

# **The Rabbit Back Literature Society Study Guide**

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## Plot Summary

In a small town in Finland called Rabbit Back, a new substitute teacher named Ella Milana discovers an altered version of the book, "Crime and Punishment," which leads her to a series of myths, mysteries and deceptions. Apparently, an insidious virus is affecting the books in the town and Ella determines to find out what is going on. In the midst of her journey, she learns about an exclusive group called The Rabbit Back Literature Society which was started several years ago. The society is composed of nine people who had been chosen as children by world famous children's author, Laura White. Ms. White had trained the children and they all became famous authors. After reading one of Ella's articles, she is invited to become the tenth member of the group. Ella soon learns, though, that the group is made up more of distrust and jealousy than any real talent or ambition as evidenced through stark declarations of the group's members in a ritual called The Game. Through her participation, Ella learns that there had been another tenth member before her, a child who had mysteriously died years ago. Ella does her best to find out the truth about the boy and the recent sudden disappearance of Laura White.

# Part One, Chapters 1-6

## Summary

In Chapter 1, Ella Milana, is a high school substitute literature teacher in the Finnish town of Rabbit Back. She is alarmed when she reads a student's essay on "Crime and Punishment" that shows incorrect information. When she questions the student, he produces the book and she sees that the book is written as the student said. Ella calls her literature professor, Eljas Korpimaki, who confirms that the book given to her by the student is not accurate. Ella takes the faulty book to the Rabbit Back library and speaks to the librarian, Ingrid Katz, about the flawed book. Ingrid tells Ella that there are pranksters working in publishing and assures Ella that the book will not be returned to circulation. Ella seats herself in the reading lounge to read the newspaper, Rabbit Tracks, and watch Ingrid at her desk because she feels Ingrid is behaving suspiciously, not having taken the flawed book as lightly as she had pretended to. When Ingrid leaves her desk, Ella sneaks into the library office and takes the flawed book along with five others in the same stack and leaves the library.

In Chapter 2, Ella returns to her parents' home where she is staying during her Rabbit Back teaching assignment. Her father, Paavo Emil Milana, a former runner, is now 55-years-old and has Alzheimer's Disease. All he does now is sit in the garden every day because he is comfortable there. Paavo sits in the rain even though Ella tries several times to get him to come into the house so she gives in and gets an umbrella for him. Ella sits in her old childhood bedroom to grade papers and comes across one essay that she thinks might be good enough for the Laura White file. Laura White is a famous author who established the Rabbit Back Literature Society of ten children several years ago. Now she is interested when other children show exceptional writing talent. Later that evening, Ingrid Katz surprises Ella at home, demanding to have the books that Ella took from the library. Ella wants to know how so many books with errors in them could be in the library and Ingrid passes it off as people not being that interested in literature. The faulty copies must be destroyed and Ingrid takes the books and leaves. Ella looks up Ingrid and learns that she is not only the librarian, but also an author and one of the members of the Rabbit Back Literary Society.

In Chapter 3, Ella looks at old family slides with her mother, Marjatta Milana, and tries to recall the feelings and events pictured but finds that her memory is fragmented and she thinks it's terrible how time dilutes memories. At school, one of Ella's students asks for the comic book she had taken from him a couple days before and when she returns it he claims that it's not the correct one so she puts it back in her bag. Ella has two voice messages on her cell phone: one from Ingrid telling her that Laura White had liked Ella's story that appeared in Rabbit Tracks and that she'd like to meet with her soon about an important matter, and the other call was from Ella's mother telling her that Ella's father has been taken to the hospital after an accident in the garden.



In Chapter 4, Ella's father is covered with gashes and animal bites but he is unable to tell anyone what happened to him. Ella's mother had gone to the garden to cut her husband's hair but found him lying in the raspberry patch instead. When her father is stabilized, Ella returns home to clean up the kitchen mess left by her mother. When Ella reads the paper, she sees an ad for a mythological mapper who could determine what types of mythological creatures are residing at your property. Ella is reminded of all the statues of gnomes, sprites and other characters all over town including the seven shops that sell them. Ella also sees that her story is included in a special literary supplement in the paper that publishes local writers. There are six literary societies in town but the most famous is The Rabbit Back Literary Society founded in 1968 by Laura White. It started with ten members and there have been no new members added in the years since.

In Chapter 5, Ella's father has died and she recalls meeting Ingrid at the library when her father had still been in the hospital. Ingrid had told Ella that Laura White had liked Ella's story so well that she wants to make Ella the next member of the Rabbit Back Literary Society.

In Chapter 6, Ella sits after her father's funeral and recalls his reading her some of Laura White's Creatureville books. Ella and her mother settle into their life without Paavo. Ella dreams about the library where the floor was made of grass and fairies and other little characters moved about. She then finds books that she authored but they are all empty so a cat tells her that she better get busy writing. The cat jumps away and snow starts to fall. During the days Ella continues to teach her classes but her dead father is never far away from her thoughts.

## Analysis

The author establishes the setting for the story as a small town in Finland called Rabbit Back. The time period is relatively current because there is mention of cell phones. The author also introduces the reader to the main character, Ella Milana, who is a young Finnish literature substitute teacher. She has had a few temporary school assignments since graduation and she still occasionally calls her favorite literature professor for advice. Ella is living temporarily with her parents since she is teaching in her hometown. Her mother is a homemaker who watches TV and like to fill out entries for contests. Ella's father had been a runner when he was younger but he has Alzheimer's Disease now and just sits in the garden all the time.

The author begins to set up the theme of deceit when it becomes clear that the Crime and Punishment book does not have the correct ending yet Ingrid Katz, the author and librarian, does not seem surprised by it. When Ella finds other books that aren't right and takes them home with her, Ingrid appears to take them back as if she is trying to protect a secret. Even the comic book that Ella takes from one of her students seems to morph into something else and the student claims it's not the correct one when Ella tries to give it back to him. Things are not what they seem in Rabbit Back and Ella is intrigued to find out more.



Memories are also important to the story. Ella watches some family slides with her mother and tries to recall feelings around events but is frustrated because her memories are fragmented. Her father's Alzheimer's Disease also supports the theme of memories because he has lost all of his. On some days, he doesn't even remember who Ella and her mother are. It is terrible when a person loses his or her memory but it is also bad when the memories are recalled incorrectly. This will be important as the story extends.

The author also introduces the theme of Fantasy which will occur regularly throughout the story. All over town there are statues of mythical figures, gnomes, fairies, etc. and even seven shops that sell them. There are gnomes and characters in Paavo's garden and the library is filled with images and statues of all types of characters. Even Ella's dream about the library contains fairies and other little creatures moving around. There is a feeling that there are even more characters lurking around that can't even be seen, leading to an air of mystery in the book.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why is Ella suspicious about the way Ingrid Katz responds to the incorrect version of Crime and Punishment that Ella brings to the library?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What role do memories play in this section of the book?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How does the author show the theme of fantasy in this section of the book?

## **Vocabulary**

slain, assessment, abstract, sarcastic, mythological, irrational, sullies, mausoleum, veneration, gruff, superfluous, discrepancies, mandarin, nymphs, ecstatic, banalities, dubious, malicious, cardamom, ambushed, peculiar, tetanus, lingonberry, proteges, heretical, scrubby, lurks, predatory, perverse, bestowed, inscrutable, contentment, ritual, enigmatic, sprite, condolences



## Part Two, Chapters 7-12

### Summary

In Chapter 7, Laura White hosts a party to announce Ella Milana as the newest and long-awaited tenth member of the Rabbit Back Literary Society. Ms. White's home is filled with guests having a wonderful time dancing and drinking. They all await Ms. White's appearance at the party and Ella meets another member, Martti Winter, who discloses that he observes people in attempts to find new material for his books. Martti has turned forty-three and he ate a cake for twenty people. Martti's weakness is food and eating has replaced all other activities in his life. He has become comfortable with being fat and has expensive clothing tailored for him.

