes her to Victoria Street and draws the traumatic scene on the wall.

## Comic Strips

Mike and Amelia communicate by drawing comic strips. This is how their relationship first begins, how Mike tells her what happened in June 1990, and how she begins talking to him again after he is arrested.

## Pagers

The Ghost gives Mike 5 pagers by which he receives jobs. The blue pager is professionals who mean money in the bank. The white pager signifies professionals, and this is how Mike meets the White Crew in California. The yellow is available to anyone, so the Ghost warns Mike to proceed with caution. The red pager is only used by the man from Detroit, so Mike must respond immediately when this pager goes off.



# Themes

## Childhood Trauma

A major theme in *The Lock Artist* is the traumatic experience that Mike undergoes when he is 8 years old. This trauma is not explicitly described until quite late in the novel, but Mike hints at it throughout his narrative. In the first chapter, Mike claims the reader has probably heard of him from the summer of 1990 when he was 8 years old. He was in the news for a few days as the Miracle Boy, and most people felt bad that his story was so horrible. He decides to write his story down, skipping around some, since he has not spoken a word in all these years, and though he cannot start with that day in June 1990, maybe he will be able to face it one day while he is writing. Mike is pronounced physically recovered by the time he is 9 years old except he still cannot speak. He is sent to live in Milford with his father's older brother, Uncle Lito, who became his legal guardian after a few months. Unfortunately, Milford is only 50 miles from his old home which is not far enough away to escape his old life. The doctors all say Mike simply decided to stop talking. Mike is sent to school at the Higgins Institute for deaf kids and those with communicative disorders. He learns American Sign Language, and psychologists bother him with daily sessions where they tell him they can do whatever he wants. Their big mistake is thinking Mike was too young to process the trauma of June 1990 and not understanding that the memory is his constant companion. After 5 years, they give up on him, and Mike is sent to Milford High School. He is nervous all summer about going to public school. His only distraction is an old lock on the delivery door that Lito replaces. Mike takes the old lock apart and repairs it; he wonders how different his life would be if not for that old lock which allowed him to find the moment when he moves the metal pieces and opens the lock. While Mike works for the Marshes the summer before his senior year, Amelia does not believe he cannot speak at first, but eventually, she believes him, and they begin communicating by drawing comic strips for one another. Mike is finally able to open a safe by imagining that he hears someone breathing inside.

When Amelia insists that Mike tell her what happened when he was a child, he drives her to his childhood home on Victoria Street, and in the back room, Mike begins drawing his story on the wall. On June 17, 1990, Mike reads a comic while his mother watches television with her boyfriend, Mr. X. They hear a noise at the front door, but when she sees nothing out the window, Mom locks the chain. Then, Mike's father comes in the back door and beats Mr. X. He sends Mike to his room while slapping Mom. Mike tries to climb out the window, but the lock is jammed, so he peeks out of his door to see his father raping his mother while Mr. X lays on the floor with his genitals cut off. Mike runs to the spare bedroom and hides in his father's old gun safe, not realizing there is no handle on the inside until he shuts the door. His father finally searches for him, begging him to open the safe and promising it will not hurt because it will be so quick; he wants them to die together. Running out of air, Mike passes out and wakes to hear tires under the safe. His father throws the safe in the river, and Mike passes out as water fills the safe. Amelia cries as she fills in the details of the last panels. She asks what happened



next since someone obviously saved Mike, but he was not conscious for that part; "in my own mind, the safe was and always would be at the bottom of the river. With me locked inside forever. That was the only real part for me. As real as anything had ever been real" (page 259). About 4 years after he was locked up, Mike received a page of comic panels from Amelia. The first panel showed her in a wedding dress, and Mike could barely stand the idea that she had moved on with her life, but in the second panel, Amelia cannot stop thinking about him, so she drives to the old house on Victoria Street. There, she walks to the riverbank, takes the dress and dives into the water where her legs become a tail. Amelia swims to the bottom of the river, finds the safe and unlocks the door to reveal Mike as an adult with bars across the door asking her what took her so long. He still has not spoken, and he refuses to try while he is in prison; however, he knows he will say something the first time he sees Amelia again.

