

# **Penny from Heaven Study Guide**

**Penny from Heaven by Jennifer L. Holm**

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# Contents

<a href="#">Penny from Heaven Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 1 and 2.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 3.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 4 and 5.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 6.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 7 and 8.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 9 and 10.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 11.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 12.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 13.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 14.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 15 and 16.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 17.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 18 and 19.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 20.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 21 and 22.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">40</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">42</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">44</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">46</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">47</a>



## Plot Summary

Penny from Heaven by Jennifer L. Holm is a story about a young girl who is on her way to adolescence. Barbara Ann Falucci, who has always been known by the nickname Penny, lives with her mother Eleanor, grandmother Me-me and grandfather Pop-pop in New Jersey in the mid 1950s. Her father, who came from a large Italian family, has been dead since Penny was so young that she barely remembers him at all. Despite her many efforts to find out the truth, the circumstances of his death are a mystery to her. As a result, Penny often wonders about heaven and death, although she has no intention of dying herself until she is at least a hundred years old or more.

Penny's best friend is her cousin Frankie, and they spend a great deal of time together, sharing many of the same interests. They both enjoy baseball, which is a sport her Uncle Dominic also loves, and Penny often listens to the game while sitting with her Uncle in his 1940 Roadking in Nonny's driveway. Uncle Dominic lives in his Roadking, and works for her Uncle Ralphie at Falucci's Market cutting meat. A bit of an eccentric, Dominic is most often seen in his slippers, even at work, and is not a large fan of large groups of people. Penny and Frankie work for the summer at the market as well, delivering meat orders to various customers in the neighborhood. Frankie is also prone to getting into trouble. His father has trouble holding onto work and as a result sometimes Frankie's schemes to bring money into the family home do not turn out as well as he plans. One such episode includes his theft from the collection plate at church. He breaks a window in his escape after being caught in the act, and spends weeks afterward working for Uncle Nunzio in his clothing factory to pay for the damages.

Penny's family is divided. Her father's side doesn't socialize with her mother's side, and the only real link between them is Penny, who often goes over to help Nonny with laundry and other chores. When Frankie hears a rumor that Grandpa Falucci hid money in the house before he died, he enlists Penny's help to search for it. They begin by searching the yard, but Nonny almost catches them. Next Frankie shares his theory that it is actually in the basement. He convinces Penny to help him and offers to do Nonny's laundry in order to gain access to the area. He actually does find a box of money, but distracted, Penny's arm gets caught in the wringer washer and she is pulled in up to the elbow. During weeks of recovery, Penny grows up emotionally. She learns the truth about her father's death, comes to accept her mother's new boyfriend and future husband, and learns about mortality — her own and others.



# Chapters 1 and 2

## Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Penny from Heaven by Jennifer L. Holm is a story about a young girl who is on her way to adolescence. Barbara Ann Falucci, who has always been known by the nickname Penny, lives with her mother Eleanor, grandmother Me-me and grandfather Pop-pop in New Jersey in the mid 1950s. Her father, who came from a large Italian family, has been dead since Penny was so young that she barely remembers him at all. Despite her many efforts to find out the truth, the circumstances of his death are a mystery to her. As a result, Penny often wonders about heaven and death, although she has no intention of dying herself until she is at least a hundred years old or more.

Uncle Dominic lives in a 1940 Roadking Plymouth that is parked in the yard of Penny's grandmother Falucci's house for what seems like forever. The year is 1953, and though most people in New Jersey live in homes, no one seems to think that Uncle Dominic is strange for living in his car. Most people who visit him are required to sit in the back, but Penny gets preferred seating up front when she goes to pay him a visit. He tells her the game is on and the Bums are leading. Those most in the area prefer the New York Yankees or the Giants, Penny and Uncle Dominic root for Dem Bums. She goes back inside hears Me-me calling from the kitchen. She cleans up after her dog, Scarlett O'Hara, before going in to see what she wants. Though Me-me and Pop-pop live upstairs, there is only one kitchen in the house, so they take their meals downstairs with Penny and her mother, who works as a secretary for a truck factory. As a result, Me-me does most of the cooking. The smell of onions and peas fills the air and Me-me tells her liver is the dinner for the evening and Penny isn't looking forward to it. Me-me isn't much of a chef. Penny's mother, Eleanor, finally arrives home after working late at the truck factory where she is a secretary. They sit down for dinner and Penny tells her about the job that Uncle Ralphie offered her that summer in the butcher shop. At first Eleanor says no, but changes her mind based on the condition that Frankie who will be hired as well goes on all deliveries with her. Penny agrees. Me-me tells Eleanor the bills are due and Eleanor turns over her paycheck.

## Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Penny thinks about death a lot. Me-me believes Heaven is all about angels and clouds, but Penny doesn't understand how anyone can sit on a cloud. She has visions of angels falling through to the ground, but Frankie reminds her that they have wings and have nothing to worry about. Penny has another idea of what Heaven is. In her mind, Heaven is a place where there is an abundance of swimming pools, baseball games, and butter pecan ice cream. In her Heaven, the Brooklyn Dodgers never lose, and she has a seat right behind the dugout - the best seat in the house.



Penny's Uncle Dominic is a bit of a hermit, living in a 1940 Roadking Plymouth. He and Penny's other uncles on her father's side are always giving her gifts, and today is no exception. Uncle Dominic is listening to the Dodgers on the radio, and he invites Penny to join him in the front seat. He gives her a magic bean that he tells her he was planning to give to her father before he died. Penny accepts, although she doesn't know what to do with it. She puts it in her pocket and goes back inside where Me-me, her grandmother, is cooking dinner. Penny's family on her mother's side and her family on her father's side do not get along. On her mother's side, the family is Catholic Methodist, and with the exception of Eleanor, they go to church every Sunday. On her father's side, the family is Italian. Penny has never seen them in the same room together, but she has often heard the stories about Uncle Dominic and what a practical joker he is. At the engagement party of Penny's parents, Dominic gave Eleanor a gift wrapped pair of lamb's eyes to better keep an eye on her future husband with.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Penny goes to Falucci's Market, where Uncle Ralphie greets her warmly from behind the counter. He introduces her as his niece to Mrs. Chickalos and then continues to fill her order. Penny can see that she is expecting. Uncle Ralphie lets her go without paying to Aunt Fulvia's dismay, and baby Gloria sleeps in the carriage next to her throughout her chastising him. Next, Jack Teitelzweig comes in to pick up an order for his mother and he no sooner says hi to Penny when Frankie also arrives. Frankie is late, but uses his two-month-old baby brother as an excuse.

Uncle Ralphie goes over the deliveries with them and they crack jokes about the third bag containing brains and to be delivered to Mrs. Morelli. Aunt Fulvia makes sure to remind them to collect as well, and they hop on Frankie's bike. They begin with Ann Marie Harrison who is now Mrs. Giaquinto. She is chatting with them both on the porch when they hear a man's voice and as she turns away from them, they can see the purple bruising on her face. He comes to the door and the whiskey on his breath is noticeable. She pays them and he shoves her inside, closing the door on them. Their next stop is at Mrs. Wiederhorn's, who invites them in for cookies and lemonade. The cookies are as hard as a rock, and when she isn't looking, they slip them into their pockets. Lastly, they head for Mrs. Morelli's. A sign on the fence warns "Beware of Dog" and the house looks like someone started to paint it but quit part way through. They ring the bell and call out. A cracking sound reveals a large dog standing on top of what used to be the gate. They try to back out, but the dog begins chasing them down the road. The only way they can distract it is by throwing the brains at it. The last thing they see as they round the corner is the huge dog consuming Mrs. Morelli's brains.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Uncle Ralphie is serving Mrs. Chickalos from behind the counter when Penny arrives. After introducing her, he continues to put together her order, adding a nice ham at no extra charge to help out the pregnant woman. He puts a whole chicken in her bag as well, telling her it will also make good soup stock and is good for her baby. She reaches into her purse to get out money, but he waves her off, telling her he isn't going anywhere. Aunt Fulvia isn't as moved to donate food as Uncle Ralphie is, despite his softening her with pet names like patanella mia, or my little potato. The fact that Uncle Ralphie is always giving away food on credit makes her crazy as she is the one who really runs the store. Ralphie knows he always gets paid somehow and eventually. She sits at the register and whenever she rings in a purchase, she puts half the money in her pocket. That way, she believes the government won't get the money.

Uncle Dominic works in the back, cutting meat for Ralphie. He used to play baseball for the minor leagues and was invited to go to spring training with the Dodgers, but



something happened to prevent it. Penny still can't understand why anyone would choose cutting meat over baseball. Penny and Frankie leave to make the three deliveries. Each one is an adventure. At the first house - Ann Marie Giaquinto (nee Harrison), they make their delivery and stumble onto the fact that her husband is a drunk and abuses her. Her purple face is a testament and his whiskey breath confirms it, as does his demeanor. At Mrs. Wiederhorn's, they are invited in to have a refreshment. Mrs. Wiederhorn tells Penny to say hello to her father who she says is a lovely man who always brings her tomatoes from his garden. That might be tough to do these days as he has been dead for years, but Mrs. Wiederhorn's memory has been slipping since her husband died. Their last stop turns out to be their largest challenge as Mrs. Morelli's dog breaks free of his fenced enclosure and chases them down the road. The package of brains thrown at the dog is all that saves them from certain injury.



# Chapters 4 and 5

## Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

Penny has a dream about her father. They are at the beach and he is in the water, calling to her. She wakes, wet from the toilet from the floor above her which is leaking again. After fixing the toilet yet again, Pop-pop announces his intention to paint a desk black. It has been his latest craze. He has been painting all of the old furniture in black lacquer paint because Me-me somehow got the idea that it will look nicer. It makes Penny feel like she lives in a funeral parlor. She helps Pop-pop drag the desk out to the summer porch and begin painting it, and Pop-pop is critical about her every move with a brush. A squirrel being chased by Scarlett O'Hara runs in through the open screen door and Scarlett, still chasing, follows. She brushes past the desk before Penny can stop her, getting paint all down one side. Penny lunges, trying to stop her, but trips over the rug and goes head-first into the can of paint herself. With Me-me's help, she tries to wash it out, but like the perm Me-me gave her, she is stuck with it. Me-me cuts as much as she can out and Penny can only pray it grows back fast. Penny goes to her room, which is little more than a closet, but it is so hot that she grabs her pillow and goes out to the summer porch. Pop-pop had the same idea and is laying on the wicker couch leaving her with the porch swing. Her mother comes home and joins her on the swing, having been out with her friend Connie again. It seems to be doing her good as she smiles more lately.

