

# **Wiseguy Study Guide**

**Wiseguy by Nicholas Pileggi**

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# Plot Summary

Nicholas Pileggi's non-fiction book, *Wiseguy*, is the basis for the hit movie, *GoodFellas*, directed by Martin Scorsese (1990). *Wiseguy* is the true story of Henry Hill, a member of the Lucchese organized crime family in New York. Henry's heyday takes place during the 1960s and 1970s during which time he works under prominent mob boss Paul Vario in the Brownsville-East New York section of Brooklyn. Henry is drawn to the mafia lifestyle as a young boy, taking a job at Tuddy Vario's cabstand at the age of eleven. The impressionable boy is introduced to the wealth and power that is granted the men in the Varios' employ. As these men are criminals by nature, they have no qualms about luring young Henry into the life. Henry is industrious, clever, and willing to hustle to run whatever errands the men need. He quickly earns the approval of his elders, who allow him to drive their cars and drink their booze, making Henry feel like an adult. Henry feels accepted and approved of for the first time in his life. He neglects his schooling, and when the truant officer sends a letter to his parents, the Varios respond by threatening Henry's mailman to ensure Henry never receives another such letter.

Henry believes that his wiseguy friends are invulnerable, as indeed they seem to be. In this insular neighborhood, even the legitimate businessmen are willing to cover for their wiseguy neighbors who are admired as entrepreneurs and are unafraid to bend the rules. Wiseguys offer an alternative to scraping out an honest living in difficult economic times; many otherwise honest men and women are willing to accept a bribe now and again to earn a little extra money. Many judges, lawyers, and policemen are also on the wiseguys' payroll. Given these role models, it is no surprise Henry grows up to believe that honesty is for the weak and vulnerable; he perceives law-abiding citizens as fools, as prey.

Henry is ambitious. As he comes of age, he throws himself into wiseguy schemes with gusto. Paul Vario is even more impressed with the adult Henry than he was with the child. Henry is reliable, loyal, and quick to recognize and act on an opportunity. Paulie introduces Henry to Jimmy Burke, who teaches Henry the illegal cigarette business. Jimmy's true passion, however, is hijacking. During the '60s and '70s, the mafia has great influence at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York and hijacking airline cargo becomes a major mafia pastime. Henry and his pals pull off a major heist, stealing nearly half a million dollars from Air France. This heist propels Henry, Jimmy, and their friend Tommy DeSimone to a higher echelon within the mafia.

Paulie offers Henry the opportunity to buy into a gambling ring with the Air France money, and Henry's new wife, Karen encourages him to buy a restaurant to provide for their growing family with a legitimate source of income. Henry does both of these things, and involves himself in dozens of other schemes as well. Henry works hard and plays harder, spending as many nights with girlfriends, prostitutes, and drinking buddies as with his wife and children. Henry is pinched by the police a few times over the years, but invariably buys himself out of trouble with Paulie's support. His children learn to consider his arrests and police searches of their home as routine occurrences. Karen is unfailingly loyal, helping him provide for the family in both his legal and illegal schemes.



Henry sees no reason to change his lifestyle. He enjoys the fruits of other people's labor, taking over and bankrupting in weeks legitimate business that others have worked their entire lives to create. For Henry, there are no consequences. No matter how many businesses and personal fortunes he destroys for his own gain, there is always someone else out there to be lied to, stolen from, or conned. Even when Henry gets ten years in prison, he bribes all manner of guards and officials to get out after four years, and those four years are spent in relative luxury. Karen spends this time in a small, shabby apartment, supporting herself and the children even while helping Henry carry out his schemes so he can continue to live in the style to which he is accustomed.

Shortly after being released, Henry, Jimmy, and Tommy stumble across the opportunity to reprise their Air France score, but this time for ten times the payout. The Lufthansa airlines theft nets them five million dollars in cash plus hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of stolen jewels. The three friends should be on top of the world, but the Lufthansa strike is what finally destroys their lifestyle. Jimmy becomes greedy and paranoid and starts killing off everyone involved in the heist except a few key members of his own crew. Tommy's violent ways come back to haunt him as a rival crime family kills him in revenge for Tommy's having killed a made man. Henry has even bigger problems, as he is arrested in connection with a narcotics conspiracy.