During the party, Martti chats with Ingrid who has brought some more flawed books which she burns in the fireplace. She is irritated that Martti is not interested in the book problem. Ella soon joins them and wants to know if Martti has played The Game recently. Martti tries to ignore her but she is insistent after learning about The Game from another member named Arne Ahlqvist. Martti tries to stall her by saying that it's almost time for Ms. White to introduce her, plus she should also be getting her own copy of the rule book soon. Martti eventually gives in and tells Ella that The Game is a way for members to extract information from each other that might be difficult to obtain any other way. Finally, Laura White appears on the stairway to join the party and Ella rushes forward in excitement. Suddenly, Ms. White is surrounded in a snowstorm and disappears.

In Chapter 8, news of Laura White's disappearance spreads and search parties are formed to find her but all they come up with are some animal carcasses and an old car in a woods but no road for it to have arrived there. A newspaper article is released asking for the person who had stolen the car to come forward with the truth and the assurance that no charges would be filed. Anyone with information would receive a free subscription to Rabbit Tracks. People noticed that many dogs seemed to join in the search, loving their freedom. Despite all the efforts, months pass and Ms. White is not found.

In Chapter 9, Ingrid drives Ella home from the party and doesn't understand why Ella isn't more upset about not being introduced at the party as the tenth member of the Rabbit Back Literature Society. Ingrid reveals that Ella's father used to spend time with the society members but was never taken in as a member.

In Chapter 10, Ella and her mother spend their first Christmas without Paavo. Ella has dreams that Paavo is a decaying Santa Claus and also that Laura White's dead body climbs to her bedroom window to read her Creatureville books. Ella wakes and thinks about her future and then she really does see someone peeking in her window. Ella soon recognizes the person as Arne C. Ahlqvist who writes under the name Aura Jokinen. Arne has come to challenge Ella in The Game. The rules of The Game state



that any society member can challenge another member using any means possible given that no harm is inflicted. Once a member has been challenged, he or she can't refuse playing The Game without relinquishing membership in the society. Ella pretends to be asleep and the woman leaves.

In Chapter 11, Ella's term at the school ends and she has to find a way to make some money to pay her bills. Ella secures a year-long job doing research on Laura White and the Rabbit Back Literature Society for Professor Korpimaki. Ella plans to use The Game to get the information she needs for her research.

In Chapter 12, Ingrid Katz locks the library and heads home to her husband and children. After the kids are tucked in bed, Ingrid goes out for a walk where she feels as if someone is following her. When she arrives home, Ingrid is shocked to find that Ella has sneaked up on her and challenges her to The Game. Ingrid thinks the Game is silly but she is compelled to join in because of the rules of the society. The two women proceed to the library where Ella ties a handkerchief over Ingrid's eyes but Ingrid doesn't think Ella has what it takes to play until she gets the absolute truth. Ella confirms that she's quite capable of playing by stating that Rule 21 allows the challenger to inflict any method to get what he or she needs. Ella wants to know about the books that Ingrid destroyed so Ingrid agrees to spill.

## Analysis

The author continues the theme of Fantasy in this section primarily with the disappearance of Laura White. A party is in process at Ms. White's home to formally announce Ella as the newest member of The Rabbit Back Literature Society. She keeps all her guests waiting most of the evening because she has a migraine so when she finally appears on the staircase, everyone is anxious. After taking a few steps, she is engulfed in a sudden snowstorm and disappears. Everyone begins searching for her but her body is never found. There is no logical reason for a snowstorm inside a house, and this is the author's way of asking the reader to suspend reality for awhile and lean into some magic thinking.

The author also introduces the rules of The Game in this section. Any member of The Rabbit Back Literature Society can challenge any other members to an episode of The Game when he or she wants to learn the absolute truth about something. The member who is challenged has to play or he or she will be removed from the society. There is also a rule called Rule 21 where the challenger may use extraordinary means to elicit answers. Until Ella's membership in the society, the other members have not played for many years due to disinterest. The Game is an extreme measure to obtain memories from people which supports the theme of memories throughout the entire book.

The author uses the technique of foreshadowing when writing about the stolen car lodged in the deep woods and that Ella's father had wanted to be part of The Rabbit Back Literature Society but was never accepted. The answer to this mystery will become evident at the end of the story.





The authors introduces the theme of ambition in this section when Ella is so anxious to be announced at Laura White's party. She thinks that this will elevate her status in the community and in the world of literature. The other members of the society also are very ambitious, particularly Martti Winter and Ingrid Katz. Martti tries to appraise Ella and her talent before befriending her and Ingrid tries to get Ella stirred up when Laura White's disappearance supersedes her public announcement. They want to put Ella on edge so that she focuses on other things and not on her writing so that they can remain in their positions of comfortable celebrity.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss some of the fantasy elements in the story up to this point.

## Discussion Question 2

What is the purpose of The Game?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Ella want Ingrid to tell her about the morphing books?

## Vocabulary

optimistic, intoxicating, cognac, envious, instinctive, deference, syphilitic, marzipan, cuisine, mousse, laborious, garnered, messiah, imperceptible, aphorisms, demigod, tenacity, ruminant, farcical, dubious, dishevelled, thermographic, grudge, stipend, axis, aesthetics, dispirited, listlessness, dissertation

## Part Two, Chapters 13-17

### Summary

In Chapter 13, Ingrid confirms that when she "spills" during The Game it means that the person being challenged must spill the truth, not just tell stories. This helps the members derive ideas for books. Ingrid tells Ella that she herself had stolen a book from the library when she was a girl. Ingrid also tells Ella that the morphed books at the library are infected with a plague and it's best not to speak about them. Ella doesn't really understand but she accepts what Ingrid has told her. It is then Ella's turn to spill and Ingrid says that she wants information about Ella's father's death.

In Chapter 14, Ella sleeps for a week after playing the game. On the seventh day, she burns her teacher's bag complete with ungraded student essays because they are all infected. She had realized the papers were infected when she had tried to read them after playing The Game with Ingrid. Ella then tries to determine which one of the society members she is going to challenge next. She finds a list of the members that include: Martti Winter, Ingrid Katz, Helina Oksala, Aura Jokinen, Silja Saaristo, Elias Kangasniemi, Toivo Holm, Oona Kariniemi, Anna-Maija Selanto and herself.

Ella recalls meeting Aura at the party and how she had said, "It's so nice to meet the new tenth member of the Society." Ella thinks it strange because it makes it sound like Ella is the new tenth member who had replaced a former one, not the new, tenth member. At the same party, Oona Kariniemi had also said that it was nice to have a tenth member again. Ella phones Ingrid Katz to get clarification about the member count and she tells Ella that there have always only been nine members before Ella arrived. Once again, Ella doesn't believe what Ingrid is telling her.

In Chapter 15, Ella sets her sights on Silja Saaristo as the next person she will question in The Game. Ella sneaks into Silja's house and surprises her with a challenge to play The Game.

In Chapter 16, Silja tells Ella that there actually had been ten members of the society at one time but no one really talks about it because the death of a child is so difficult. There had been a member who was selected sixth but nothing has ever been said about him after he died years ago. The boy went to a different school from the other kids but he was clearly the most talented one in the group. The boy also always carried his diary with him to make notes for future books. The other kids in the society vowed never to talk about him because their parents might take them out of the group if it was found out that one of them had died. Ella thinks that Silja is withholding so she invokes Rule 21 and twists Silja's cheek. Ella makes Silja take some "yellow" which is another name for sodium pentothol, a truth serum. Silja mellows out and tells Ella that every time she talks about the boy who died, she's inclined to say that he was murdered.