Penny goes to see her Italian side of the family and she and Frankie wind up going to the cemetery with them to see Penny's father's grave. Nonny and Uncle Paulie still go regularly and talk to Freddie. Penny still isn't sure how her father died, as no one will really tell her the truth. The standard line is pneumonia, but Penny isn't sure. She found a box under her mother's bed that has mementos of her life before Freddie died. In one picture, her mother is smiling, wearing a bathing suit, and on the back of the photo, her father had written "I am the luckiest fella ever." Penny wishes she could have known the man who wrote that.

## Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

Penny has a dream about swimming at the beach and wakes to discover the reality is that the toilet upstairs is leaking again. She calls out to Pop-pop, who once again tries to fix it. He refuses to call a repair man in to have it done correctly, assuring Penny and anyone else who will listen that any man worth his salt can fix his own toilet. After that, he and Penny begin painting Me-me's desk in black lacquer. Penny asks Pop-pop what it was that killed her father. No one will tell her much beyond that he got sick, went to the hospital, and died there. She wonders if he would have died had she had her lucky bean back then. Me-me tells her that she has her father's eyes as she is cutting paint from her hair after her mistimed lunge to stop Scarlett O'Hara. She runs into Veronica Goodman outside the Sweete Shoppe, who bursts out laughing when she sees Penny's





hair. Of course her friends join in, making Penny want to sink into the ground. Penny and Veronica were friends once, but a dispute between Uncle Ralphie and her father changed all that.

Penny's Italian grandmother, Nonny, has her kitchen downstairs in the basement. She didn't like the way Uncle Paulie's wife Gina cooked and demanded a kitchen of her own. Paulie finally agrees to keep the peace. Nonny is the Italian word for grandmother, and every time she sees Penny, she bursts in to tears. Alfredo, or Freddie as most referred to him, was her favorite first born son and Penny reminds her of him so much. Penny is always told that her father died of pneumonia, but Nonny refers to the bad men and Penny thinks something else might have happened. A box under Penny's mother's bed has mementos of her time with Freddie, photos of happier times, notes filled with love and expectation.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

On Sundays, Penny has dinner at Nonny's, and after Me-me's cooking on Saturday, Penny is ready. Penny has five real uncles and three more adult cousins that she calls Uncle. They all get together and speak mostly Italian, which Penny doesn't speak. Aunt Gina claims they don't want them to learn Italian because during the war Italy was on the wrong side and Italians in America were penalized for it.

Dinner is a large, important affair to this side of the family. There is always a ton of food, which is always made with love and attention to detail. After dinner, instruments are pulled out and music is played, giving off a kind-of party-like atmosphere. Uncle Nunzio, who owns a clothing store, tells Penny she should come down and pick out her fall coat — a treat he bestows on her every year. When Uncle Dominic drives Penny home, she is struck by the differences in the two families.

The next day she goes to Uncle Nunzio's factory and picks out a cranberry colored wool coat with rabbit fur around the collar and wrists. It comes with a matching muff made of rabbit and hat. Nunzio also has Penny pick out a new coat for her mother. Instead, she selects a fox stole that she can already see her mother wearing. When she gets home, Frankie is waiting for her, having had to escape the noise his colicky younger brother makes. They throw the baseball around for a while, Frankie lamenting the fact that she is a girl as she has an arm his team could use, and then Frankie goes in to use the bathroom. The toilet overflows and Penny calls her Uncle Dominic, who come to help. In no time he fixes it and later, as the bathroom is being used above her, Penny knows which uncle gave her the greatest gift that day.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Though Penny's mother can be heard to say the family is full of men, but Penny knows that it is the women who really run everything. Penny and Frankie wonder if the family all speaks Italian to keep their conversations private.

Penny loves going to her Italian side of the family for dinner, and looks forward to the Sunday meals, especially after having endured a Saturday meal cooked by Me-me. At Nonny's, meal times are an event. Food is piled high, as though they are always expecting company, and the house is filled with family. The feast is eaten and music is played. All in all, the house is lively and fun. By comparison, going home is like entering a morgue. Even though everyone is home, and is eating dinner, the house is incredibly quiet.

Penny picks out her fall coat as usual, courtesy of Uncle Nunzio and his coat factory. She finds one she likes, and at Nunzio's urging, selects something for her mother as well. Carolina, Uncle Nunzio's secretary, tells Penny about how bold and daring her



mother once was, and Penny has a hard time imagining her mother that way. Now, she hardly leaves the house. Penny choose a fox stole for her, hoping to encourage some of the spirit she's lost. When she gets home, Frankie uses the bathroom upstairs and again the toilet floods. With everyone gone shopping, Penny does the only thing she can, she calls Uncle Dominic, who comes and fixes it for her right away. Penny secretly hopes that one day Dominic and her mother will get together. Later, as Penny looks at her new coat in the dark of her room, though struck by how beautiful it is, she is still more grateful for the gift her Uncle Dominic gave her as she listens to the toilet flush above her.



# Chapters 7 and 8

## Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Penny wakes to the sound of her mother laughing, and finds her talking at the door to Mr. Mulligan. Penny asks and gets confirmation that the family will be going to Aunt Francine's and Uncle Donald's for summer vacation. Penny's twelfth birthday is coming, and her mother tells her that when she turned twelve, Me-me and Pop-pop gave her her very first piece of real jewelry — a pearl necklace she still has. She tells Penny about how she wore it to her first dance, and Penny asks her if she kissed the boy she went with. She tells Penny that she won't be home for dinner and asks her to help Me-me with the chores. Pop-pop mentions taking Penny for a walk to town, and Penny knows that he is going to pick up cigars, even though Me-me wouldn't like it. She talks him into stopping at the Sweete Shoppe, and he has a hamburger for lunch while she orders a sundae. Outside the tobacco shop, Penny runs into Robert from school and then Jack Teitelzweig and his brother walk by, stopping to say hi. Penny is tongue tied and oddly shy around him, and before she can get her mouth to work properly, Pop-pop comes out and scares them off.

Penny helps Nonny do the laundry in the basement, putting the clothes carefully through the wringer. Frankie is helping and upstairs they can hear Aunt Gina and Nonny arguing. They are reminded of a bully named Bobby Rocco and how he picked on Frankie until Nonny came out and told him if he hit Frankie again, she'd cut off his arms. The bullying stopped. Frankie asks Penny what she'll be getting for her twelfth birthday. Penny has been hinting about a bike to replace the one Pop-pop ran over, and Frankie wonders if Uncle Dominic would teach him how to drive. He is motivated because he wants to get a real job. He confesses that his father has lost his job again. Frankie wonders if Nonny wears black underwear as well and tasks Penny with sneaking up to find out. When she gets there, she finds a photograph of her father with his parents and a photo album containing clippings of all the articles he wrote while alive. Penny can hear his voice as she reads them, and when Nonny comes in, she brushes her hair for her like she used to. Then she twists it into a braid and ties it with a black ribbon. Looking at Nonny, Penny realizes that the black clothing is the protection Nonny wears in a country where she feels lost and insecure.

## Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Penny is surprised to wake up to her mother's laughter — something that seldom happens these days. She talks to her mother about summer vacation and confirms they are headed to Uncle Donald's again. Penny isn't thrilled as it means she usually ends up having to watch seven-year-old Lou Ellen, who is a brat by anyone's standards. Eleanor hurries off to work after Penny donates the money she was paid for working to the household finances. She's hoping her contributions will enable them to buy a television set next year, but her mother doesn't sound enthusiastic. Pop-pop uses



Penny as a blind to go and get some cigars. While they are out, they have lunch at the Sweete Shoppe and then she runs into Jack Teitelzweig and his brother. Penny likes Jack and for some reason gets tongue tied around him.

Penny and Frankie help Nonny by feeding some laundry through the wringer washer. They can hear Nonny and Aunt Gina arguing upstairs and wonder how Uncle Paulie can handle the constant conflict. Nonny seems to be able to hold her own, simply continuing to harangue Gina in a language she doesn't understand. It's an effective tactic and Nonny knows it. Frankie and Penny talk about her upcoming birthday, and what she plans to ask for. Frankie is thinking about asking Uncle Dominic to teach him how to drive. His father has just lost his job again, and Frankie would like to be able to get a full time job. Penny teases him until she realizes that he is really worried about his family. Frankie looks at all the black clothing they are washing and wonders aloud if Nonny wears black underwear as well. He enlists Penny to find out and she sneaks upstairs to Nonny's room. Going quietly through the drawers, she finds mementos from her father — a photo and an album of clipped articles. Penny can hear her father between all the lines. When Nonny comes into the room, she hands Penny her hairbrush like she used to when Penny was younger, and Penny brushes her long hair until it is tangle free and shines. She puts it in a braid and ties it with a black ribbon before tucking Nonny into bed, feeling a respect for her and an understanding that she lacked going in.



# Chapter 9 and 10

## Chapter 9 and 10 Summary

Penny gets home to find her mother getting ready to go out, wearing a new dress. She tells Penny that Mr. Mulligan has invited her out for dinner and dancing. Penny asks if they have gone out before, how long they have been dating and then notices that her mother is no longer wearing her engagement ring. Eleanor tells Penny they'll talk in the morning as she wants to get ready and Penny, stunned, goes to her room. It is almost midnight before her mother returns. Penny sees that as Mr. Mulligan helps her out, he kisses Eleanor on the lips. At that moment, Scarlett O'Hara pees on the carpet, echoing Penny's feelings exactly.

That Saturday, Eleanor invites Mr. Mulligan to come by and watch the game with Penny. He comes over, but never stops talking. Finally, Penny just tells him to be quiet so she can hear the game. Her mother is angry that Penny would be so rude. Upset, Penny leaves the house, refusing to apologize. She makes her way to Uncle Dominic and sobs uncontrollably in his car. He listens to her and then takes her home, telling her to apologize to her mother and give her time to cool off, reminding her that it is her mother's right to be happy too. Eleanor doesn't say a word to Penny when she apologizes like Uncle Dom suggests.