## Art

An important aspect of Mike's life, and thus of *The Lock Artist* is his artistic ability. Besides his talent at opening locks, Mike possesses a gift for drawing. After his job in Connecticut, he draws his day for Amelia, hoping the pages will find their way to her someday. No one talks to Mike during his first semester of high school, but his second semester brings art class, and his teacher, Mr. Martie, does not single him out. Mr. Martie watches Mike draw a railroad bridge in the center of town; "so began the only good and decent chapter in [his] life" (page 52). After Mike changes his schedule to take a double period of Advanced Independent Study in Art, he makes a friend, Griffin King, who thinks it is cool that Mike cannot talk. Griffin learns some sign language so they can communicate, and the other students treat Mike differently because now he is the quiet kid who can draw. Mike wishes he could end his story there, but it would not be true by a long shot. During Mike's junior year and Griffin's senior year, Griffin encourages Mike to ask out Nadine, a new girl in their art class, but Mike is scared of the silence. In a girl's bedroom at the Marshes' house, he finds an art portfolio and is mesmerized by the drawings. The last drawing is a self-portrait of the girl, and this is the first time Mike sees Amelia. Mike decides he needs to find a way to show Amelia he is not a criminal or a freak, and his only chance is to draw something for her. At home that night, he draws a portrait of Amelia after much effort, and the next morning, he decides to hide it in the woods so he can retrieve it if she happens to stop by. He leaves it on her dresser the next night. At home, Mike tries to decide what to draw for Amelia, and recalling her first words to him, he designs a comic strip of their first meeting, ending with his thought that "If she asked me to, I would dig this hole to the center of the earth... God, that's ridiculous. But I think it's true" (page 146). He breaks into the Marshes' house and leaves the comic strip on Amelia's dresser, but he does not see her the whole next day. As he leaves, Mike finds the envelope with an additional page which Amelia drew showing her ignoring Zeke and thinking about Mike. At home, Mike draws the next day, but he allows himself to talk in the comic. There is no envelope in Mike's car, but he hears a window shut and sees the envelope fall through the air, so he retrieves the envelope. Page 4 shows the artists drawing Mike as Amelia thinks he has more talent than any of them and then shows Amelia breaking up with Zeke. The final panel reveals Amelia thinking about Mike being in her room two nights in a row and lamenting his



cruelty by not coming last night. Mike can barely breathe as he drives, and at home, he does not know what to draw or what might happen if he slips into her room again. He draws himself in the bottom corner with a big dream bubble in which he draws Amelia as he sees her in his dreams. When she looks at Mike's drawing of her as a mermaid, she is amazed and asks how he knew she has always had a thing about being a mermaid before inviting him to kiss her. The next day, Mr. Marsh tells Mike he needs to talk to him inside where he says that Amelia informed him Mike is wasting his time digging because he is such an amazing artist; therefore, Mr. Marsh now wants Mike to spend his time with Amelia, drawing or whatever else they want. Lucy finds another reason to hate Mike when she sees his drawings and how talented he is.