Despite the Lufthansa score and his many other schemes, Henry has continued to sell drugs, which he learned to do in prison when he had no other way of making illegal income. Paulie Vario prohibits drug selling by his operatives because of the risks associated with narcotics busts. Henry, high on drugs most of the time, believes even more strongly in his invulnerability, propelling him to take greater and greater risks. When Henry is arrested, he knows his friends will not help him out this time. Paulie is furious that Henry would jeopardize Paulie's operation with his illegal drug ring. After Paulie turns his back on Henry, refusing to help him in any way, Jimmy is certain Henry will tell the police about Lufthansa in order to secure his freedom. With Paulie's approval, Jimmy begins plotting Henry's death.

When Henry finally accepts that his old friends are after him, he agrees to cooperate with law enforcement. Henry and his family enter the federal witness protection program. Henry's detailed inside knowledge is a dream come true for law enforcement, which has long sought evidence against the elusive Paul Vario. Henry's testimony sends both Paulie and Jimmy to jail, along with a host of other less prominent figures in the criminal underworld. This is Henry's greatest scheme. By turning on his old pals and siding with the government, Henry ensures his immunity to every crime he has ever committed, or may commit in the future.

# Introduction

## Introduction Summary and Analysis

Many readers may be familiar with the storyline of *Wiseguy* as told in the hit motion picture, *GoodFellas* (Scorsese, M. 1990). On May 22, 1980, Henry Hill enters the Federal Witness Protection Program along with his wife, Karen, and their two daughters, fifteen-year-old Judy and twelve-year-old Ruth. Hill's decision to cooperate with law enforcement is a coup for the police and a major blow to his long time mafia friends and partners. His two oldest friends, mob chief Paul Vario and James "Jimmy the Gent" Burke are planning to kill Henry to prevent him from talking to the police, plus Henry faces a myriad of state and federal charges, so his decision to cooperate with law enforcement is the only logical choice.

Organized-crime writer Nicholas Pileggi is approached by Henry's attorney to write Henry's story. Pileggi is "bored with the egomaniacal ravings of illiterate hoods masquerading as benevolent Godfathers" and initially is not interested (p. 3). Yet, Henry's importance to the federal authorities leads Pileggi to agree to meet with him. Pileggi is flown to several destinations before finally arriving at the meeting spot, where Henry makes his appearance along with his federal agent bodyguards. Hill's demeanor and appearance surprise Pileggi. Unlike most of the mafioso's Pileggi has met during his journalism career, Henry is not a blind follower of the mafia life. Henry understands the way the life works and notices everything about it. Despite being a mafia insider, Hill retains a detached perspective that convinces Pileggi his story is worth telling.

In the Introduction, the author sets the tone of his book and places it in context. Pileggi makes clear that he does not seek to glorify Henry Hill or the mafia lifestyle. Pileggi's intent is to shed light on the everyday criminal activities of the street-level mafiosi, better known as the wiseguys. Apart from its entertainment value, the importance of such a book is not immediately made clear, but as the reader learns how the wiseguys have penetrated every level of this nation's social and political fabric, the author's reason for writing the story is better understood.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

At the age of eleven, Henry Hill wanders into a cabstand in the Brownsville-East New York section of Brooklyn. One of seven children, Henry seeks a part-time job to supplement his family's income, and he has always been fascinated with the mysterious cabstand. Growing up across the street, Henry has often watched visitors pull up in Cadillacs and Lincolns, wearing silk suits and dripping with jewels. Those who man the cabstand are fastidious with their clothing but careless in their parking habits, routinely double-parking yet never getting tickets for it. Henry knows the city snowplows always clear the cabstand before doing the rest of the neighborhood, and no one on the block dares complain about the noisy all-night card games. Henry has seen the thick wads of bills sported by the cabstand men and he knows there is money to be had working there.

Henry Hill Sr., an underpaid electrician, is initially delighted that his young son has found employment. Henry's father has been supporting his family since he was twelve years old, when he first immigrated to the United States from Ireland following the death of his own father. "American youngsters, unlike the children of his native Ireland, seemed to dawdle about in their adolescence much longer than necessary" (p. 6). Henry's mother, Carmela Costa Hill, is also pleased with Henry's initiative, for this gives her more time to spend with her youngest son, Michael, who is confined to a wheelchair. As Carmela is from Sicily, she is happy to learn that Henry's new bosses, the Vario family, hail from the same part of Sicily where she was born.

Soon, however, the Hills change their minds about Henry's job. Henry's after-school employment becomes a full-time obsession. Henry stops hanging out with his former friends and spends all his time at the cabstand. His mother cries when he buys a double-breasted, pin-stripe suit, saying he looks like a gangster; Henry takes that as a compliment. Henry's father, angry at the hard life he has dealt him, is now also angry with Henry's new business associates. He screams at Henry regularly and occasionally Henry has to take a beating. "I was the luckiest kid in the world. People like my father couldn't understand, but I was part of something. I belonged. I was treated like I was a grown-up. I was living a fantasy" (p. 15).