Frankie thinks the whole thing is hilarious and makes joke after joke about her mother and the milkman. Penny might have hit him if Uncle Salvatore hadn't come in. He asks Penny how her mother is, having had a crush on her for many years. She doesn't have the heart to tell him her mother is dating the milkman, not that she sees her mother with Uncle Sally either. Uncle Ralphie and Uncle Sally talk in the back and Penny and Frankie overhear their conversation. Uncle Sally tells him about a story old man Garboella told him about the Water boy, which was Penny's late grandfather Falucci's nickname. Apparently, the Water boy had a bunch of money stashed somewhere at the house, buried in the ground.

They go back to Nonny's and Frankie offers to do yard work for Uncle Paulie. Surprised at the offer, Paulie asks him to prune the shrubs, pick the sticks up off the yard, and mow the grass. Two hours later, they are still picking up sticks. Penny goes in for a drink and Aunt Gina asks her advice about which of two dresses to take to Atlantic City to go dancing for their anniversary. Penny chooses the red and watches Aunt Gina try it on. She looks beautiful. She helps Penny pin up her hair so it doesn't look so bad and Penny asks her why she quit dancing at the Radio City Music Hall after she married Uncle Paulie. Aunt Gina tells her that Nonny and Frankie both wanted her to quit after they were married. She dances for Penny. When Penny tells Frankie they are going away for the weekend, Frankie sees it as an opportunity. Penny finally gives in. On the weekend, Penny sneaks out after everyone is asleep. They double on Frankie's bike to Nonny's house and Frankie shows her the stone that he thinks is a marker. They dig, talking about what they'll do with the money. Instead of cash however, they find



Queenie. Inside, barking begins and Nonny shouts into the darkness that she'll call the police. Nonny fires off a round into the back yard that gets them both running.

## Chapter 9 and 10 Analysis

Penny finds her mother getting ready to go out, and this time, instead of lying to her again, Eleanor tells her the truth. She is going out with Mr. Mulligan. Penny is stunned. Of all people — Mr. Mulligan?? She can't bear the thought that he could turn out to be her new father, despite all the times she has prayed for a new father. It is a cruel joke, and Penny is not laughing. Eleanor stays out until sometime around midnight. Penny knows because she was unable to sleep and heard them return. She watches out the upstairs window as he helps her out and kisses her on the lips. It can't get any worse in Penny's mind. Then, Saturday arrives and her mother tells her that she's invited Mr. Mulligan over to watch the baseball game with her. No amount of squirming or excuses will get her out of it and it turns out to be every bit as bad as she anticipates. He shows up and never stops talking. Finally, in frustration, Penny tells him to be quiet so she can hear the game. Her mother, shocked at her rude behavior, insists she apologize, but Penny refuses. Instead, she runs out of the house. Taking a long, and roundabout route, she ends up in Uncle Dom's car, sobbing uncontrollably. When he finally figures out what is wrong, he gives her the only advice he can. Go home, and tell her mother that she is are sorry. Then be patient. Her mother's anger with her will pass.

Frankie all but does a stand up comedy routine when he finds out, suggesting that milkshakes be served at the wedding and asking if he can get a deal on cottage cheese. Penny would have slugged him but Uncle Sally came in at that moment, and his conversation with Uncle Ralphie was sufficient to distract both Penny and Frankie. The town gossip, Uncle Sally, tells Uncle Ralphie that he heard from old man Garboella that Penny's late grandfather buried a fortune in the yard. Penny isn't surprised as she has caught Nonny doing the same thing. She squirrels away money all over the house. The idea is very exciting to Frankie, and he follows up by offering to do yard work for Uncle Paulie. Uncle Paulie gives him some chores to do, and they begin by picking up the sticks in the yard from the tree that is dying and dropping them everywhere. Two hours later, Frankie comments that Grandpa must have left himself a marker of some kind so he could find it again. Penny isn't optimistic about their chances of finding it. It turns out she is right. The only thing they uncover in the dark is a box with Queenie bones in it. To make matters worse, they wake Nonny, who takes a shot at them in the dark of the back yard.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

The next morning Penny finds her mother cooking in the kitchen - something she only does when company is coming. She tells Penny Mr. Mulligan is coming for dinner and warns both Penny and Pop-pop to be on their best behavior. Penny goes to play baseball with Frankie, who asks her to play shortstop as they are short a player. Penny does, and Veronica and her group show up. They sit right behind Penny and begin needling her. Penny ignores her at first, but Veronica won't stop. When she starts in on Uncle Dominic, calling him crazy, Penny snaps. Before anyone can stop her, she slugs Veronica in the nose. Frankie comes running and Veronica hits Penny back, giving her a shiner. The game is over.

Penny's mother is less than pleased as she tries to clean up the bruises and scrapes on her face. When the doorbell rings, she sends Penny down to let Mr. Mulligan in. He gives Penny, Eleanor and Me-me all a bouquet of flowers, and Penny watches as her mother fusses, and notices that the photo of her mother and father are missing from the sideboard as well. Dinner ends better than it begins. Pop-pop serves Mr. Mulligan dark meat instead of the white he asks for, and Penny, innocently gives him a helping of Me-me's peas and onions. When asked if he wants more, he declines at first, claiming he doesn't want to eat them all, but Me-me assures him there is lots. To be polite, he takes a second helping and Penny can hardly keep a straight face. Then Scarlett O'Hara comes in and lifts her leg to pee right on Mr. Mulligan's shoe. Penny's mother is horrified, and she and Me-me take the shoe out to clean it, leaving Penny and Pop-pop with Mr. Mulligan. He comments on her shiner, and Penny tells him quietly that mother hates it when her bed isn't made. After dessert, Mr. Mulligan can't leave fast enough and Penny waves goodbye thinking he won't be back soon.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Penny discovers her mother is cooking for Mr. Mulligan, and her day is off to a bad start. She meets with Frankie to play baseball, and he shows her an article in the morning paper reporting on vandals and laughing tells her they made the news. Frankie's team is short a person so Penny fills in as short stop. Jennifer shows up with her friends and the teasing begins. Penny manages to just ignore her at first, but it gets harder and harder as Jennifer gets more and more personal about it. When Jennifer begins to pick on Uncle Dominic, something in Penny snaps. She hits Jennifer right in the nose. Jennifer hits her back, and the brawl that ensues ends the game.

Penny's mother cleans her up, chastising her for fighting and then sends her down to open the door for Mr. Mulligan. The dinner is much more entertaining than Penny could have hoped for. From Me-me's peas and onions to Pop-pop's burping and hearing issues, Penny has a hard time keeping a straight face. The highlight comes from





Scarlett O'Hara, who comes in and pees on his shoe. Penny's mother is horrified, and she and Me-me leave the room to clean the shoe. Penny uses that opportunity to imply that her mother gave her the shiner for not making her bed, and then Pop-pop asks if Mr. Mulligan plans to marry his daughter — or what? He can't get out of the house fast enough. After a serving of key lime pie, he declines coffee and leaves. Penny waves goodbye, certain that he won't be back any time soon.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Pop-pop is talking to Mickey through the static on the radio again when Penny goes down. Me-me warns that they'll lock him in an institution if he claims to be talking to his dead nephew through the static, but that doesn't stop him. Penny gives Pop-pop a kiss and goes back upstairs. In the morning, she goes to work and Frankie tells her that Aunt Concetta died. It isn't a tragic affair because Aunt Concetta was old and they didn't know her very well. It does mean, however, that they will be going to another funeral and another wake. Frankie is happy about it because he collects the funeral cards that are given out and this one will give him a total of fourteen prayer cards. On the evening of the wake, Me-me helps her to get ready and notices that she has outgrown this funeral dress. Next season she will need a new one. Cousin Benny drives them to the funeral hall, and Frankie manages to get himself and Penny into for poking the corpse and claiming she moved. The funeral director is not amused and promises Frankie that if he does it again, he will personally see to his funeral. Cousin Benny is no where to be seen after the funeral and Uncle Dominic offers to take them to the wake. As they pass Ann Marie's they see Benny on the lawn fighting with her husband. Uncle Dom stops and puts an end to the fighting. He gets Benny back into the car and explains that even if Ann Marie's husband is a louse, there is nothing that can be done about it now.

When Penny gets home, Me-me is already in bed and Pop-pop is listening to Mickey through the static on the radio again. She sits with him for a while, keeping him company.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Pop-pop has never gotten over losing his nephew Mickey in the war. He often sits in front of the radio, listening to the static and convinced that Mickey is talking to him. They have their conversations late at night because Me-me discourages it, telling him that if anyone finds out, they'll have Pop-pop committed. In the morning, the store is in a commotion. Frankie tells her that Aunt Concetta died. She was old and they weren't close, but Italians tend to make a large fuss about funerals, and this one won't be an exception. Cousin Benny and Frankie take Penny to the funeral and wake. Benny is driving because the baby is sick, and so is Uncle Angelo. Uncle Angelo tends to get "sick" a lot, but it is more often just because he has been drinking. Penny asks Benny about her father's funeral, and Benny tells her it was terrible. Nonny and her mother were beyond distraught. They go to the funeral hall and pay their respects, Frankie getting Penny into trouble when he pokes the body and insists loudly that she moved.

Uncle Dominic drives them to the wake, and as they pass Ann Marie's house, they see Benny on the front lawn fighting with her husband. Uncle Dominic breaks it up and tells Benny that there are some things that nothing can be done about. This is one of them.