When Mike visits Amelia at college, Amelia asks about what happened to him as a child, swearing she will never see him again if he does not tell her now, and Mike offers to show Amelia where it happened instead. They drive to Victoria Street and park in front of the empty house where Mike spent the first eight years of his life. Mike picks the lock and leads Amelia to the extra room in the back of the house, but when she encourages him to draw the events, he realizes there is not enough room on his pad of paper. Mike begins drawing on the wall, and after retrieving his art supplies from the bike, Amelia follows behind him, filling in the details. On June 17, 1990, Mike reads a comic while his mother watches television with her boyfriend, Mr. X. They hear a noise at the front door, but when she sees nothing out the window, Mom locks the chain. Then, Mike's father comes in the back door and beats Mr. X. He sends Mike to his room while slapping Mom. Mike tries to climb out the window, but the lock is jammed, so he peeks out of his door to see his father raping his mother while Mr. X lays on the floor with his genitals cut off. Mike runs to the spare bedroom and hides in his father's old gun safe, not realizing there is no handle on the inside until he shuts the door. His father finally searches for him, begging him to open the safe and promising it will not hurt because it will be so quick; he wants them to die together. Running out of air, Mike passes out and wakes to hear tires under the safe. His father throws the safe in the river, and Mike passes out as water fills the safe. Amelia cries as she fills in the details of the last panels. About 4 years after he was locked up, Mike received a page of comic panels from Amelia. The first panel showed her in a wedding dress, and Mike could barely stand the idea that she had moved on with her life, but in the second panel, Amelia cannot stop thinking about him, so she drives to the old house on Victoria Street. There, she walks to the riverbank, takes the dress and dives into the water where her legs become a tail. Amelia swims to the bottom of the river, finds the safe and unlocks the door to reveal Mike as an adult with bars across the door asking her what took her so long. This is how it begins between them again. For 5.5 years, Mike and Amelia have communicated this way, and though it is not easy to be incarcerated, Mike knows he will make it because Amelia is waiting for him. He still has not spoken, and he refuses to try while he is in prison; however, he knows he will something the first time he sees Amelia again.

## Mike's Interest in Opening Locks

An important theme of *The Lock Artist* is Mike's ability to open locks, and this all begins because of his interest in the way they work. The summer before starting public high



school, Mike's only distraction is an old lock on the delivery door that Lito replaces. Mike takes the old lock apart and repairs it; he wonders how different his life would be if not for that old lock which allowed him to find the moment when he moves the metal pieces and opens the lock. Mike buys locks from an antique store in Milford and spends the summer practicing. He becomes interested in combination locks like the one on his gym locker, so he buys some combination locks from the antique store and begins practicing on them. The week of the big football game against Lakeland in November, Brian Hauser, the school's best football player, cannot open his new lock to change for practice, and Griffin claims Mike can open the lock. Brian mocks Mike until he opens the lock and writes the combination down for Brian. That is how it all began; Mike "hadn't learned that some talents cannot be forgiven. Ever" (page 59). Because of this, Brian and his friends convince Mike to open the Marshes' back door so they can play a prank on Adam Marsh, but this prank leads to Mike being arrested and sent to work for Mr. Marsh during the summer. The second morning, Mr. Marsh is waiting with a locksmith, Mr. Randolph, who does not believe Mike picked the lock. Mr. Randolph lets Mike use his tools, and Mike quickly unlocks the door and returns to digging. The next day, Mr. Marsh is waiting with Mr. Randolph again, and they show him a new lock with serrated pins. Mike is unable to open the lock, and they refuse to let him try again. Mike cannot breathe as he walks away; it is the first time he has tried to open a lock and failed. Mike did not think his day could get worse after failing to unlock the safe, but it did two hours later when Amelia comes outside and sits on the patio instead of coming to talk to him. She is soon joined by Zeke and another couple, and though Mike is thirsty, he does not dare go near them to the faucet. He continues working as they all laugh, and when he finally looks up, they are all drawing him. At the end of the day, Mike buries the portrait of Amelia in the dirty pile. It all seems to come back to that lock as though things would have turned out differently if he had been able to open it. He cannot sleep because of the thought that the lock beat him, so at 2 A.M., Mike sneaks out and drives to the Marshes' house, retrieves the envelope with the portrait and picks the lock to the back door. He sneaks inside and goes to Amelia's room where he picks another lock. He puts the unsigned drawing on her dresser and leaves.