In Chapter 17, Ella leaves Silja's house with a little bit of yellow should she need it for further rounds of The Game. Ella wonders if The Rabbit Back Literature Society is hiding the facts about a child's murder, something she never thought she would uncover in her research. A few days later, Ella makes an appointment at the Rabbit Tracks newspaper to review their archives in hopes of finding information about the boy's death. She found nothing in all the issues from 1971, 1972, and 1973. Ella determines that she must get to the bottom of the boy's death because if he had been murdered, nothing else about the society would matter. Just as she is drifting off to sleep one night, Ella's phone rings and she answers it to hear Martti Winter talking as if he had dialed Ingrid's number.

## Analysis

Ella conducts her first session of The Game with Ingrid Katz and she wants to know what has happened to those books that seem to change. Ingrid admits that the books are infected with a plague that she doesn't really want to talk about. Ella takes this to heart and eventually burns her book bag along with student essays that have also seemed to morph and change. Ella begins to wonder if anything is ever really true if the words in books can change into other things that totally change their meanings. The Game supports the themes of Truth and Memories because the members who have been challenged are compelled to tell the truth about things they have experienced. In the instance where Ella challenges Silja, she doesn't think she is digging deep enough to find the authentic truth so Silja takes some yellow to remove any inhibitions so that the real truth can come out more freely.

The theme of Truth is also important when it comes to the books that morph and change. Ingrid states that the books have been infected with a plague and Ella even burns her students essays because she thinks they have been infected. Ella begins to wonder if anything can ever be considered to be true because if printed novels can alter on their own, how can anything else be safe?

The author uses intrigue when she writes that people congratulate Ella on being the new tenth member of the society and not the new, tenth member. As a literature teacher, Ella knows the importance of the placement of a comma and in this case, it leads her to believe that there had been a tenth member of the society but there hadn't been for many years. Then when Ella learns for Silja that there had been a tenth member, a gifted boy, but that the boy had died in 1972, Ella determines to get to the bottom of the mystery.

## Discussion Question 1

What does it mean when someone must "spill" when challenged during The Game?



## Discussion Question 2

Why does Ella burn her book bag containing the students' essays and a comic book?

## Discussion Question 3

What makes Ella think that there might be some foul play regarding the original tenth member of the society?

## Vocabulary

stipend, disconcerting, maliciously, grotesque, nostalgic, inhibitions, muddle, mutation, pyre, surveillance, carcass, smirk, tangent, wunderkind, hiatus, traumatized, reminiscences, explicit, estrangement, archives, wary, suppressed, prevailing



## Part Three, Chapters 18-23

### Summary

In Chapter 18, Martti Winter is a wealthy man from book sales and an inheritance when his mother died. He is now 42-years-old and spends most of his time eating pastries in his three-story house. Martti and Ingrid had once been lovers and he longs to talk to her but can't revert to their old habit of playing The Game so he avoids her at all costs now. Martti lives behind locked doors now but once Ingrid sneaked into his house and surprised him in the middle of the night. To prevent this from happening again, he tightly sealed his brick garden wall and installed barbed wire and broken glass on top of the garden wall. Martti simply wants to keep his own thoughts to himself. However, he did relent and give Ingrid a key when she nursed him through a bad bout of the flu but she promises never to challenge him again. Martti has given up his curiosity along with sex and alcohol; he prefers only to eat.

Martti is restless though and sees that his front yard fills up with dogs every night. The dogs seemed to be waiting for something. Martti's back garden was not much better. He had spent lots of money installing lights but they never last and it is pitch black outside. Martti once had a mythological mapper come to his house and she detected phantoms attracted to repressed guilt.

In Chapter 19, Ella runs into three society writers at the grocery doing people research. The store is crowded because they are giving away free coffee and cake and Ella is pushed to and fro. Suddenly her body is transported to the ceiling area where it is snowing and the wind is blowing. Oona and Elias are also up there and they dart back and forth watching people whose characteristics they study for use in future novels. Suddenly Ella finds herself lying on the floor where Silja finds her and helps her outside.

In Chapter 20, Ingrid had long wondered what would happen to an infected book if it wasn't destroyed so she wrapped a Creatureville book in Christmas wrap and put it in her desk drawer at the library. Ingrid decides to wait awhile before unwrapping the book to see what had happened to it.

In Chapter 21, Laura White's body has still not been found. Ella tries to figure out a way to challenge Martti because he is the most well-known member of the society and undoubtedly has the most information to spill. Ella has done some surveillance at Martti's house and sees that it is very well guarded and shut up all the time so there's no way she can just sneak in.

In Chapter 22, Martti receives a phone call telling him that Rabbit Market is celebrating its anniversary and will be sending him a gift delivery since he is such a good customer.



In Chapter 23, Ella has purchased a huge pastry gift basket and poses as the delivery girl to gain entrance into Martti's home. He takes her to his office where everything is blue and she proceeds to tie a handkerchief over his eyes.

## Analysis

The author provides more insight into Martti's character in this section. He has been the most prolific and most successful writer in The Rabbit Back Literature Society and he lives on his laurels. Unfortunately, Martti has tired of the world and has shut himself off in his house. He no longer has any interest in sex or drinking, preferring only to eat. His whole world now revolves around food and he is gluttonous in his pursuit. Even though Martti's house is large and luxurious, he is essentially imprisoned by the dogs that surround his house every day. It could be said that the dogs symbolize critics and Martti is afraid of what the dogs might do to him just like he's afraid of what the critics would do if he were to publish any more novels. Martti is fresh out of ideas and doesn't have the energy or the inclination to challenge any of the other writers through The Game. He is bored with all of them and doesn't think he can get any new information anymore. Ella intrigues Martti, though, because she is an untapped resource for information so he lets her into his world but it's probably just to see what he can get out of her for his own benefit. Ella is up to the task, though, and she proves to be a worthy adversary when she gains entrance into his house by posing as a delivery girl with a huge basket of pastries, something she knows Martti can't resist.

The author continues the theme of Fantasy in this section too as exhibited when Ella and some of the other society members fly up toward the ceiling of the grocery store to observe the shoppers. The author could be trying to say that the writers think they are above everyone else in town because of their writing gifts and that they are willing to go to extremes in order to secure ideas for their work.

## Discussion Question 1

Why has Martti given up everything in his life except eating?

## Discussion Question 2

What do all the dogs symbolize in the story?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Martti think that Ella is worth playing The Game with?



## Vocabulary

hinterlands, hillock, pastilles, incessant, extravagant, tragicomedy, corporeal, melodrama, informant, significant, lurking, spontaneity, marzipan, acknowledge, vague, sheepish, coincidence



## Part Three, Chapters 24 - 29

### Summary

In Chapter 24, Ella wants to know everything that Martti knows about the other tenth member of The Rabbit Back Literature Society. Martti congratulates Ella on her research and willingness to get at the heart of the society. Martti tells her that he joined the society when he was in the second grade. He had been a star football player but the invitation to join The Rabbit Back Literature Society was too strong to resist so he gave up football. Martti's mother was especially pleased when he joined the society because of the prestige. She was happy that he was a good football player but his being in The Rabbit Back Literature Society was more prestigious and that thrilled her. Martti's friends abandoned him, though, because they felt he thought he was too good for them now. Martti had actually never even finished reading a book but Laura White trained him to be a good writer.