When Penny gets home it is late and Pop-pop is listening to static again. Penny sits with him, and acknowledges Mickey on the radio.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Penny's birthday begins like any other normal day. Scarlett O'Hara comes in and pees on the rug. Me-me makes banana pancakes for breakfast but uses bananas that aren't ripe. Her mother comes in and after wishing her a happy birthday, she gives her a small jewelry box. Inside is a ruby necklace. She tells her that it was the one in her engagement ring and helps her put it on, eager to hear if she likes it. Penny says she does, but can't help but think her father is disappearing. Frankie picks her up and they go to the store where the gifts continue. Uncle Ralphie gives her the same gift as every year — a pecan roll. He sends them to Nonny's with a bag of groceries and on the way Frankie gives her a crime comic called *Crime Mysteries*. When they get to Nonny's, the house looks deserted and Penny is a bit disappointed until they get inside where a surprise party is waiting for her. Uncle Ralphie even closed the store for the day. The gifts continue, and include Uncle Dom whistling happy birthday with Queenie in a concerto; all of her favorite foods; a rum cake; a glass of Chianti; a brush and comb set; black patent Mary Janes; a fancy satin skirt; a five dollar bill; and then to her surprise, a brand new bicycle with a red bow. Uncle Dominic comes in and says there is one more present, passing an envelope down the table. Penny thinks it might be money but inside finds tickets to that night's Dodgers game for her, Frankie and Uncle Dominic. Penny can't believe it. They pile into the car and head home so Penny can get permission to go, and seeing the excitement on her face, Eleanor can't say no, even though she had a party of her own planned for Penny. The trip to New York City is so exciting, but nothing tops the sight of Ebbets Field. Uncle Dom's tickets take them right down in front, and the whole game is like a carnival. Penny is sure that she is somewhere better than anything the angels could offer up.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Penny gets up on her birthday to dog pee on the rug — just another day like any other day. She goes downstairs to find Me-me making her banana pancakes, which live up to her usual standards. She chokes them down. Her mother gives her the first real piece of jewelry she's ever had — a ruby necklace — but when Penny learns that it came from the engagement ring her father gave her mother, it feels more like her mother is selling off her father a piece at a time. She has a hard time pasting a smile on her face and telling her mother she loves it. Frankie picks her up for work, and Uncle Ralphie is alone in the store. He gives her his usual yearly gift and sends her to Nonny's with a bag of groceries to start the work day. A surprise party is waiting for her, and what a surprise it is. She gets so many gifts that she can hardly believe it, including the new bicycle she was hoping for. Just when she thinks it can't get any better, Uncle Dominic comes in with one more gift. He gives her an envelope, and instead of money like she is expecting, she finds tickets to that evening's Dodgers game. Penny can hardly believe her eyes. To make it even better, Uncle Dominic includes a ticket for Frankie too. She's



so excited that the surprise her mother is trying to give her hardly registers. When she gets home to ask permission to go, her mother and Pop-pop are hanging streamers. Surprised, and a bit disappointed, Eleanor gives her permission to go, trying not to be disappointed that she's been upstaged by the other side of the family. Trying to make sure Penny's birthday is terrific, she allows her to go, even though it means that her birthday celebration with Penny will have to wait until the following morning. The trip to New York City is great, but the ball game and the whole experience of being there is a birthday present that she'll never forget. In fact, Penny is sure that if heaven exists, she's found it.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

One morning soon after, Penny wakes to a bad smell. When she sees Scarlett O'Hara lying next to her bed in her own mess, and softly whining, she knows something is wrong. She calls Uncle Paulie, who asks her if she's seen Frankie, but Penny is too worried about Scarlett O'Hara to focus on that. A trip to the vet confirms that Scarlett can't be helped and the best they can do is make her comfortable. Penny puts her in diapers and sets her on the porch to watch the squirrels. She whines softly when she sees them and Penny is tempted to chase them for her. She hears someone calling her name and thinks she is imagining it until a hand waves to her from a bush in the back yard. She goes to it and finds Frankie, looking dirty and scared. He asks if the police have been there looking for him, and she assures him they haven't. He tells her that he was caught when he tried to take money from the collection, and assures her his intention was to return it. He panicked, knocking over a bookshelf and breaking a window as he escapes. Since the last time he was in front of the judge, he told Frankie he'd better not see him there again, Frankie figures he'll be sent away for sure. She offers to hide him in the basement, but Frankie knows he has no choice but to turn himself in.

Uncle Ralphie picks Frankie up and takes him to the police station. That night, Penny finds little sympathy at the dinner table as she tries to find out what will happen to him. Later, Penny goes to Frankie's house to find out what is going on, but he has little information yet. When she gets home, Pop-pop tells her Scarlett O'Hara is gone. All she can think about that night is how everything is messed up. The next morning she goes to Nonny's and talks to Uncle Dominic. She asks him why no one will stand up for Frankie. She cries, still overwrought by Scarlett's death, and now afraid that she will lose her best friend as well. Uncle Dominic holds her while she cries, telling her everything will be okay. That afternoon, Frankie shows up, excited and tells her that the charges have been dropped. Uncle Dominic talked to the Bishop on Frankie's behalf. Now, he has to work to pay for the new window, and apologize to Father Giovanni. All in all, he figures he got off lucky. Frankie and Uncle Dominic help Penny bury Scarlett in the back yard at Nonny's with the Kings and Queenie's making Penny feel a bit better.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Penny struggles with two issues that are emotionally devastating. The first is the deterioration of Scarlett O'Hara and the second issue that causes anxiety for Penny involves her cousin Frankie. Frankie, still looking for a way to bring some money into a household that is struggling with the latest job his father has lost. Though Frankie crosses the line and is caught trying to steal from the collection plate, he insists that his motives were pure and that he fully intended to replace anything he took. When caught, he panics and breaks a window to escape. Too afraid to go home, Frankie sleeps under



a bush in Penny's back yard. When she finds him, she offers to hide him in the basement at first, but they both know he has to turn himself in. Finally, they call Uncle Ralphie who has been worried sick, to come and get him. Uncle Ralphie takes Frankie to the police station. Penny talks to her family at the dinner table, trying to find out what might happen to Frankie, but her mother, Me-me and Pop-pop are less than supportive. They all cite his ongoing bad behavior and the likelihood that he will follow his father into jail at the rate he is going. She goes to see Frankie who is sure that he is headed for reform school or worse. He closes the door looking tired and beaten. When Penny gets home, she discovers that in her absence, Scarlett has died. Since Scarlett had been gift to Eleanor from her husband, she takes the loss as hard as Penny does. The next morning, Penny goes to see Uncle Dominic and begs him to help. She tells him that though everyone tells her that the events occurring are for the best, Penny doesn't buy it. She can't see how losing Scarlett is for the best. She also can just sit by and watch as her best friend is taken to reform school. Dominic intervenes on Frankie's behalf, talking to the Bishop and managing to have Father Giovanni drop the charges. All Frankie has to do is work at the factory to pay for the window and apologize to Father Giovanni. It is also likely that he will lose his position as an altar boy, but all of that is minor compared to the thought of reform school.



# Chapters 15 and 16

## Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

It is a hot August day and at Frankie's urging, Penny asks Me-me if she and Frankie can go to the pool. Sadly, Me-me believes that a person can contract polio at public swimming pools and won't let her go. She goes back outside and plays cards with Frankie for a while until Me-me and Pop-pop come out and announce they are going to the Harrison's until five. As soon as they are gone, Frankie convinces Penny that they can go to the pool and be back before anyone notices. They get to the pool to discover that Jack is the lifeguard and Penny can't stop thinking about him. When he calls her on the bullhorn, she is daydreaming about him, but manages to drag herself out of the pool when she sees her mother standing beside him. Her embarrassment is immense and her mother's disappointment obvious. Her punishment is grounding for the rest of the summer. A week later, Penny is sure she is in hell, but Uncle Dominic rescues her. He convinces Me-me to allow him to take her to the beach. They go swimming and afterward go on the rides that are on the boardwalk. It is a perfect day.

Frankie and Penny are in the basement at Nonny's. He offered to do the laundry because he has a new theory about where Grandpa might have hid his wealth. Penny is absently doing the laundry as Frankie investigates, her mind on the fight she had that morning with Me-me over Mr. Mulligan's return to her mother's life. Penny is resentful and makes no secret of it until Me-me sets her straight. When Frankie gives a yelp of surprise and hauls a cigar box out of a hole behind a brick in the wall, Penny thinks this must be a miracle. He teeters on the ladder and the box goes flying, money everywhere. Penny figures there must be a million bucks. When she feels a tug on her fingers, she turns to see her arm being pulled into the wringer. She tries to scream but nothing comes out. Her arm is pulled in up to the armpit and the wringer is still pulling. Frankie finally pulls the plug from the wall and runs for Uncle Dominic while Penny screams in pain. Penny blacks out for a few minutes and wakes again in Uncle Dominic's car. He tells her not to worry, they will be at the hospital in just a minute.

In and out of consciousness, for a time, Penny believes she is going to die, but then she wakes to arguing. Her mother and half a dozen other relatives are around her and her mother is angry, yelling at Uncle Dominic that he was supposed to look after her, and that he killed Freddie and now her too. She slaps him hard across the face and would have a second time but Penny manages to croak "No", and their attention shifts to her instead. Her arm is bandaged and sitting at kind of a strange angle. A doctor comes in and when Penny insists on knowing what is going on, he tells her that the nerve damage in her shoulder is extensive and he just can't predict what might happen or whether her arm will work again. She blacks out again while the whole room is in distress.





## Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Penny is hot and defies Me-me's wishes when she is left on her own by going to the pool against instructions to the contrary. Caught in the act, she is hauled out of the pool in a public and embarrassing manner. Penny isn't sure what is worse - being called out of the pool by Jack by order of her mother who is standing beside him, or the laughter initiated by Veronica as the event occurs. Her punishment is grounding, and in less than a week, she is fed up and thinking about escaping. Uncle Dominic drives up and offers to talk Me-me into letting her go out with him. Me-me agrees, to Penny's surprise, asking only that Eleanor not find out. Penny spends the day at the beach with Uncle Dominic, who turns down the attentions of young women in order to spend his time with her. She feels like they are father and daughter, doing things a normal father would do. It is about the most perfect day, ending with rides on the boardwalk.