Mr. Marsh wants Mike to show Mr. Slade what he can do, but they are interrupted when Amelia returns to Mike. When it is time to say goodnight, Mr. Marsh calls Mike to his office where he hands Mike a leather case of lock picking tools and asks him to show Mr. Slade what he can do with them now. They are impressed when Mike unlocks the back door, and after he proves he can also open a padlock, they think "he" can use Mike who might be their ticket out of hell. At home, Mike wonders what he has gotten himself into; he "didn't know that once you've proven yourself useful to the wrong people, you'll never be free again" (page 187). After Mr. Marsh is kidnapped by his debtors, he convinces Mike to visit the Ghost in Detroit in order to help the Marsh family, including Amelia. The Ghost leads Mike to a clearing in the back where eight safes are arranged in a circle with the locks facing inward. He urges Mike to open one, and Mike is unsure how to communicate that he does not know how and was sent here by mistake by two idiots. The Ghost angrily escorts Mike to his bike when he realizes the boy cannot open the safe. When Mr. Marsh introduces Mike to the man from Detroit, the man from Detroit convinces Mike to try again with the Ghost by threatening Amelia. Mike returns to West Side Recovery where Mr. G is sarcastic about giving him another





chance. He tells Mike that his eyesight is going, his hands shake and his daughter's husband ran out on her and their children which is all Mike needs to know about him. Since Mike knows nothing about opening safes, the Ghost asks what he can do, and when Mike pantomimes picking locks, the Ghost provides a cylinder with a key lock and has Mike open it. He resets it, mocking Mike for working so slowly, and he pulls out a padlock, telling Mike to feel for the sticky points; "either you can feel it or you can't" (page 213). The Ghost tells Mike to work on it while he goes to lunch, and he sends it home with Mike that night to practice as homework. Mike's only way to bring Amelia back is to learn how to open safes, so he practices all night and finally opens it. The next morning, he shows the Ghost that he has figured out how to open the lock, so the Ghost throws him a new lock and leads him outside, but he is irritated to see that Mike still has not opened the new lock. The Ghost retrieves a dolly from the storage room containing a safe that has been torn apart. He is appalled by the damage done through forced entry, and after explaining the various means of forced entry to Mike, the Ghost claims such men cannot face the challenge of a safe on its own terms. Making Mike wheel the safe back into storage, he points out how heavy it is and tells Mike to imagine the difficulty of stealing the safe to break it open at home. The Ghost takes Mike to his circle of safes and compares a safe to a woman's heart: one must understand her in order to open her. He removes the panel from the locking mechanism and shows Mike how the notches line up perfectly by using the correct combination. He shows Mike how to picture the notches while turning the dial to figure out how many wheels there are and find the contact areas for each wheel to get the numbers in the combination. Then, he tries those numbers in various orders until he gets the correct combination. No matter how hard he tries, Mike cannot feel it that day or for several more. After fighting Zeke, Mike works on the practice safe lock the Ghost gave him as sirens approach. Mike can finally feel it, so he returns to West Side Recovery, pushes past the Ghost and, at the safes, listens as he spins, imagining that he hears someone breathing inside. Mike pulls the handle and opens the safe; Amelia comes home the next day. When Mike tells Amelia about his childhood trauma in 1990, the reader learns that he accidentally locked himself in a gun safe which his father then threw into the river, nearly drowning Mike. This event makes Mike's interest in opening locks seem less criminal and more understandable.

# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of *The Lock Artist* is first person, limited and reliable. Mike, the narrator, knows only his own thought and feelings, as well as what other characters tell him. Mike appears to be honest and is never proven otherwise, and he is willing to admit his own faults throughout the novel. The novel's point of view is important because it shows the reader Mike's thoughts and reasons for committing his crimes in addition to describing his traumatic childhood, and all of this makes Mike into a more sympathetic character since it is obvious that he got trapped into a life of crime as a result of the trauma he experienced at the age of 8.