Martti knew, though, that the new boy would outshine his writing every time because the boy was a prodigy. That boy also was the only one who didn't attend Rabbit Back School; apparently he lived in another town. Martti can't remember many details about the boy, only that he was divine looking and a brilliant writer everyone was jealous of. There was also something about the boy's eyes that wasn't quite right. The boy died in the spring of 1972 and no one ever talked about him again. The only other thing that Martti recalls from that time is that Laura White required the society members to take a notebook with them all the time to jot down things that they noticed. Suddenly a loud, inhuman cry erupts from the back garden.

In Chapter 25, Ella rushed downstairs and out into the garden but it was so dark that Martti couldn't see her. Finally Ella reappeared at the house, stating that a small creature has been attacked and she lays it down on the terrace. It is a badly injured magpie which dies as they watch it. Suddenly a black form flies between Ella and Martti in a blast of wind and the dogs out front begin to bark. Martti manages to get Ella back into the house. Ella is frightened by the event but Martti doesn't want to talk about it, preferring instead to challenge Ella to The Game. Martti wants to know what Ella sees and thinks when she looks at herself naked in the mirror sometimes.

In Chapter 26, Martti senses that The Game is becoming too intense for Ella and apologizes because she has been thrown into it with no real warning. Before she leaves Martti's house, he gives her a photo album of old pictures of the society and makes her promise not to show them to anyone else. Martti also invites Ella to come back, saying that they can talk without playing The Game and she promises that she will. Ella returns home and stays in her room for five days where she continually reviewed her sessions of The Game in her mind. Ella cringes when she thinks about spilling how detached she was from her father's death and how embarrassed she was when talking about her naked body with Martti.





When Ella flips through the photo album Martti gave her, she sees old pictures of Laura White and the original members of The Rabbit Back Literature Society. It is then that Ella sees the dead boy in some of the photos.

In Chapter 27, Ella receives a letter from Laura White's attorney telling her that Laura White had willed all of her possessions to The Rabbit Back Literature Society. Each member would receive a substantial sum of money when Laura White was declared dead but that would probably be in at least ten years. Ella goes to Martti's house for a visit. Ella is curious about Laura White's house and wants Martti to accompany her there to take a look at it but Martti isn't interested. Ella then shows Martti a picture from the old photo album and he confirms that a shadowy figure must be the boy who died. Martti said that the other members of the society almost felt a relief when the boy died because they could never measure up to his talent.

Ella visits Martti for five days in a row and they talk about how Laura White trained the children in the society. One day, Ella notices a key in Martti's front door when she arrives and she goes inside to find Ingrid and Martti in bed together. Ella leaves but returns that evening for another round of The Game. When she arrives, Martti is wearing nothing but a watch. He wants to teach her a new maneuver of The Game called The Mirror in which the blindfold is tied on the challenger instead of on the person being challenged. Martti directs Ella to look at him as if she were his mirror and convert the image into words.

In Chapter 28, Martti encourages Ella to take some yellow before beginning to spill. Ella tells Martti that he is as big as a tent and not fit for humans to see. After awhile Ella moves toward Martti and begins to kiss him. Martti then gets up to get dressed so they can continue with Ella's asking the questions but she has only one: where does Martti get the ideas for his stories. Martti turns pale underneath his blindfold.

In Chapter 29, Martti tells Ella that he gets ideas for his books by pondering life and listening to Mozart, the answer that most article writers want to hear. Ella doesn't believe him, of course, and invokes Rule 21 to make Martti tell her the truth. Ella has to pinch Martti's cheeks five times before he agrees to take yellow and spill. Martti recalls being a boy and reading in a bright room in Laura White's home one summer day. He realizes that Ingrid isn't there and excuses himself to go to the bathroom so that he can explore the house and find Ingrid. Martti spots Ingrid walking down a corridor but she disappears without a trace. Returning to the reading room, Martti sees Ingrid burst out of a door holding something against her chest. She runs out of the house and Martti follows her.

Martti knew that Laura White would never lend any of her books because of the risk of bacteria getting on them so he wonders what it is that Ingrid has taken. Martti searches for Ingrid and finds her on the playground and he sees that she is looking at the notebook of the dead boy whose book was more green than blue like those belonging to the other members. Ingrid moves on to the library and Martti follows her there, arriving just as she is emerging empty handed. Martti searches the library for four days to find the notebook which he stuffs inside his shirt before leaving. Martti knew that he should



not open the notebook on his own; that it should be seen by all the members or no one. They all knew that the notebook contained the ideas for a thousand books.

They all agree that Martti would leave the notebook on a hilltop and each member could come individually to look at the book or not. No one ever spoke of it again but Martti could tell that all the members had read it. Martti admits that all his book ideas have come from that notebook and he sees the same in books from the other members' books.

## Analysis

The theme of Ambition is important in this section. Martti explains that even though he was good at football, he joined The Rabbit Back Literature Society because it gave him a sort of celebrity in the town. Martti and the other members wanted the supposed fame that would come as a result of their being in the society. His ambition shows when he explains that he and the other members didn't like the dead boy because he was beautiful and outshone all of them with his writing.

The theme of Approval is also very important in this section. Martti recalls that his mother was especially pleased with him when he stopped playing football and joined The Rabbit Back Literature Society. The society was more prestigious which pleased his mother and he wanted to do anything that would win her approval. The children in the society were also very anxious to please Laura White. She made them feel special by being selected and they wanted to please her and stay in her good graces.

The scene with the magpie is interesting in what it may represent for Martti. The bird is nearly shredded to death in Martti's dark garden by some unseen force. The mythological mapper had sensed a phantom representing repressed guilt in Martti's garden. Martti can't get any lights to stay lit in the garden, symbolizing that Martti's repressed guilt is something that he subconsciously tries to keep hidden. Magpies are birds that chatter incessantly and also collect things indiscriminately so it could symbolize Martti and the other society members who take ideas from other people all the time in order to use them for their own benefit. The repressed guilt part of Martti (the phantom) knows that this is not right so he tries to stop it (the magpie) and keeps all the feelings hidden.

## Discussion Question 1

Why did Martti lose his friends when he joined The Rabbit Back Literature Society?

## Discussion Question 2

What does the dead magpie in the garden symbolize?



## Discussion Question 3

Why were the other members of The Rabbit Back Literature Society relieved when the dead boy died?

## Vocabulary

trivialities, dickens, tipsy, anointed, distracted, literary, envied, prodigies, peculiar, terrace, icon, obscene, magpie, indignation, bewildered, unrequitable, humiliating, babble, reproductive, addled, painterly, quiver, confectionery, acquaint, aback, gambolling, vertigo, pornographic, chronological



## Part Three, Chapters 30 - 36

### Summary

In Chapter 30, Martti admits that he had buried the notebook in oilcloth in his backyard. Martti falls asleep and Ella can't help thinking about the buried notebook but she is afraid to go outside because it is so dark and cold. Ella takes down one of Martti's books and signs the name of the dead boy, Oskar Sodergran, inside. Ella then makes her way through the pack of dogs gathered outside, gets in her car and drives away. Ella can't help but think that Martti and the other members are frauds because they have taken the ideas for all their books from the dead boy's notebook. She knows that this revelation alters the scope of her research project too. Ella then considers the fact that Oskar Sodergran could have been murdered and wonders who would have been capable of that.

A few days later, Ella decides that she can still do more research and sends the professor just some of what she has gathered and will decide what to do with the alarming information later. Ella calls Martti to tell him that they need to dig up the notebook but he prefers to let it stay buried. Martti doesn't even want to know the dead boy's name and Ella tells him that he has already told her during The Game. She tells Martti to look inside the book lying on the piano and he is shocked to see the boy's name because Ella had written it before she left his house the other night.

In Chapter 31, Ella goes to an event where society member Toivo Holm is giving a talk about writing for television. Toward the end of the evening, Toivo jumps off the stage and whispers a challenge in Ella's ear.