Frankie is always full of ideas. Some of them are better than others. This time, he offers to do Nonny's laundry because he wants unrestricted access to the basement where he is sure that their grandfather hid his fortune. While Penny is stuck feeding the wringer, he is looking around for a suitable place that might have money stashed. The funny thing is that sometimes Frankie is right. This is one of those times. He actually finds a box filled with money. He's so excited coming down the ladder with it that he loses his balance and the box goes flying. Money is falling everywhere, and Penny figures there must be a small fortune there. She is so intent on watching the money fall that she doesn't realize at first that her fingers are begin pulled into the ringer. She can hardly even call out to get Frankie's attention at first, but by the time she does, she is in the wringer deep and it is pulling hard. It doesn't stop pulling, even when her arm is in up to the shoulder. Finally Frankie pulls the plug. Penny is screaming when he goes to get Uncle Dominic. She is in and out of awareness as Uncle Dominic gets her to the hospital. Her mother is so mad that she slaps Uncle Dominic, who just stands there and takes it. She is blaming him for Penny's arm. Penny tells her mother to stop and the attention of everyone in the room changes to her. When the doctor comes in, she has to insist before he finally confesses the truth — her arm may never work right again.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

The rest of Penny's summer will be spent in the hospital. Penny divides the kids in her ward into two groups — those that are dumb and those that are unlucky. Most fall into the first category, having done something incredibly stupid to get themselves a bed in the hospital for an extended period. Only one girl is in the unlucky category, and Penny hears the nurses talking. She has a blood cancer and they say she is dying. Penny has a steady parade of visitors that come to see her, and there are many times where the constant effort to socialize is exhausting. Everyone wants to know the same thing — how is she feeling? Of course that translates into can she move her fingers yet? The answer is no. Penny tries every day, but can't wiggle them at all. Frankie is allowed to come in any time he wants, and his normal behavior is a comfort most of the time. Her uncles all bring her gifts, her favorite being the radio from Uncle Sally. Penny is the only one on the ward who has one, which makes her pretty popular after visiting hours are over. As the days pass, her group becomes more and more like a family, gathering around to listen to programs and sharing how they feel about nurses, doctors and the hospital in general.

One day the doctor comes in and tells Penny they will have to do a graft, taking skin from her hip to patch the damaged skin under the arm. Frankie thinks that's worthy of photographs but they won't let him into the operating room to take them.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

If Penny thought being grounded was a lousy way to spend the summer, that was only because she hadn't been here yet. Penny would likely spend the rest of the summer in the extended care ward and being stupid and unlucky, she had lots of company from those who were in the same category. Some of the stupidities amazed her. She was also surprised at how many relatives made the trip to see her each day. From uncles to aunts to Nonny and Me-me and Pop-pop, not to mention her mother, the doctors, nurses and orderlies, it was a constant parade of people and the amount of socializing it took was exhausting. The one person that she wanted to see the most didn't come. Uncle Dominic didn't come once. Penny didn't understand why not. Frankie charms his way into unlimited access, which is nice because he is one of the few who still behaves normally around her. Aunt Gina even says they'll go to Radio City Music Hall when she gets out.

Day after day, she tries to use her fingers to no avail. She had no idea how much of her life required her right hand until this happened. She couldn't scratch, brush her hair or teeth or even just go to the bathroom without help. Her uncles brought her all kinds of gifts as usual, but the best was the radio so she could listen to ballgames that came from Uncle Sally. Her mother comes twice a day, each time anxious to know if she's



regained any use, and each time is disappointed by the news. Frankie wonders if the doctors will cut off her arm if she doesn't get the use of it back. There is no talk of that, but they do wind up doing a skin graft, taking skin from her hip to cover the area under her arm.



# Chapters 18 and 19

## Chapters 18 and 19 Summary

The grafting operation is successful, but Penny's arm still doesn't work. The kids Penny shares the ward with all go home except for the girl who has cancer. She is still holding on against all odds, and they put her next to Penny to give both girls company. Uncle Dominic still doesn't come, and Penny asks Frankie why. Frankie tells her that no one knows where he is. He got into his car and left the day of Penny's accident, and hasn't been seen since. Penny asks Frankie to find him. The next morning Frankie tells her that Uncle Dominic went to Florida. The nurses put the girl with cancer beside her for company. She is eight years old and has a good grasp of the fact that her life is ending. When it does two days later, Penny stops eating and once the word gets out, everyone is bringing her food. Nonny manages to get her to eat her favorite dish. One day Mr. Mulligan shows up with a container of butter pecan ice cream and a newspaper. They share the ice cream and he reads the paper to her, cover to cover. It is the beginning of a new regiment that he keeps up. He begins with the sports, then local news, obituaries and funnies. Their favorite becomes the police blotter. Penny realizes he is an interesting man. He tells her about his time spent in the air force and she realizes that she is glad he is there.

School starts, and still Penny is in the hospital. She actually misses school, to her surprise. One night Penny hears voices drifting in from the hallway. Someone named Harvey asks the nurse how Penny is doing and the discussion turns to Penny's father. Harvey asks if he was really a spy and all they agree on is that he died in jail. Penny doesn't hear much more than that. When her mother shows up the next day, Penny immediately buttonholes her about her father, and the fact that she lied to her. Instead of answering, she pales and runs from the room just as Uncle Paulie and Aunt Gina are coming in. Penny demands the truth from them and gets mostly the same reaction, except that Aunt Gina sends Paulie to see about Eleanor and sits down to tell Penny the truth. She tells Penny how it all started because of a short wave radio that Uncle Dominic gave to her father so that he could listen to the ball games. They thought he was using it to send messages. It was a time shortly after Pearl Harbor, where everyone was suspicious of everyone. Penny's father had been born in Italy and come to the US when he was two, but his father, Grandfather Falucci, never finished the paperwork that would make citizens of them. Nonny had to go and register them as enemy aliens and no one would listen when the police were told it was all a mistake. Her father's only crime was being Italian. They let Dominic go, but because Freddy wrote for an Italian newspaper as well, they kept him. He died in an internment camp in Oklahoma. Eleanor comes back and promises Penny there will be no more secrets. They talk for a while. Penny gets a new roommate who is in to have her appendix out. They whisper together after lights out, and Penny offers to loan her the lucky bean. She asks if she can see it, and when it starts to slide off the table, Penny lunges for it using her bad arm without thinking, and her arm works! Even the fingers curl. Penny realizes she is going to get her life back.



## Chapters 18 and 19 Analysis

Time drags on. Penny sees many of the kids go home, but still sees no sign of her Uncle Dominic. When she pushes Frankie, he discovers that Uncle Dominic has gone to Florida. He left the day of her accident. Penny can't understand why he would leave her when she needs him the most. She sees her mother talking to the doctor and watches her shoulders slump. Then she knows. Her arm will never work again. Penny tells Frankie he can have her bike. He's excited at first but then realizes the reason she is offering and he tells her to wait cause she'll need it when she gets out. Gwendolyn, or Gwennie, is put beside her for the company and benefit of both, and her quiet acceptance of death helps Penny to voice the reality she believes now. Her arm will never be more than it is now — useless. When Gwennie dies two days later, Penny goes into a tailspin. She doesn't come out until Nonny's quiet insistence that she eat her favorite food opens a floodgates of sort emotionally, and she finally feels able to cry herself out. Nonny never says a word. She just holds her and lets her purge the fear and loneliness. When Mr. Mulligan first shows up, Penny has no idea what to say to him. She is rather embarrassed about her behavior from the last time they met, but he behaves as though it never happened. Instead of asking her all of the same questions everyone else does, he quietly takes her mind away from herself and the hospital. He reads the paper to her from cover to cover. She realizes that there is more to him than a milkman, and finds that she not only enjoys his company, but looks forward to it.

As school starts without Penny, she realizes that she would even rather put up with Veronica's harassment than stay in the hospital any longer. The boredom is getting on her nerves. One night she overhears a conversation in the hallway that concerns her father and the circumstances that surrounded his death. These details she has never been able to coax out of anyone on either side of the family. She now learns that her father was considered to be a spy by the government, and actually died while he was in jail. It is such a shock that when her mother shows up, she is less than considerate about her feelings when she confronts her. Her mother is so shocked at first that she can't face Penny and she leaves the room just as Uncle Paulie and Aunt Gina come in. Aunt Gina finally tells her the whole story, and at first Penny can only think to blame Dominic like her mother has. When her mother finally comes back in, she swears that she will never lie to Penny again, and agrees to answer her questions. Penny wants to know if her father loved her, or even liked her. Eleanor assures her that he did. Soon after, Penny gets a new roommate who is nervous about her upcoming appendix surgery. Penny offers her the loan of her lucky bean, but knocks it off the table. To stop it from falling to the floor, Penny reaches out and grabs it, using her mangled arm for the first time in weeks. She is overjoyed at the thought that she will again have her life back.



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

At first all Penny can use of her mangled arm is her fingers, but Penny is determined to get the rest back as well. She is finally allowed to go home in mid September, providing she agrees to wear a sling and promise to do the exercises provided to her. When she gets home, she discovers that her room has been entirely redecorated. The walls are now a pale turquoise, similar to the color of the ocean. New lamps and a white chenille bedspread complete the renovation that makes it look more like Aunt Gina's bedroom. Penny is thrilled and surprised to discover that it was Pat Mulligan who took the time to paint for her. Penny's arm gets stronger every day, and Dr. Goldstein is happy with her progress. Aunt Gina takes Penny out to get her hair done, and Uncle Nunzio chips in by having several dresses made for her. She returns to school and discovers that her injury made her into an instant celebrity of sorts. Even Veronica seems to have backed off for now.

One afternoon Penny gets a box from Pop-pop. Inside is a black kitten with a smudge of white fur on one side. She decides to name the little boy Rhett. Things just keep improving for Penny. Mr. Mulligan comes over for dinner frequently and even fixes the toilet when it leaks. Frankie continues to work at the factory and respects and admires Uncle Nunzio. In just one more month, the window he broke will be paid for. He brings up Grandpa's buried money again, but Penny just shakes her arm at him and he realizes they have all that they need already. Two more miracles happen to Penny. She still works at Falucci's, but because of her arm, she works the cash register now. As she sits there doing her homework one day, Jack walks in and asks her to a movie. When Penny admits she won't be allowed, he offers to take her for ice cream instead and they discover they share the same favorite. The second miracle is that the Dodgers and the Yankees are in the World Series together. The Dodgers don't win, but it goes all the way to the end. Shortly after that, on a Saturday, Penny is sitting in the backyard watching Rhett chase squirrels when a familiar voice says "Hi Princess". Uncle Dominic is as thin as Penny has ever seen him, and has dark circles under his eyes. Penny is still mad at him for abandoning her, and for what happened to her father. She tells him that she knows everything, and he tells the whole story again in a rush from his perspective, obviously still haunted by it all and finishing by exclaiming that he killed his own brother. Penny realizes he is her Uncle Dominic. The same Uncle Dominic she has always loved. She finds a way to help him to forgive himself a little.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

Penny would have agreed to eat Me-me's recipe of cooked liver every night if that's what it took to gain her freedom from the hospital. When she goes home finally in mid September, she discovers that with the help of Mr. Mulligan, her mother has redecorated her entire bedroom. Now it is adult looking and as beautiful as Aunt Gina's



bedroom is. Penny is thrilled and surprised to hear that Mr. Mulligan helped, even though it seems to have made Pop-pop a little jealous. Penny does her exercises and keeps getting more of her arm back. Aunt Gina takes her to a beauty parlor to have her hair properly styled and she looks beautiful, especially when Uncle Nunzio throws in a bunch of new dresses to go with it. She goes back to school with confidence and discovers that her accident has made her a bit of a celebrity. Even Veronica leave her alone. Pop-pop gives her a kitten that she names Rhett in keeping with her Gone With the Wind theme, and Rhett enjoys chasing squirrels as much as Scarlett O'Hara had. Mr. Mulligan comes over a lot, and Penny sees how happy her mother is and approves. It turns out that he really is a nice man. Frankie continues to work for Uncle Nunzio at the factory, finally finding a new role model. Uncle Nunzio tells him he is one of his best workers, and if he keeps it up, he might be inclined to help him get into college when the time comes.