The distribution of exposition and dialogue is fairly equitable in this novel which is somewhat ironic since Mike cannot speak. Mike addresses his story to the reader as though they are conversing in a bar. This distribution shows Mike is a good listener as he recalls many conversations, and the way in which the story is told shows Mike and other characters' motives for committing the crimes he recounts. The story is told solely from Mike's viewpoint.

## Setting

This novel is set in the real world of America during the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century. Mike's childhood occurs in Michigan, but his career as a boxman takes him to states across the country. Most of the characters in the novel are thieves who hire Mike for one or more jobs, and they gain wealth by robbing rich people.

Mike tells his story from prison where he has spent the past nine years. Prison is the setting of the first and last chapters in this novel. For his crimes, Mike has been sentenced to 10-25 years, but he is hoping to be released after 10 years. Pennsylvania is where Mike goes to meet the Blue Crew for his first real job in September, 1999. They rob a safe in the suburbs of Philadelphia, and then, the Blue Crew takes Mike to New York City so he can acquire a fake ID. Milford, Michigan is where Mike moves with Uncle Lito after June 1990. Mike lives in the back room of Lito's liquor store until age 17 when he leaves home to work as a boxman. The Higgins Institute is a school for deaf children and those with communicative disorders which Mike attends until they give up on him and send him to a public high school. The summer before starting high school, Mike first buys several locks to practice opening from the antique store near Lito's liquor store. Before leaving Milford, Mike returns to the antique store to buy a diamond ring for Amelia. Mike gets a ride to New York with the Blue Crew after their job in Pennsylvania because he needs fake identification since he violated probation in Michigan. He rents a room above a Chinese restaurant.





While living in New York, Mike takes a job with a group of amateurs, Big Mouth, Heckle, Jeckle and Ox which nearly leads to his arrest. He leaves the city when he receives a page from the White Crew in California. Mike breaks into a house in Connecticut with Big Mouth, Heckle, Jeckle and Ox, a group of amateurs, to steal diamonds. When they learn the diamonds are fake, they return to Connecticut and find the real safe, but security officers kill the amateurs and handcuff Mike. Mike picks the handcuffs and escapes. West Side Recovery is the shop in Detroit, owned by the man from Detroit, where the Ghost teaches Mike to open safes. The shop becomes Mike's once he is ready because the Ghost moves to Florida to help his daughter. Victoria Street is where Mike lived until he was 8 years old. He takes Amelia to Victoria Street and draws on the wall to show her what happened to make him lose his ability to speak. Returning home after 2 years, Mike's father kills Mike's mom and her boyfriend while Mike locks himself in a gun safe. His father throws the safe into the river in an attempt to kill Mike, but Mike is rescued while unconscious from a lack of oxygen.

Mike goes to California to accept a job with the White Crew after the fiasco in Connecticut. He stays with the White Crew for nearly a year before he is summoned home to watch Sleepy Eyes kill the assemblyman, Tall Moustache and Fishing Hat. When he returns to California, Mike plots to kill Sleepy Eyes and the man from Detroit with the White Crew, but Gunnar betrays them to Sleepy Eyes who kills Julian and Ramona. Mike calls Harrington Banks, an FBI agent, who saves Mike from Sleepy Eyes but arrests both Sleepy Eyes and Mike. The White Crew lives in a modest house on Grant Street in California, and Mike moves into an apartment attached to their garage. Julian and Ramona try to rob the man from Detroit's boat one year, but they work for him when he allows them to escape with their lives. Gunnar develops a contact on the boat, and the White Crew plans a heist which is supposed to result in the deaths of the man from Detroit and Sleepy Eyes; however, Gunnar betrays his crew because his contact is Sleepy Eyes. Mike attends Milford High School where he learns of his artistic talents. This is where he meets Brian who convinces him to break into the Marshes' house. Mike only attends three days of his senior year before receiving a page that summons him to Pennsylvania. Amelia studies art at the University of Michigan, and Mike visits her there after the assemblyman job. This is when she demands to know about his past, so he takes her to Victoria Street and draws the traumatic scene on the wall.