In Chapter 32, Ella spills to Toivo for four hours about her erotic dreams and fantasies. It is then Toivo's turn to spill and Ella asks him about his most shameful sexual experience. Toivo tells her about being engaged to an actress who took on the role of playing Laura White in a production. This aroused Toivo so much that he brutally ravishes the woman and even though he is embarrassed, it was the best sexual experience of his life.

In Chapter 33, Ella talks on the phone to her mother who has been away visiting her sister. Her mother tells her that she is considering staying there permanently and Ella will have the house to herself. Ella asks if the name Oskar Sodergran means anything and she vaguely remembers the boy visiting a neighbor sometimes. She seems to recall that they boy had been killed in a car accident. Ella's mother wants Ella to mail an envelope she left on the spice rack, an entry form to win a free year of the Rabbit Tracks newspaper. Ella goes to the rectory to see if she can find out anything else about the dead boy and the minister is able to give her the family's address.

Ella writes a letter to Olavi and Mirja Sodergran, the dead boy's parents, telling them that she believes that their son's ideas live on in the books of the other members of the



society. The boy's notebook had been a source of inspiration for all the other authors. Ella cuts the stamp off the envelope her mother had wanted her to mail and glues it to the letter to the Sodergrans.

Later that night, Ella feels guilty about not mailing her mother's envelope and opens it to find that it is not a contest entry at all. Ella's mother had written to the newspaper telling them that many years ago her husband had attended a party in town also attended by Laura White. He returned the next morning with a head injury and told his wife that Ms. White had arrived drunk at the party and ran away when her husband and another writer tried to calm her. Ms. White ran into town, jumped into a white Renault and started it and the two people pursuing her were able to climb inside the car before she took off. She drove the car into the woods, missing so many trees and finally came to a stop when it hit a tree. All three passengers left the car there and walked to their respective homes.

In Chapter 34, Ella is lying awake in bed when she hears the steps creaking inside the house. Ella throws a heavy vase at the intruder, flips on the light and sees that it is Aura Jokinen, alias Arne Ahlqvist. Ella immediately challenges her to The Game. Aura has come to warn Ella that the other members of the society plan to come to Ella's home that night to kill her because she is digging up information that is better left alone. Aura had never read the dead boy's notebook and has written her books from her own ideas so she has nothing to fear if Ella tells the truth. Ella and Aura rush away in Aura's car and drive to Laura White's house and Aura takes her to Laura White's office. A paper in Ms. White's typewriters said: "The Return of Emperor Rat by Laura White; I saw."

Aura recalls that the night of Laura White's disappearance, Aura had talked to her and she appeared to be ill but wanted to introduce Ella at the event. Aura admits that she has brought Ella to Laura White's house so that Ella can question her about Ms. White's inherent nature in The Game. Ella wants to know if Aura had been lying about the other members wanting to kill Ella and she admits that they can't stand each other so getting together to formulate that plan would have been impossible. Aura then takes yellow and ties on a blindfold.

In Chapter 35, Aura tells Ella that the Laura White book issue of books changing is bizarre and she can't explain it; all she knows is that reality around Laura White just seems to shrivel and blister up. Aura recalls as a girl going into Laura White's bedroom once to find her asleep when a bee flew out of her mouth and stung Aura. There were also other events such as when Laura White was walking in the rain one day and Aura could see right through her when she sneezed. Suddenly, Aura's speech slurs and she falls to the floor. Ella realizes that Aura has had a stroke and she calls an ambulance.

In Chapter 36, Ella calls the other members of the society and they agree to all visit Aura in the hospital. Each member spends just one minute with Aura and when it is Ella's turn, Aura tells her to go find Dr. Jansson to ask about Laura White. He had just been there but went to the cafeteria.



Dr. Jansson tells Ella a story about when Laura White was a girl and she ran away in the frigid night, eventually falling into a hole in the ice and getting trapped. She was rescued and revived but reverted to an infant in her abilities. The family moved away and came back six years later and it was if nothing had ever happened; Laura White was an eloquent little lady. The doctor is humbled that he had no hope for Laura's condition but she proved everyone wrong when she basically came back to life. He now knows that anything can happen in life and that's why people must accept that Laura White disappeared the way she did—in a flurry of snow.

## Analysis

The theme of Truth is important in this section. Martti spills what he knows about the dead boy, including his name, to Ella but he doesn't recall doing it. He must have buried the information deep inside out of guilt and shame. Ella reaches a point where she can't let the others take credit for ideas they have taken from the dead boy so she writes the boy's name inside one of Martti's books because she feels like it belongs there. If the idea for the book came from the boy, then he, not Martti should be listed.

The truth about the white Renault lodged in the woods also comes out when Ella reads the letter that her mother has written to the Rabbit Tracks newspaper. For so many years, Laura White has been idolized in the town and Ella's mother kept the secret of the drunken escapade which landed the car into the middle of all the trees. The car has been a source of myth and legend around town for years and Ella's mother wants to set things right now that she is thinking of moving away permanently. She may also want to let people know that Laura White was just another human being like everyone else, capable of great things but also having some flaws.

The truth can be life altering, too, as shown in the case of Aura who has a stroke while spilling about Laura White. She had wanted to get to the very essence of Ms. White and when she attempts to do that, her body rebels and she is stricken. It is very mysterious that she suffers this stroke while talking about Laura White while in Laura White's house. It's almost as if the missing author had supernatural powers to stop Aura's spilling and took extreme measures to do it.

The truth also comes out when Ella writes a letter to the dead boy's parents. She doesn't want to cause them any pain but she wants them to know that the other members of The Rabbit Back Literature Society had all taken ideas for their books from their son's notebook. Ella thinks it is only fair that they should know how their son's ideas have been used and that he is responsible for the success of the other members.

The theme of Fantasy is also important in this section. Aura talks about finding Laura White asleep one day when a bee comes out of her mouth. Also, Ella talks to Dr. Jansson and learns that Laura White had been injured and brain damaged when she fell in an icy pond when she was a little girl. The family moved away for a few years but returned and Laura was completely fine. He feels bad that he had given Laura a fatalistic diagnosis about her condition when clearly she recovered and is perfect.



According to the doctor, anything is possible, even Laura's disappearance in a snowstorm inside her own home. The author wants the reader to know that not everything has a rational explanation; some things just happen and have to be accepted.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Ella think that the dead boy could have been murdered?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Aura tell Ella that the other society members are coming to Ella's house to kill her?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Dr. Jansson think that people should believe that Laura White disappeared in a flurry of snow?

## Vocabulary

pilfered, revelation, inevitably, consciousness, bizarre, instinctively, alleged, decomposed, strategize, empathetic, tentatively, eavesdrop, lament, rectory, disintegration, immortalize, convey, revelation, traitor, feigned, criminological, Nosferatu, rococo, insurmountable, aftermath, inherent, joists, esteemed





# Epilogue, Chapters 37 - 39

## Summary

In Chapter 37, Ella and Martti begin an intimate physical relationship. It is now May and the weather is nice so Martti suggests a picnic in the garden tomorrow and asks Ella to bring a shovel.

In Chapter 38, Martti and Ella take their picnic basket, blanket and shovel into the back garden and they eat under an apple tree. Their relationship is based on an agreement that they'll only talk about unimportant things. Martti continues to tell Ella little anecdotes about Laura White, just enough to honor her research commitment to Professor Korpimaki. Ella has also started to write a novel about Laura White but hasn't told anyone yet.