Two more big surprises happen. Jack comes into Falucci's Market and asks Penny out for ice cream, and the Dodgers make it to the World Series and give the Yankees a run for their money. Part way through the series, Mr. Mulligan even shows up with a television set. They don't win, but there's always next year. Uncle Dominic shows up one day, looking thin and haggard. She is still sort of angry with him until they hash out the events that led to her fathers arrest. It obviously still bothers Uncle Dominic, and Penny realizes that she has nothing to be angry with him for. He tells her that her name came from a time when her father told him that she was like a shiny penny he'd lost and won't ever hold onto again. Penny gives him a different version, and her version is much easier to live with. He knows she is lying and tells her so, but it still has the effect Penny was looking for, and it seems like he forgives himself a little.





# Chapters 21 and 22

## Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

One day, Mr. Mulligan shows up after school wearing a suit and tie, and carrying Penny's favorite ice cream. After Me-me brings in cookies and lemonade, he nervously asks Penny for her permission to marry her mother. She thinks he should probably be asking Pop-pop instead, but he tells her that her mother wanted her to give her permission first. She lets him fumble for words for a minute or two before letting him off the hook. The wedding is simple and Penny gets to be both maid of honor and flower girl. Frankie twines flowers all around her sling. Mr. Mulligan says Penny can call him anything she wants, so she calls him Pat for now.

Things are a little different after he moves in. He even manages to deal with Pop-pop, and Penny's mother finds the confidence she needs to consider returning to nursing. Penny talks to her about the fact that she doesn't seem to get along with the Italian side of the family and she admits that it was difficult from the start. Then she surprises Penny by suggested that they throw a dinner party and invite them all. Penny is surprised, and the invitation is well received. Everybody comes, and the house is filled. Everyone even gets along, and the night is filled with happy sounds and laughter. It isn't the beginning of a new trend and afterward things go back to the way they were but for the moment, Penny feels like the luckiest girl in the world.

She still thinks about heaven sometimes, but her idea of it has changed. It still contains butter pecan ice cream though. Now, in her heaven, Uncle Dominic is playing ball again and lives in a house with a wife and new baby. Of course none of that happens, but Uncle Dominic does move out of his car and into Nonny's basement. They still sit in his car now and then and listen to the radio, reminiscing about the time that they had the best seats in the house.

## Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

Mr. Mulligan comes over to ask Penny's permission to marry her mother. While traditionally he should be asking the father of the bride, Mr. Mulligan vividly remembers Penny's initial objections to his dating her mother, and doesn't want Penny's objections to stand in the way of her mother's acceptance. He tells her how much he loves her mother, and Penny has to admit that her mother is happier with Mr. Mulligan around. Besides, she can hardly say no to a man who has the foresight and courtesy to bring butter pecan ice cream along with him. The wedding is held not long after, and Penny gets to be both maid of honor and flower girl. Frankie helps her to decorate her sling and Penny begins calling Mr. Mulligan by his first name instead. She may call him Dad one day, but not right away.





When he moves in, Penny is a bit concerned at first, but he manages to fit right in. He is even able to handle Pop-pop, and that all in itself is a feat that she admires. Penny asks her mother about her relationship with her father's side of the family. She admits that they've never been close, and that began right after she and Penny's father married. Nonny announced her intention to move in with them, but Penny's father wouldn't let her. It was just one more thing that made her mother an outcast to them. The largest of those of course was the fact that she wasn't Italian. Still, her mother says, if Penny wants to invite them all for dinner, she would have no objections. Not only is the invitation well received, but the whole family shows up. Though things go back to the way they were afterward, this is an evening that Penny will remember for a long time. She has never felt more lucky and more loved than she does now.

Penny still wonders about heaven, but in a different way now. It's still a place where you can get butter pecan ice cream on tap. In this version however, Uncle Dominic is playing baseball again, and he is married and has a new baby. While that doesn't happen, Uncle Dominic does move out of the Roadking and into Nonny's basement.



# Characters

## Barbara Ann Falucci (Penny)

Penny is an eleven-year-old girl who loves the Brooklyn Dodgers. She was told that her nickname came from a Bing Crosby song and that because her father loved the singer, the name just stuck. Penny doesn't mind. She's been called Penny for so long that sometimes she forgets that her birth certificate actually says something else. Besides, she's glad they didn't name her after another one of his songs. She could have been called Clementine instead. Her father died when she was just a baby, and as a result, Penny thinks a lot about death and what happens to you when you die. She's heard rumors of clouds and angels, and had discussions about wings, but basically, she thinks Heaven is where there are swimming pools everywhere, a steady supply of butter pecan ice cream and the Brooklyn Dodgers never lose. The best part about being dead would be that you could have the greatest seats in the house — right behind the dugout. Penny's father was Italian and he comes from a rather large family. As a result, Penny has a lot of uncles. Her favorite uncle is Dominic. Dominic lives in his Roadking on Nonny's (her grandmother on her father's side) property. He is considered to be a bit of an eccentric and is rarely seen wearing anything but slippers on his feet. He is as passionate about baseball and Dem Bums as Penny is, and they often sit in his Roadking and listen to baseball games together. For Penny's twelfth birthday, Dominic gets tickets to the Dodgers baseball game with seats right down at the field. It is a memory that Penny will cherish. He even includes a ticket for Frankie.

Penny's mother is a bit over-protective. She doesn't allow Penny to go to the local swimming pool or movie theater for fear that she will contract polio there and wind up in an iron lung. Her best friend and cousin, Frankie, who shares her enthusiasm for baseball, talks her into sneaking out to the pool one hot summer day. When her mother catches her, she is grounded for the remainder of the summer. Frankie tends to get her into more trouble than she would get on her own. Such is the case when Frankie overhears a rumor that their grandfather hid a cache of money somewhere in the house. Under the guise of helping Nonny with her chores, they begin searching.

Penny is stunned when Frankie is right and a box of money is found in the basement, but when Frankie loses his balance and the box goes flying, Penny is distracted just long enough for her hand to be pulled into the wring of the washer. Unable to stop it, she watches as it pulls her arm in all the way up to the shoulder. The pain comes shortly after, jolting Frankie into action. He pulls the plug and runs outside to get Uncle Dominic. By then, Penny is screaming. Dominic frees her and takes her to the hospital, where she will spend weeks in recovery. During this recovery, Penny will make the transition from child to adolescent. She will learn the truth about her father's death and will get to know her mother's boyfriend. She will also see life from a more fragile perspective, and appreciate the many blessings she has.



## Frankie

Frankie is twelve years old and is Penny's best friend. He has dark hair with eyes that are brown. Many people think Frankie and Penny are brother and sister, and Penny doesn't mind as long as Frankie isn't getting her into trouble. For the last few years, he's been an altar boy at St. Anthony's and enjoys it, although he sometimes falls asleep during the services. He is a proficient liar and is proud of how good he is at it. He dearly loves and wants to emulate his father, Uncle Angelo, who was arrested and jailed for robbing a five and dime. Frankie watches as his father loses job after job following his release, and knows that in order to help his family put food on the table, he must do whatever he can. He takes a job delivering meat from Uncle Ralphie, and works with Penny. He makes the mistake of trying to "borrow" some money from the collection plate one day, and when the Father catches him in the act, he breaks a window to escape. He would have had to go to a detention facility if Dominic hadn't intervened and spoken to the Bishop on his behalf. Instead, Frankie is only required to pay for the window he broke and apologize to the Father. He takes a job with Uncle Nunzio at his clothing factory, and in the process finds a new role model — this one having a much more positive effect on him, although it still doesn't keep him out of trouble entirely.

Frankie overhears a conversation that Grandfather Falucci had a secret stash of money that he hid somewhere in the house, and convinces Penny to help him look for it. He surprises even himself when he finds it, but it loses its appeal when in the process his best friend Penny almost loses her arm to the wringer washer. He spends a great deal of time keeping her company at the hospital and afterward. After that, he reaches the conclusion that they have pretty much everything they could ask for.

## Uncle Dominic

Dominic is Penny's favorite uncle. He is a handsome man who most claim looks just like Penny's father did. He has dark hair and brown eyes and is a bit of a hermit and considered by most to be an eccentric. He always wears his slippers, even when he goes to work. He lives in a 1940 Plymouth Roadking parked beside the house, and every winter he goes to Vero Beach in Florida. He loves baseball, and his favorite team is the one he affectionately calls Dem Bums - the Brooklyn Dodgers.

The car he regularly drives is a 1950 Cadillac Coupe de Ville. Dominic works at Falucci's Market with Frankie and Fulvia. He doesn't like big gatherings and avoids them whenever possible. He has a soft spot for dogs and has always owned dachshunds. He names them all either Queenie or King, depending on whether they are male or female. There have only been two Kings, but he now owns Queenie V and VI. The first four are buried in the backyard at Nonny's somewhere. He built a pen so the dogs can run around and avoid the fate of their predecessors - being run over by a car. For the most part, he prefers dogs to people, talking to them all the time, and even cooking especially for them.