## Language and Meaning

The language used in *The Lock Artist* is mostly casual and informal as appropriate for the conversational tone in which Mike sets out to write his story. This style is used because Mike decides to write his story as though he is chatting with the reader in a bar since he has not spoken since he was 8 years old. The language aids comprehension since it is easy to understand. Mike is effective in describing events and his thoughts which is very important since he cannot speak. The language utilized throughout the novel characterizes Mike's thoughts and the characters that he encounters throughout the tale.



The distribution of exposition and dialogue is fairly equitable in this novel which is somewhat ironic since Mike cannot speak. Mike addresses his story to the reader as though they are conversing in a bar. This distribution shows Mike is a good listener because he recalls many conversations, and the way in which the story is told shows Mike and other characters' motives for committing the crimes he recounts. The language with which Mike recounts his biography is very conversational, and the lack of jargon about his safecracking career aids the reader in being able to understand his story. Overall, the language assists in making *The Lock Artist* very easy to understand.

## Structure

This novel is divided into twenty-seven chapters which comprise 304 pages. The chapters average about 12 pages in length and range from 3-21 pages long. The chapters are numbered and titled by location and time period in which the described events occur. They are generally short, but the longer chapters are so detailed and eventful that they seem short as well. Some of the chapters detail a matter of hours while other chapters summarize several years of Mike's life. The book primarily spans over a period of about 2 years, though the first and last chapters occur 10 years later and some of the chapters contain flashbacks to Mike's traumatic childhood.

*The Lock Artist* by Steve Hamilton is an intriguing story about a silent young man who is led into a life of crime because of his amazing ability to open locks. Years after a family tragedy steals his speech at the age of 8, Mike discovers his talent at picking locks, but when his gift comes to the attention of the wrong people, Mike loses everything. *The Lock Artist* is a sympathetic tale which shows the devastating effects of a childhood trauma on the narrator. The novel is fairly quick-paced and extremely easy to read. It contains flashbacks since Mike does not tell his story chronologically, instead jumping around in time between 1990 through 2000. Overall, *The Lock Artist* is very easy to read and extremely entertaining.



## Quotes

"I stayed in the news for two or three days, but even when the cameras and the reporters moved on to something else, mine was the kind of story that stuck with you. You felt bad for me. How could you not? If you had young kids of your own back then, you held them a little tighter. If you were a kid yourself, you didn't sleep right for a week. In the end, all you could do was wish me well. You hoped that I had found a new life somewhere. You hoped that because I was so young, somehow this would have protected me, made it not so horrible. That I'd be able to get over it, maybe even put the whole thing behind me. Children being so adaptable and flexible and durable, in ways that adults could never be. That whole business. It's what you hoped anyway, if you even took the time to think about me the real person and not just the young face in the news story." Chapter 1, page 1

"This is why they called me. This is why they waited around for a kid they'd never met before to ride halfway across the country. Because with me on the job, they leave absolutely no trace behind them." Chapter 2, page 11

"I didn't know which of them was more terrified at that point. But, like I said, I wasn't scared myself. Not one little bit. It's the one advantage you have maybe, being scared all the time. When it's time to really be scared, when all of a sudden you're finally supposed to be scared... it just doesn't happen." Chapter 3, page 20

"No matter how big the score seems to be, if it doesn't feel right, you turn around right then and there and you walk away." Chapter 4, page 27

"What I wanted was for them to leave me the hell alone. Because they were all making one big mistake. This business about me being too young to 'process' the trauma, that I'd have to bury it in my mind's backyard until somebody came along to help me dig it up- I mean, I still get upset to this day just thinking about it. The condescension there. The stunning, absolute ignorance... It wasn't repressed. I didn't have to go digging to find it. It was always there. My constant companion. My right-hand man. Every waking hour, and more than a few of the sleeping hours... I was and am and always will be right back there in that day in June. Nobody ever got that. Not one person." Chapter 5, page 35