When she feels the moment is right, Ella rises to retrieve the shovel and looks at the letter lying on the ground which had come a couple days ago from the dead boy's parents. Finally, Martti leads her to the spot where the notebook is buried and begins to dig. The dogs in the front yard begin to howl madly. Suddenly a fierce wind blows up and the air turns cold. And just as quickly a swarm of bees heads toward Martti, stinging him in several places. Ella takes over with the shovel and before long, she finds the oilcloth-wrapped notebook. Suddenly a dark, cold envelops the garden and Martti falls down, sweating profusely. The dogs begin howling again and Martti turns cold as ice. Then Ella sees it: the phantom. She reaches out to touch it and then falls to the ground. The phantom heads for Martti and Ella knows now that this is what tore up the magpie last winter.

Ingrid arrives at Martti's house with Laura White's last book which Ingrid had kept in her desk at the library. She is knocked down by a large force and she watches all the dogs rush into Martti's house. Ella, who has been unconscious in the garden, awakes and sees all the dogs rush into the garden and attack something nearby as an inhuman cry rings out.

In Chapter 39, the dogs' victim tries to crawl away but the dogs are merciless in their pursuit. As the dogs move to another spot in the garden, Martti sits up and blows his nose. Ella now knows that the dogs have been attacking the phantom. Several dogs die in the melee and they stop barking and attacking just as Ingrid walks out onto the terrace. Martti instructs Ingrid to call a veterinarian to attend to the wounded dogs and he and Ella walk deeper into the garden. They unwrap the notebook and begin to look at it together. They are both shocked when they see writing but it is some form of ancient runes or magical diagrams, not book ideas like Martti had thought all these years.

Ella then reads the letter from the dead boy's mother and she states that her son was always happy to write his strange little marks in the book. She would like to have it if the





members of the society would approve. She also says that her son had been autistic and that Laura White had always been very kind to him when he visited his grandmother in Rabbit Back. The boy couldn't read or write and they feel fortunate that such a famous author would take time with their son. The woman had often read literature to her blind husband and her son would recite passages during his visits to Rabbit Back. She is happy that he was able to inspire some of Finland's most gifted authors.

## Analysis

The author uses the phantom (Martti's suppressed guilt) as a strong component in the story just prior to the real truth about the dead boy's notebook being told. Guilt can be a strong facet in a person's life and the phantom tries to stay alive at any cost, even attacking the dogs (the critics) that try to take it down. However, when the notebook is opened, it is clear that there was no real writing done by the dead boy, only cryptic shapes. The children in The Rabbit Back Literature Society had actually befriended an autistic boy, not a writing genius, when they spent time with the dead boy. They did not steal his ideas because there weren't any written down. At meetings of the society, the autistic boy simply recited passages he had heard his mother read to his blind father. Laura White had not made the dead boy a member of the society because of his skills; she was simply being kind to a boy who needed friendship and encouragement. Perhaps the author wants the reader to understand that everything is not always black and white, not always what it seems, and that memories of events can be altered in order to suit individual circumstances. Plus, there are phantoms in people's lives from things they create, such as Martti's repressed guilt, that didn't have to be there at all had the truth been known from the beginning.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of the cold wind, swarm of bees and howling dogs when Martti digs up the notebook?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do the dogs attack the phantom in the garden?

## Discussion Question 3

What is ironic about what Martti and Ella find in the dead boy's notebook?



## Vocabulary

gropes, lumbago, meandering, banter, paramount, sauntering, anecdotes, schizophrenic, mournful, mutters, distorted, commotion, agility, bewilderment, feeble, unscathed, lopes, intricate



# Characters

## Ella Amanda Milana

Ella Amanda Milana is a substitute teacher of Finnish language and literature. She is a relatively recent university graduate who is working on a temporary assignment in her hometown of Rabbit Back. Ella lives with her parents and will move on when this assignment is complete. Ella is drawn into the mystery and fables of the town when she discovers that the words in a classic book have been altered. She learns even more about the area's mysticism when she is invited to become a member of The Rabbit Back Literature Society by its founder, author Laura White. Ella's skills as a researcher are put into action when Laura White suddenly disappears and she gleans information about the society and its members through the playing of The Game. Ella learns about a boy who had been a member of the society many years ago but who had died and she feels the need to research his history when it becomes apparent to her that the other society members were jealous of him and resented his talent. Finding the truth about memories is very important to Ella and she becomes masterful in playing The Game and getting to the bottom of the society's mysteries.

## Martti Winter

Martti Winter is an important character and one of the most prominent members of The Rabbit Back Literature Society. Martti had been a really good football player as a boy but he gave it up in order to join The Rabbit Back Literature Society. The society members had been promised celebrity and that was very appealing to Martti. Joining the society was also highly favored by his mother so he did it also to win her approval. Martti recalls stealing ideas from another boy in the society who had died and has lived with repressed guilt for the rest of his life. After he has attained wealth and success, Martti shuts himself up in his lavish home to avoid critics and other members of the society. Martti also shuns most physical pleasures with the exception of eating and he consequently leads a gluttonous lifestyle as if he can never be satisfied by anything. Martti is later drawn to the last member of The Rabbit Back Literature Society, Ella, mostly because her quest for the truth is very appealing to him. He submits to playing The Game with her and even maintains a relationship outside of society rules. At the end of the story, Martti's repressed guilt (the phantom) rears up when the truth about the boy's notebook is about to be revealed. His guilt is very strong and fights to stay alive but must die when Martti realizes that there was nothing in the boy's notebook except the random and cryptic markings and shapes of an autistic child.

## Ingrid Katz

Ingrid Katz is one of the original members of The Rabbit Back Literature Society. Today she works as the librarian at the Rabbit Back Library. She is particularly interested in



finding books that have been infected by the mysterious plague and works to destroy them. Ingrid and Martti had once had a romantic relationship but now she leads a boring life with her husband and four children.

## **Laura White**

Laura White is the famous author who started The Rabbit Back Literature Society. She is an enigmatic creature whose name conjures up worlds of respect for what she has accomplished. The children in the society recall that she was the only person who ever really listened to them as individuals and encouraged them in their writing skills. She almost becomes a mythical figure, even more so after her mysterious disappearance in a snowstorm inside her house at a party.

## **Eljas Korpimaki**

Eljas Korpimaki is Ella's former literature professor. She calls him periodically to confirm details about literature and he also hires her to research Laura White and the Rabbit Back Literature Society.

## **Paavo Emil Milana**

Paavo Emil Milana is Ella Milana's father. As a younger man, he had been a runner and was called the Rabbit Back Rocket. Now, at fifty-five, he suffers from Alzheimer's Disease and sits in the garden all day. When he dies, Ella doesn't really feel much because, to her, he had already died.

## **Marjatta Milana**

Marjatta Milana is Ella's mother. She takes care of her husband, watches television programs and enters contests in hopes of winning prizes.

## **Aura Jokinen**

Aura Jokinen is an original member of The Rabbit Back Literature Society. She writes science fiction and fantasy books under the name Arne C. Ahlqvist. Aura suffers a stroke while playing The Game with Ella at Laura White's house while trying to get to the core of Laura White's essence.

## **Silja Saaristo**

Silja Saaristo is one of the original members of The Rabbit Back Literature Society. Silja is a mystery writer and the second person whom Ella challenges in The Game.

## The Dead Boy

Although the dead boy does not have an active role in the story, his character is important because the memory of him elicits feelings of envy and hate among the other society members. Ella makes it her mission to find out what happened to the boy. It is ironic that the society members all recall stealing his ideas from his notebook, but when it is found, it contains just cryptic shapes.

# Symbols and Symbolism

## The Game

Getting to the authentic truth is important in the story so society members can invoke the use of The Game to challenge other members. Just telling stories is not enough, though, and some members take "yellow" in order to loosen any mental restrictions when spilling what they know.