Dominic loves Penny, and calls her Princess, as do most of her uncles. He still feels a great deal of responsibility for the circumstances that took her father from her, although Penny doesn't learn this for some time. Dominic had given his brother Freddie a short wave radio so that he could listen to the Dodger's baseball games. He loved it, but when the police caught him with it, he was taken to jail and called a spy. Dominic was certain that as it was all a big mistake and that he would be released as soon as they realized it. The police release Dominic but not Freddie. Freddie is taken to an internment camp where he later dies, and Dominic never forgives himself. He remembers a visit with Freddie when Freddie tells him that his daughter is like a penny he lost and will never hold again. When Penny has her accident with the wringer, Dominic is supposed to be keeping an eye on her, and Penny's mother blames him for not being more vigilant. She tells him that it is just like what happened with Freddie, and Dominic is devastated. He is so full of remorse and guilt that he leaves for Florida and doesn't return for weeks. Not only is he convinced that he killed the brother he loved, but that he has maimed his favorite niece. It is almost more than he can bear, and when he finally returns, Penny can see the toll it has taken on him. She tells him he isn't responsible, and her compassion eases a great deal of his pain. He even moves out of the Roadking and into Nonny's basement.

## **Eleanor**

Eleanor is Penny's mother. She has wavy hair that is golden-brown in color, cut short to just below her ears. She wears little make up beyond some red lipstick and some Tangee rouge on her cheeks. In fact, the Tangee rouge is the one thing about her that could be considered fancy. Eleanor has changed since her wedding photo. In those days, she looked happy. Her hair was long and curled, worn down past her shoulders. In those days she was a nurse, but when her husband took sick and died she simply couldn't face the hospital anymore.

Now, she works for a truck factory as a secretary to a boss named Mr. Hendrickson. Eleanor begins dating the milkman, Mr. Pat Mulligan, when Penny is eleven. Penny is not happy about it, but the effect on Eleanor is obvious. She is happy, smiling all the time, and looks better than she has in a long time. While Penny approves of the effect this relationship has on her mother, she doesn't want her to marry him and turn him into her new father. Penny has always harbored a secret hope that her mother and Uncle Dominic would get together. When Pat expresses an interest in marrying her, she insists that he get permission from Penny first, and by then, he has won her over. They are married soon afterward.

## **Mr. Pat Mulligan**

Mr. Mulligan is Penny's family's milkman. He is slowly going bald, with only one tuft of red hair remaining that reminds Penny of Woody Woodpecker somehow. He is of Irish descent, and his skin is light and fair. Of all the delivery people who come to the door, he is Penny's favorite. He has a great sense of humor. Penny is uncooperative where



he is concerned and goes out of her way to ensure that he is uncomfortable. Despite this, Pat Mulligan is determined to find a way to ease Penny's discomfort with him. He has fallen in love with Eleanor, and together they make a good couple, so he continues to try. When Penny gets her arm caught in the wringer washer, she spends a great deal of time in the hospital. When a decent interval has passed, Pat begins to visit Penny, bringing her ice cream and reading the newspaper cover to cover with her. She finds his voice soothing, and he slowly manages to change her mind about him. It is with great joy that he asks for and receives her blessing to marry into the family. It is a good union, and he is welcomed by both sides.

## Uncle Ralphie

Uncle Ralphie owns a butcher shop and is one of Penny's uncles on her father's side. He gives Penny and Frankie a job delivering meat orders in the neighborhood. He is generous to a fault, often giving away food on credit to the dismay of his wife and business partner, Fulvia.

## Me-me

Me-me is Penny's grandmother on her mother's side. She and Penny's grandfather live upstairs from Penny and her mother, joining them for meals in the kitchen they share. Since Eleanor works at the truck factory as a secretary, Me-me does the cooking. Somehow, she got into the habit of overcooking everything however, and the end result is always either soggy or tough and inedible. In fact, Me-me's meals are best avoided entirely. Despite that, her heart is in the right place.

Me-me's hair is mostly gray, and she often wears it up in a bun. She loves to wear clothing that has colorful prints. Me-me is annoyed that Eleanor refuses to return to nursing after having gotten such good grades in school.

## Pop-pop

Pop-pop is Penny's grandfather on her mother's side. Me-me, his wife, claims he has been deaf since returning from the war in 1918. He had come home with shrapnel in his leg from Europe, and according to Me-me, he's been deaf ever since, having left the best part of himself in France. Since those days, his listening is selective at best. Since he returned home, his manners have also deserted him, loudly burping, often multiple times.

## Uncle Angelo

Uncle Angelo is Frankie's father. He has spent time in jail and was caught due to his stupidity. He robbed a five and dime store, and along with the cash from the register, he took a handful of candy bars. During his escape, he ate the candy bars and threw the



wrappers out the window. The police followed the trail of wrappers, catching him. Frankie loves his father and wants to be just like him. Angelo has difficulties hanging onto employment, and more often than not the family struggles to make ends meet as he is again and again unemployed. Frankie struggles with what he feels are his growing responsibilities to help his father to support the family.

## **Scarlett O'Hara**

Penny's dog, she is almost fifteen years old and has been with Penny since she was a puppy. She used to bark every time Penny cried as a baby. When Penny turns twelve, Scarlett takes a turn for the worse, and in a very short time, her life ends. Devastated by the loss of her lifelong friend, Penny is comforted somewhat when Frankie suggests that Scarlett take a place of honor in Nonny's back yard with the assortment of Kings and Queenie's that have been buried there. Penny can imagine Scarlett playing with her friends and chasing squirrels together with them.

## **Alfredo (Freddie) Christopher Falucci**

Penny's father, and the first born son in his family, Freddie was the favorite of his mother, and Penny's grandmother, Nonny. He was the first in the family to have ever attended college, and made his living afterward as a newspaper reporter. His death was a family tragedy and Nonny still wears black every day. He is buried between Stuart Brandt and Cora Lamb in the cemetery across from the Catholic cemetery because his mother hadn't converted before he died.

## **Nonny**

Nonny is Penny's Italian grandmother. She is a small woman, who still deeply mourns the loss of her first born son Alfredo, Penny's father. She cries every time she sees Penny because of how much she reminds her of him. She is a tiny but powerful woman who still makes macaroni from scratch. She still goes to Freddie's grave on a regular basis, ensuring it is clean and free of weeds.

## **Uncle Nunzio Rosati**

Nunzio owns a clothing factory, and is always dressed in a way that reminds Penny of a movie star. He is married to Aunt Rosa, and they live next door to Nonny in a house guarded by two stone lions. He is generous to a fault, yearly providing Penny and her mother with coats and often other articles of clothing as well. Nunzio gives Frankie a job to keep him out of a juvenile facility and ends up becoming a role model to the boy, even promising to help him get into college if he stays out of trouble.



## **Uncle Paulie**

Paulie lives with his wife Gina in the home they purchased from Nonny. Nonny herself still lives in the house, and Paulie goes to great pains to keep peace in the house. He even puts a full kitchen in Nonny's suite when Nonny voices her unhappiness with Gina's ability to cook. He is a constant mediator between the two, but seldom manages to keep the peace entirely. He often thinks he should have been a politician.

## **Aunt Gina**

Gina is Paulie's wife and they live together in the house that used to belong to Nonny. To this day, despite the best efforts by Paulie, there is friction between Nonny and Gina. Aunt Gina is a little less than traditional in that she doesn't understand the way in which Nonny and the rest of the family still mourn the loss of Freddie.

## **Dr Lathrop**

The family doctor that is one of the doctors who looks after Penny when her arm gets caught in the wringer washer.

## **Veronica Goodman**

Veronica used to be a friend of Penny's but is now her biggest adversary. She is one of the more attractive young ladies, and always has a posse of girls around her no matter where she goes. She rides Penny relentlessly.

## **Aunt Fulvia**

Aunt Fulvia works with Uncle Ralphie at Falucci's Market. She sits at the till and rings up the purchases, and is the real brains of the operation.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Lucky Bean**

Gift given to Penny by Uncle Dominic.

### **Falucci's Market**

Butcher shop belonging to Uncle Ralphie.

### **Vero Beach, Florida**

Where Uncle Dominic goes each winter.

### **Shady Grove Cemetery**

Site where Penny's father rests in peace.

### **The Sweete Shoppe**

A luncheonette with a full fountain that makes very good egg creams and ice cream sundaes.

### **Butter Pecan Ice Cream**

Penny's favorite ice cream.

### **Grandfather Falucci's Treasure.**

A box of money stashed in Nonny's basement.

### **Wringer Washer.**

The machine that almost takes Penny's right arm.

### **Short Wave Radio**

What causes the arrest of Penny's father.





## **The Boardwalk**

An area near the beach where rides and games are set up.

## **Ebbet's Field**

Where Uncle Dominic takes Penny and Frankie for Penny's twelfth birthday to watch the Dodger's play.

## **Lamb's Eyes**

Wedding gift from Uncle Dominic to Eleanor.

## **Water Boy**

Nickname for the late Grandfather Falucci.



# Themes

## Penny's Heaven and Mortality

Penny is an eleven-year-old girl who lost her father at a very early age. In fact, she barely remembers him at all. Most of what she knows about him comes from stories told by both sides of the family. Unfortunately, the questions that plague her the most are the ones that neither side seems willing to answer directly, and that only piques her curiosity more. Penny would like to know the circumstances surrounding her father's death. Since no one will give her a straight answer, she finds herself speculating about it more and more. She wonders about death, and what heaven is like, since that's where she is constantly told her father is now, although she has no intention of personally finding out about it until she is a hundred years old or more.. The descriptions she is given of heaven are almost as varied as the circumstances of her father's death, though there do seem to be some constants. Heaven, as far as she can understand it, is filled with angels and clouds. She can't quite understand how angels manage to sit on clouds, but the wings might play a factor there. Heaven, from Penny's perspective, must be filled with all the butter pecan ice cream you can eat, swimming pools at your disposal, and baseball. The best thing about heaven, Penny has decided, is that you would be able to get the best seats in the house — right behind the dugout. When Penny turns twelve, she has an accident that puts her in the hospital for sometime. She comes face to face with mortality — her own and the mortality of others close by, and also learns the truth behind her father's death. She grows up a great deal in that year, and revises her thoughts about what heaven must be. She isn't sure about angels, swimming pools, or even dugouts anymore, but she is still convinced that heaven has an unending supply of butter pecan ice cream.