"Damn, I thought, could it be that these guys think that they have to pay me? Or else? I mean, if they found me in the first place, that meant they probably had to know about the man in Detroit, right? I wasn't just one kid on one pager. Maybe they figured there must be plenty of other people on other pagers, some of whom could set their feet in concrete and drop them into the Hudson River on a moment's notice. That's right, I thought. You don't mess with the Kid. Let 'em all think that." Chapter 6, page 38

"It makes my heart ache, just thinking back on that time in my life. How lonely I was. How out of place I felt every single minute of every day." Chapter 7, page 50



"This was such a rare time in my life. In a way, I don't want to keep going with my story. Just stop it right there, let you think, yeah, this kid turned out all right. He had a rough start, he found something to do with his life. Everything worked out okay. Of course, that wouldn't be the truth. Not by a long shot." Chapter 7, page 54

"But no, I hadn't learned that lesson yet. I hadn't learned that some talents cannot be forgiven. Ever." Chapter 7, page 59

"You know what happens to you at art school? All that good natural technique you have? All that detail? They'll beat it right out of you. They'll be so threatened by it, they'll make you start throwing paint at the canvas like a monkey. By the time you graduate, the only thing you'll be able to do is teach art to high school kids." Mr. Martie, Chapter 9, page 66

"I didn't feel any different, but some things you just can't change that easily." Chapter 10, page 83

"You're like a work of art. I mean, look at you. You're just perfect." Julian, Chapter 10, page 89

"You can't show me how you did that. It's just something you can do. Or can't do." Lucy, Chapter 10, page 91

"I didn't realize it was this bad, Michael. I mean, I know what you had to go through... I thought you were getting over that now. I thought you were doing okay." Uncle Lito, Chapter 11, page 96

"So there it was. My big lesson of the day, something I'd take with me and never forget. The whole legal system- If you think it's just a big set of rules, you're dead wrong. It's really a bunch of people sitting around and talking to each other, deciding what they want to do with you. When they make their decision, then they pull out whatever rule they need to make it happen. Get on the wrong side of these people and you have no hope. They'll turn a parking ticket into a bus ride to the penitentiary. On the other hand, if they decide that it's in their best interests for you to be spared, then you will be." Chapter 11, page 99

"Of course, I know that seeing her drawings first was a big part of it. I mean, how could it not be? It was just a gut instinct at this point, this feeling that there was definitely something different about her. That maybe she'd seen some of the same things I'd seen." Chapter 13, page 119

"My head was pounding. I couldn't breathe. For the first time, I had tried to open a lock, and I had failed." Chapter 13, page 130

"I locked that door behind me, too. Leaving no other trace except that one single gift. Which I had left unsigned. I'm crazy, but I'm not stupid." Chapter 15, page 142



"You don't talk much, do you? I can respect that. World needs more people who know enough to keep their mouth shut." Jerry Slade, Chapter 15, page 144

"Even now, when I think back on that day... the day Amelia gave me that last page... that hope I felt, for the first time in my life. That's the part I want to remember most. That hope that was so real it was like something I could touch. Like it was right there in front of me. Those few hours I spent with nothing more than that one piece of paper in my hands. Waiting for the night to come. Being scared and unsure of myself, and having absolutely no idea about what would happen. But having hope that it would be as good as I could possibly imagine." Chapter 17, page 161

"So maybe you shouldn't dream at all if you're in a place like this. Not that kind of dream, anyway. Don't dream that kind of dream unless you don't plan on waking up." Chapter 17, page 165

"You surprise me every day, Michael. That's all there is to it. I mean, you've already proven your loyalty to me. After all that hard work... after not giving up your friends like that. By the way, I apologized yesterday, right? Did I already apologize?... I was so upset about what happened. What you boys did. You and those Milford High School punks... But that's no excuse for abusing you like that. I'm just trying to explain where my head was. Okay? You understand? And you forgive me, right?" Mr. Marsh, Chapter 17, page 169