## Yellow

"Yellow" is sodium pentathol, also called truth serum, and is taken by some members of The Rabbit Back Literature Society while playing The Game. Because the members are writers, it is natural for them to tell stories, so when they are challenged in The Game, they may need the extra help of the yellow to dig down into their core to tell the real truth of what they know.

## Creatureville books

The Creatureville books is a series of children's books written by Laura White. They are very popular all over the world and it is revealed later that she based the characters on the children in The Rabbit Back Literature Society.

## Rule 21

Rule 21 is an extension of The Game. It can involve the infliction of some physical pain such as twisting lips or cheeks in order to get the challenged person to talk. It can be used when the challenging person senses that the challenged person is withholding information.

## Dogs

Dogs are present everywhere in Rabbit Back throughout the story. They are in the library, they're used in the search for Laura White and they are especially evident at Martti Winter's house. The dogs symbolize critics which are always present in the lives of writers.

## The dead boy's notebook

The dead boy's notebook represents envy and lies. All the members of The Rabbit Back Literature Society were jealous of the boy's talent yet they all remember stealing ideas



from him for their own books. In actuality, there were no book ideas in the boy's notebook so they remembered the events inaccurately and lived a lie all this time.

## Bees

Bees typically symbolize hard work as in "busy bees." It is interesting to note that a bee comes out of Laura White's mouth even while she sleeps, meaning that she is productive even as she rests. When the bees attack Martti at the end of the story, it symbolizes his need to become more productive and not just rest on his laurels for the rest of his life.

## Magpie

A magpie is a bird that chatters a lot and also collects things indiscriminately. The magpie that is killed by the phantom in Martti's garden symbolizes Martti. He really doesn't work anymore, and what he had created was the result of ideas he had taken from someone else (or at least he thought so).

## Phantom

The phantom represents Martti's repressed guilt. He thinks that he has stolen all his ideas from the dead boy's notebook and has lived with the guilt of that all his life. In the end, the phantom attacks the dogs (critics) in Martti's garden because it knows that Martti really didn't steal any ideas so the critics need to be silenced.

## Winter terms

The author uses many winter-related words and names throughout the story: Martti Winter, Laura White, snow, footprints in snow, icy pond, steamy breath, etc. These all symbolize truth which is sometimes called "cold, hard truth," in the story. The truth is all around the people in Rabbit Back but they choose to focus on myths and mysticism perhaps because it can be more interesting.



# Settings

## Rabbit Back

Rabbit Back is a small, fictional town in Finland. It is the main setting for the story's events. It is a town where magical and mysterious fantastical things happen. It is clear there is a level of intellectualism there, too, given the literary society, an active library, and a rigorous school. There is also an emphasis on cold weather and wintry elements.

## Rabbit Back Library

The Rabbit Back Library is located in Rabbit Back. It is where Ingrid Katz works as librarian and Ella Milana does research.

## Laura White's House

Laura White's house is the site of her disappearance in a snowstorm at a party one evening. She had also held the early meetings of The Rabbit Back Literature Society at her house. After her disappearance, the house will be willed to the members of the society.

## Ella's House

Ella lives with her parents at her childhood home. After her father dies and her mother moves in with her sister, Ella lives in the house by herself. Ella spends time grading essays and sleeping there.

## Martti Winter's House

Martti lives in a luxurious three-story home in Rabbit Back. It is finely appointed and has a high-walled garden in the back. The front yard is almost always filled with random dogs that collect there every day.



# Themes and Motifs

## Truth

The theme of Truth is an important one in The Rabbit Back Literature Society. Nothing is quite what it seems in the town of Rabbit Back which is dotted with statues of nymphs, fairies and druids. Then when classic books start morphing, it is clear that something isn't right. The search for truth is Ella Milana's mission in the book as she tries to learn more about The Rabbit Back Literature Society and its members. As the story extends, it becomes clear that what has always been accepted as true is not necessarily so. The society members all think that they had taken story ideas from the dead boy's notebook but that is revealed to be a false assumption all along. People can live their whole lives thinking something is true when guilt and envy prevent them from exploring what is the authentic truth of a situation. Things would have continued in that unhealthy manner for many more years had it not been for Ella whose research helps her discover that not everything that is believed is true and not everything that is true is believed.

## Ambition

The theme of Ambition is an important one in The Rabbit Back Literature Society. All of the members of the society are driven by their ambition to be great writers and attain wealth and celebrity. Even as children, the members knew that they would be set apart from the other children if they were members of the society so they made the choice to join. They even gave up sports and activities they enjoyed as well as other friendships in order to be part of this elite group. They sensed that their lives would be altered by membership and they all wanted that enough to give up everything they had liked doing before. They enjoyed the privileged status so much that they made a pact to never tell their parents any negative news about the group so that they could be pulled from membership. The members have ambition but they don't have confidence in their own abilities as evidenced in their invoking privileges in playing The Game to get new story ideas from their colleagues. They are also secretive among each other so as not to let out any ideas that might be picked up and used by someone else.

## Approval

The theme of Approval is an important one in The Rabbit Back Literature Society. Martti, in particular, joins the society to gain adult approval. Not only does he receive the approval of Laura White to be included in the group, but he also gets validation from his mother who approves of his writing activities more so than his excellent football skills. All the children in the society crave the approval of founder Laura White and they want to do everything she wants in order to stay in her good graces. Just being a member of The Rabbit Back Literature Society gleans approval for the children from most of the people in town. Their membership sets them apart as exceptional people. As adults,



they still seek approval through their books and popularity as a way to measure their value. The reader never knows Ella as a child but as an adult, she is very much aware of her physicality and feels that she doesn't measure up to acceptable measures of beauty. Her acceptance into The Rabbit Back Literature Society elevates her confidence and she realizes that she can be validated by things other than physical beauty.

## Fantasy

Fantasy is an important theme in The Rabbit Back Literature Society. The town is dotted with statues and images of fairies and gnomes, many of which are given to the members of the society. The town of Rabbit Back has only one flower shop but has seven shops that sell related fairy and gnome items. It is not uncommon to see fairies and other tiny creatures running about, even among the stacks of books at the library. The garden at Ella Milana's house is filled with ephemeral creatures and is probably why her father likes to sit outside all the time. There is even someone called a mythological mapper who will sleep on your property for a few hours and be able to tell you what types of creatures inhabit the area.

In addition to creatures and spirits around the town, there are invisible things that happen too, such as Laura White's disappearance in a snowstorm that occurs right inside her house. There is also a dark phantom that roams the back garden of Martti Winter's house and it has a malevolent spirit. All the people in Rabbit Back, and not just the society members, seem to believe in the local myths and live their lives as if these mystical events are commonplace.

## Memories

Memory and Memories is an important theme in The Rabbit Back Literature Society. The author begins by having Ella try to recall some childhood memories, and while they make her feel good for the most part, she isn't sure that she is recalling them properly. It leads her to question whether or not people remember the truth or their own version of the truth, another important theme in the book. Ella even looks at old slides from her childhood and she tries to recall the feelings she felt at the time and she's not sure if she has put a spin on those as well.

The author wants the reader to think about the importance of accurate memories. When he writes about the society members who all think that they got their book ideas from the dead boy's notebook, which is a false assumption, he lets us know how dangerous it is to not question things that we take for granted.

The author also wants the reader to understand that memory is such a vital part of life that without it, people are not fully functioning. He exhibits this in the case of Ella's father who had once been a vibrant member of the Rabbit Back community but has been reduced in stature because he has Alzheimer's Disease and can't remember his past.