## Silver Linings In Dark Clouds

Penny gets her arm caught in a wringer washer when her attention is distracted by Frankie's discovery of Grandpa Falucci's hidden money. By the time Frankie comes to his senses, Penny is screaming, and the wringer has taken Penny's arm in all the way up to the shoulder. Frankie pulls the plug and runs outside to get Uncle Dominic, who comes in, frees Penny and quickly takes her to the hospital. Penny's mother blames Uncle Dominic for not being more watchful of Frankie and Penny when they were alone in Nonny's house, but it isn't really his fault. Despite that, his guilt is enormous and he leaves the area for Florida. Penny begins a long and painful recovery that includes skin grafts and much soul searching. The entire family comes to visit frequently with the exception of Uncle Dominic. Just when it appears as though she will never have use of the arm again, Penny learns some interesting facts about her father which sufficiently distract her. She also has an opportunity to get to know the man her mother is involved with. Mr. Mulligan spends a great deal of time with Penny, reading to her and bringing her ice cream. She listens to his stories, and comes to realize that he really is a very nice man. Just before she is due to be released, Penny loans her lucky bean to the girl



in the bed next to her. In an effort to grab it, she lunges instinctively with her mangled arm and it responds. Penny realizes to her great joy that her life will go back to normal.

## Love, Family, and Forgiveness

Penny loves her family. She loves both sides of it — her mother's side and her father's side, even though they seldom get together. This is something she doesn't really understand. Her mother's family, which includes Me-me, Pop-pop, her mother and herself, all live in one house together. They all have their quirks, but genuinely care about one another. Her father's family live close by, and she sees them frequently as well, going over to Nonny's house often to help out, as well as to visit Uncle Dominic who is her favorite uncle. Holidays and special occasions are celebrated on both sides, though separately, and Penny is dearly loved by all and spoiled by her many uncles on her father's side of the family. She is at Nonny's house when the accident occurs that almost costs her right arm, and in the hospital, Penny's mother blames Uncle Dominic for the accident as well as for her father's death and Uncle Dominic pales under her verbal assault, leaving the hospital and New Jersey shortly thereafter. Penny is angry with him for leaving her when she needs him the most. When he finally shows up again, her arm is healing, and she has the use of it again, but she is still angry. Now, she knows the truth about her father's death as well, and part of her blames him for that as well. When she sees the tortured look on his face, and understands how it still haunts him, and how much he still blames himself, she realizes the truth. It wasn't his fault at all. It was just easier to blame him. In that instant, she remembers how much she loves him, and forgives him for any small part he might have played in either her accident or her father's death. She tells him that and finds a way to make him forgive himself a little too.

Penny's mother has promised full disclosure on all issues now, so Penny uses that opportunity to find out what keeps both sides of the family apart. Eleanor explains that her father's family always treated her as though she was trying to take him away from them, even though that wasn't the truth, and offers to invite them over for a family dinner. Surprised and pleased, Penny agrees and the invitations are accepted. The dinner is a wild success, and so filled with laughter and love that Penny feels as though she is the luckiest girl in the world. Not much changes as a result, and they don't become the Norman Rockwell family, but it's okay.



# Style

## Point of View

*Penny from Heaven* by Jennifer L. Holm is written entirely from the first person perspective of an eleven-year-old girl named Penny. She lives in a house with her mother and her mother's parents — Me-me and Pop-pop. The novel relies primarily on her narrative of the time and while there are conversations between the main character, Penny and those who play a role in her life, most are short and merely used to illustrate a point or explain a given situation. The period of time covered is less than one year, and it is a time in the main character's life where she is making the transition from child to adolescence. As such, her concerns are at first juvenile. An accident that involves a rather lengthy stay in the hospital helps Penny in many ways to see things from a more grown up perspective, and changes her outlook towards life and death, and her own mortality. She also realizes that in some ways her behavior has been more selfish than is warranted, and allows herself to be more concerned with the happiness of those who are close to her rather than how it directly affects her and only her. Since the character is young, the only love interest to evolve is between her mother and a man she chooses to be Penny's new step-father, although Penny is on the cusp of displaying interest in boys herself as is shown with the introduction of Jack briefly.

## Setting

*Penny From Heaven* is set in the early 1950s and takes place almost entirely in New Jersey. As the novel is told from the point of view of pre-teenage girl named Penny, it revolves primarily around her family, friends and immediate neighborhood, with the exception of one trip to New York City — specifically Ebbet's Field, where Penny is taken by her Uncle Dominic to see a baseball game live played by their favorite team, the Brooklyn Dodgers. Aside from that, there is brief discussion of Florida where her favorite uncle retreats to at times, but Penny herself remains in her local region. The novel begins in Penny's home and describes her typical routine which involves time shared between her family and the extended family of her deceased Italian father. Penny lives with her mother, grandmother and grandfather which make up the family on her mother's side, but spends a lot of time between the many uncles and the grandparents on her father's side of the family. She is given a summer job by an uncle who owns and operates Falucci's Market, where she and her cousin Frankie deliver groceries but that part of her job is short lived as a result of an accident involving a wringer washer that Penny becomes caught in. The remainder of her summer is spent in the hospital.



## Language and Meaning

This novel is told entirely in a young, conversational English by an Italian-American pre-teenage girl named Penny. The story takes place in a time where life is relatively uncomplicated by technology and gadgets. Penny's time and concerns are focused on a summer vacation of baseball, bicycle riding, and a summer job at her uncle's butcher shop. Penny's father was Italian, but his only part in this novel is confined to the cause and manner of his death, and the extended family he has that are involved in Penny's life. The differences between American and Italian family life are shown through the eyes of an eleven-year-old, and center on her outlook on the way food is a way of life on the Italian side, and merely a means of sustaining life on the American side. The story gains authenticity with the many Italian terms and endearments used which include "Tesoro mio - my treasure"; "Nonny - grandmother"; "Patanella mia - my little potato"; "Sfogliatelle - Italian pastry with ricotta cheese inside"; "Scopa or briscola - Italian card games" and "cocca di papa - Daddy's little girl", to name a few. Penny enjoys the Italian influences and would likely be a good student of the language, but the Italian side of her family is more concerned that she not advertise her immigrant heritage and focus on being one hundred percent American. This is likely due to the fact that the war and its associated prejudices cost her father his life and freedom which is a fact she only learns after she is hospitalized.

## Structure

Penny from Heaven is told in under three hundred pages, which are divided into twenty-two chapters. The chapters are all relatively equal in length, each one ranging from ten to fifteen pages in length, with rare exception. Each chapter is given a title that foretells the main topic of the chapter itself. For example, the chapter titled "The Lucky Bean" would be followed by a story told by Penny about how she was given a lucky bean by her Uncle Dominic. The time period covered is less than a year from beginning to end and centers mostly on Penny's summer vacation at the age of eleven. The novel progresses at a walking pace with more memories and descriptions than dialogue, and the topics reflect the main character's youth and outlook as well as concerns. There are no complicated sub plots or alternate points of view although as the story progresses, Penny learns to see things from a less selfish perspective, and comes to understand that life is tenuous and precious. As a result of information she learns after a serious accident, Penny matures, and broadens her horizons somewhat to include the feelings of those around her. It is a coming of awareness as a child begins the transition into a young lady.



## Quotes

"They're good people, patanella mia."  
Chap. 3, p. 19

"I think we have a shot at the series."  
Chap. 3, p. 22

"I should've been a diplomat."  
Chap. 5, p. 47

"I'm the luckiest fella ever."  
Chap. 5, p. 57

"Do you think Uncle Dominic would teach me how to drive?"  
Chap. 8, p. 93

"You're going out with the milkman?"  
Chap. 9, p. 102

"Princess, your mother and me, we just ain't never gonna be like that."  
Chap. 9, p. 109

"Well, at least I don't have some crazy uncle who lives in a car and wears bedroom slippers all over town."  
Chap. 11, p. 129

"Mother slugged me for not making my bed."  
Chap. 11, p. 136

"We find the loot, and you can hire someone to do the wash."  
Chap. 16, p. 189

"I was thinking maybe we could go to New York City and see a show at Radio City when you get out of this joint."  
Chap. 17, p. 205

"I know about my father being a spy."  
Chap. 18, p. 223

"If you were Italian and didn't have your citizenship, you couldn't travel to certain places, or have radios with a shortwave band, or flashlights, or cameras, or I don't know what else."  
Chap. 19, p. 225

"I, ahem, I was wondering if you would give me your permission to marry your mother."  
Chap. 21, p. 246



## Topics for Discussion

Why is Barbara called Penny? Who gave her the nickname and why? How many stories are there about the origin of that name? Which one does Penny prefer to believe as the truth? Why?

What is Penny's impression of what Heaven is? How does that change or get added to throughout the story? In the end, how is her idea of Heaven revised, and how close is life to the heaven she now imagines?

Where is Penny's father? How and when does Penny finally learn the truth about what happened to him? Who does she initially find out from? Who gives her most of the details and how do they change the way she perceives things?

What accident does Penny have? What injury does it cause and what is her initial prognosis? Who is initially blamed for the accident and why? What is the result of that blame? How does it change how Penny feels?

Where does Uncle Nunzio work? What benefits do Penny and her mother realize from Ninzio's business? What special item does Penny select for her mother, and why does she choose this particular item? What is she hoping it will inspire?

How does Penny initially feel about Mr. Mulligan? How does that change when she discovers that her mother has been seeing him now and then? What does Penny do to try and stop the developing relationship? What happens as a result?

Who gives Penny a hard time in school and whenever their paths cross? Why is this the case? What happens when Penny is playing baseball with Frankie as a result of the needling coming from this person? Whose influence is Penny drawing on at this time?

How does Mr. Mulligan resolve the relationship difficulties he has with Penny? What initial gesture changes Penny's mind about him? What routine do they establish? What else does Penny discover about him afterward? What courtesy does he extend to her regarding her mother?

When does Uncle Dominic return? Where has he been and how long was he there? What was he doing there? How does Penny feel about him initially and why? What explanation from Dominic makes her change her opinion? What kindness does Penny show him and why?