"Yeah, things worked out, I thought. And here I am. Working with a guy who tried to set up the wrong target. The absolutely worst target in the world. No wonder he's so careful now." Chapter 18, page 177

"I got in beside him and made two promises to myself. Stay away from Lucy. And practice." Chapter 18, page 181

"I didn't know any better. I didn't know that once you've proven yourself useful to the wrong people, you'll never be free again." Chapter 19, page 187

"He treats you like a dog... Maybe for once in your life you should think about biting the hand that feeds you." Gunnar, Chapter 20, page 201

"I've had more than one moment like this in my life. These moments when I could have taken myself right out of the game. Cut my losses. Taken the whole thing to my probation officer, maybe. I can't help wondering how differently my life might have turned out if I had played it that way. Even once." Chapter 21, page 209

"Besides, you need to focus right now. I need your absolute best effort here. Are you with me? They will kill me... I need you to believe that, Michael. They will kill me for sure. Or if they think I'm more useful to them alive... they may hurt Adam. End his football career... Or Amelia... I don't even want to think about what they might do to her... It's a terrible thing to put on you, but I don't have a choice." Mr. Marsh, Chapter 21, page 215



"I will never be free of this, I thought. There is no way out." Chapter 22, page 225

"I didn't know where Amelia had gone... No messages. No words. Just gone. And as impossible as this may seem, I knew that there was only one way for me to bring her back. I had to learn how to open a safe." Chapter 23, page 226

"Listen, I know I owe you a lot. I mean, I don't know if saying thank you is enough. But thank you. Okay? You gave me a chance to get out from under those guys. I got totally paid up and everything's good now. They're not going to bother me anymore. Or anybody in my family." Mr. Marsh, Chapter 24, page 245

"This is where I should be, I thought. If everything hadn't gotten turned inside out. One more year of regular life, and this would have been me." Chapter 24, page 246

"I don't know why I feel this way about you. Okay? I try not to, because it's just... it's just crazy. But I swear to God, I will kick you out of my room and you will never see me again, ever, unless you tell me what the fuck happened to you to make you this way. Right now." Amelia, Chapter 24, page 249

"I promise it won't hurt. Okay, buddy? I swear to God. It won't hurt. Just come out and we'll do this together, okay? You and me... Come on, Mike. I can't do this by myself. You have to come with me, okay?... It'll be so quick. You won't even feel it. I swear to you. I cross my heart and hope to die. I want us both to be together when we do this." Mike's father, Chapter 24, page 257

"It was my first lesson in how everything in your life can change if you just do one small, specific thing perfectly well." Chapter 25, page 261

"Bottom line kid. Bottom line. You are an artist. So you get to act like a fucking prima donna. They expect you to. If you didn't, they'd think something was wrong." The Ghost, Chapter 25, page 264

"Looking back on it, the whole thing did seem a little too choreographed. But at least I had passed the test, right? Local kid makes good, proves himself to criminals." Chapter 25, page 277

"No more. I was no longer owned by the man from Detroit. I would never again have to answer one of these pagers. My days as a safecracker for hire were over. I was free." Chapter 26, page 296

"We've kept this up for the past five and a half years. This is how we stay in touch with each other. It's like we both live in this imaginary world where we can be together, every single day. It's still not easy to be in here, believe me. But with Amelia waiting for me, I think I'll make it. I still haven't said a real word yet. I'm sure as hell not going to try as long as I'm in this place. But when I get out... The first time I see her again... I don't even know what the first word will be. But it'll be there, waiting to come out. After all these years, I'll say something. I know I will." Chapter 27, page 304



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Amelia, and how does Michael communicate with her?

Why does Michael agree to learn from the Ghost?

What is the horrible thing that steals Michael's speech?

Where is Michael as he tells his story, and how did he get there?

How does Michael's career end?

Why is Michael fascinated with the idea of opening safes?

What is Michael looking forward to in the future?