# Styles

## Point of View

"The Rabbit Back Literature Society" is told from the third person omniscient point of view. Third person omniscient is a method of storytelling in which the narrator knows the thoughts and feelings of all of the characters in the story, as opposed to third person limited, which adheres closely to one character's perspective. This means that the author writes the story using third person pronouns such as "she" and "he." The author also has insight into what the characters are thinking which makes it an omniscient view, as opposed to a limited view where only the activities of the characters are reported. For example, the author writes, "She contented herself with Ingrid's explanation for the irregular books. Later she came to realize that under one reality there's always another. And another one under that." The author tells what Ella is doing and what her thoughts are without having any dialogue from Ella; the author has provided an omniscient view of Ella's thoughts.

## Language and Meaning

Because "The Rabbit Back Literature Society" is set in modern day, the language is current for the times. The author uses 21st century terminology and euphemisms in narration and dialogue to show authenticity. The author uses things like cell phones and pop culture icons so that the modern day audience can relate to them.

The story is set in Finland and translated from Finnish so it is natural that the names are Finnish while the rest of the book is British English. For example, the author uses the word "colour" instead of "color" and the word "manoeuvre" instead of "maneuver." Because the story is set in Finland, the author uses terms that are native to the country.

## Structure

The structure of a novel usually takes one of four forms: character, milieu, event or idea. And while a story can contain all four forms, one usually predominates. "The Rabbit Back Literature Society" is an example of a milieu structure. "Milieu" is just another word for the world according to the author's view. It is all the elements that combine to tell the story and share the point that the author is trying to make. In this book, the author wants the reader to care about Ella Milana's journey and her persistence in trying to uncover the truth. Ella starts out by trying to accurately recall childhood memories which she isn't sure she is capable of doing because time passes and event blur in the mind.

But getting at the truth haunts Ella, especially when she learns that a tenth member of the society may have been murdered. The majority of the book is structured so that Ella can dig to find the information she needs to come to a satisfactory conclusion which she manages to do by the end of the story.



## Quotes

I can assure you that the book in question will not be returned to circulation. These things happen sometimes. It's not commonly spoken of, but there are quite a few pranksters working in publishing. Thank you for calling to our attention.

-- Ingrid Katz (chapter 1 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** Ella returns the flawed copy of "Crime and Punishment" to the library and wants to get to the bottom of the situation. However, Ingrid Katz, who is both an author and the librarian, acts as if these types of strange things happen all the time. Ella is unnerved by her behavior and gets the sense that there is more going on than Ingrid is letting on.

Yes. Well, I didn't see anything remarkable in it when I read it in the paper. It seemed to me like a typical bit of slick lang-and-lit-teacher's prose. Very good, no doubt, for someone at your level of training, but not at all extraordinary. I just thought: Uh-huh. Next. But then I'm not the one who took nine tentatively promising children and trained them to be nine more or less successful authors, so what's my opinion worth? If Laura White sees something in your story, then there's something in it. And something in you. I can't see it, but I believe in it.

-- Ingrid Katz (chapter 5 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** The Rabbit Back Literature Society has been an exclusive organization for several years. The news that Laura White wants to add Ella to the group makes Ingrid jealous. As the book extends, the jealousy among the society's members will become prominent.

I confess that gathering material can sometimes have the flavour of a hunt," he said. "Even the best cook can't make chicken soup out of his own feet. There aren't so terribly many ingredients in anyone's life, less meat than there is on a sparrow. The average person could come up with at most two good novels. Many who think very highly of themselves can't manage more than a couple of anecdotes.

-- Martti Winter (chapter 7 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** Martti is the first of the society's members to admit that they use other methods to find ideas for their books. They borrow from other people's lives, even observing people in public places to pick up mannerisms and speech. The author is trying to say that a lot of what people write about comes from sources other than themselves and is not always true and authentic.

It's OK to be pissed off," Katz said gently. "It means you're still alive.

-- Ingrid Katz (chapter 9 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** There has always been a thread of competition and animosity among the members of The Rabbit Back Literature Society. Even as children, they tried to outdo each other. Now that Ella has been selected as a new member, a fresh sense of



competitiveness arises. When Laura White disappears at the party where she is going to announce Ella's membership, Ingrid takes advantage of the situation and tries to get Ella worked up.

You've seen what an infected book looks like. I don't have a name for it. In my head I sometimes call it 'the book plague'— on those rare occasions when I dare to think about it at all. Maybe the world is what it is. But there are things you can't talk about. You just keep quiet about them, and I would put this on that list.

-- Ingrid (chapter 13 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** The infected books alter the outcomes of the stories and Ingrid doesn't really know what to do about it so she tries not to think about it. As an author and a librarian, Ingrid feels that books should be kept sacred but the fact that they can morph means that anything else can change too and that the truth is not always what it seems.

Yellow? You want me to take yellow?" Saaristo says in bewilderment. "Isn't tearing my face off enough? I know I started the whole yellow thing, but I don't think it's such a good idea now.

-- Silja (chapter 16 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Silja had once introduced "yellow," (sodium pentothol) into The Game so that users would have no inhibitions when spilling. She's not so confident anymore that people need to tell their deepest, darkest secrets, especially when she is the one being questioned.

My mother had never been proud of me before. I mean, of course she thought it was nice that I was good at football, but football was just a game, when it came right down to it—that's what she thought. But this. She was completely excited that I had been anointed as a talented, promising writer. So naturally I joined the Society.

-- Martti Winter (chapter 24 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Most people need the approval of other people, especially their parents, and joining the society was an instant route to achieving that. As a member each child was elevated in the eyes of their families and the community and they still consider themselves to be different—and better—than other people. However, in spite of the attention and adulation, the need for approval never goes away as symbolized by the dogs (critics) that gather on Martti's lawn every night.

Think about it," Winter said. "A child on his way to becoming a writer, like us, and yet so far above us that we couldn't even imitate him. How could we possibly have liked him?"

-- Martti (chapter 27 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** The members of The Rabbit Back Literature Society were set apart from other children at school because of their talents. This also made them very ambitious as Martti reveals when he talks about why the other members never struck up any friendships with the dead boy.



I wrote the dead boy's name under yours," Ella said. "I thought it belonged there."  
-- Ella (chapter 30 paragraph 10)

**Importance:** Ella wants Martti to feel some responsibility for stealing book ideas from the dead boy's notebook. That's why she stealthily writes the boy's name in one of Martti's books and calls his attention to it later.

A notebook stolen from a dead child is a private Society matter? You don't all have the right to steal, and hide what you've stolen and then declare it a private matter. The notebook belongs to literary studies research and to the dead boy's parents.  
-- Ella (chapter 31 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Ella confronts Aura who has come to challenge her in The Game. Aura doesn't want Ella to uncover the truth about the dead boy's notebook and she threatens her. Aura doesn't know the intensity of Ella's feelings for finding the truth in life and Ella sets her straight right away.

We thought we'd lost Laura forever, and we got her back again. Why? Because anything can happen—even the kinds of things we can't predict or understand. For that same reason, we have to accept that Laura finally did leave us the way she did, tragically and unexpectedly."  
-- Dr. Jansson (chapter 36 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** Dr. Jansson had been the one who had said that little Laura White would be brain damaged after she fell into the icy pond. A few years later, when she is completely healed and fully functioning, he has to accept that he was wrong. Sometimes there is no logic or rationale for what happens, people just have to accept it, just as they have to accept that Laura left in the indescribably way that she did at her home.

And on the next page," Winter says, "his notes begin. Turn the page and you'll find all the incredible, marvellous ideas that Oskar thought of and The Rabbit Back Literature Society stole. For thirty years I've dreamed up my own books from the contents of this one."  
-- Martti (chapter 39 paragraph 10 )

**Importance:** Ella and Martti have just dug up the dead boy's notebook and Martti is sure that he will find pages and pages of ideas. What he finds instead are pages with cryptic symbols written by the boy who was autistic and couldn't read or write.