Unlike Henry's father who has worked hard his entire life just to eke out a living, the men at the cabstand have a continual influx of cash. To Henry they seem invulnerable. In 1955, Paul Vario is the man in charge. A large man in both height and girth, Paul uses the cabstand as his headquarters. He receives regular visits and pay-offs from lawyers, bookies, handicappers, union officials, politicians, off-duty police officers, and hit men. Paul is a rising star in one of New York's five organized-crime families, and his influence is sufficient to ensure that any charges brought against him are dismissed or reduced to small fines. Paul runs the neighborhood, keeping it free of all crime and violence except



the crime and violence he himself orders. Three of his brothers, Lenny, Tommy, and Vito "Tuddy" Vario run gambling and loan-sharking operations from the cabstand as well.

Young Henry becomes Paul's errand boy, bringing him his coffee, his cigarettes, and his messages. Paul is impressed with Henry's willingness to hustle and with his quick mind. Henry develops a knack for knowing when Paulie needs him and when to fade into the background. After a couple of months, Henry gains Paulie's trust. Henry describes the elder mobsters as being "'suspicious of their own noses'," but Henry's Sicilian background and his closeness to Paulie gain him easy acceptance. Henry spends time at the Varios homes eating their food, socializing with their children, and receiving cash tips for running the household errands. The wiseguys are heroes to Henry, who does not want to waste his life being angry and overworked like his father. He desires the power, perks, and privileges of the mafia lifestyle. Soon the neighborhood catches on to Henry's new status, and people begin treating Henry with the same respect they show the Vario family.

Through these recollections, the author establishes sympathy for Henry's character, which is necessary in order to keep the reader engaged. Henry comes from poverty and casual domestic violence, and it is understandable that such a boy would be swayed by the glitzy life of the wiseguys. Instead of being beaten and asked to work hard for no reward, Henry is accepted and admired by the Vario family, and paid handsomely for his contributions. Henry has found more than a new job; he has found a home.





## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Henry quickly learns the art of the hustle. By the age of thirteen, he is asking the cab drivers to buy him beer that he then resells to the kids at school for a tidy profit. He also fences stolen goods for the neighborhood juvenile delinquents. The wiseguys admire his initiative and make use of his innocent youthful looks to further their own scams. Johnny Mazzolla takes Henry out to cash counterfeit twenty-dollar bills. Johnny drives him around to various neighborhoods where Henry buys small items like doughnuts or razor blades with the fake money, receiving real dollars as change. Henry knows how to soften up the fake bills by soaking them in cold coffee and cigarette ash, and on the rare occasions he is caught, he cries and pleads ignorance, telling the store clerk he is just a kid and doesn't want to get in trouble with his mother.

Tuddy Vario teaches him to make junk Christmas trees which look like good fake trees; the trees last for a day or two, long enough for Tuddy and Henry to sell them for premium prices to unsuspecting buyers. Tuddy gets Henry a job at an Italian food store, but Henry's real job is to steal the expensive food items for the Varios. Henry notes that the Varios can afford the food, but enjoy it more when it is stolen. Paulie enjoys taking his beloved wife, Phyllis, out on the town using stolen credit cards, which he calls "Muldoons." The wiseguys simply love to scheme. Henry soon learns how to assemble crap game tables and steer high rollers from the neighborhood into the games. Sometimes the games are even held in the basement of Henry's schoolhouse. The school custodian and the local cops are on the payroll, so the wiseguys only have to worry about plainclothes detectives. Henry quickly develops an instinct for identifying undercover policemen.

Henry enjoys the games, which are quite popular in the days before travel to Vegas and Atlantic City becomes easy. Professionals run the games, but the Varios keep five or six percent of the winnings as the house. Food and drink are provided for the gamblers, and Henry is often called upon to make sandwich runs to Al and Evelyn's delicatessen. He soon realizes he can make more money if he makes the sandwiches himself. After a few weeks of this, Al and Evelyn offer him five cents on the dollar if he will stop taking the card game business away from their sandwich shop. Henry holds out for seven cents on the dollar, thrilled to be receiving his first kickback at the age of thirteen.

This is an exciting time for young Henry, and it is during this time he first meets Jimmy Burke. In his mid-twenties, Burke is already a legend in the mafia world. Unlike the Italians, Jimmy tips heavily, making him very welcome at the card games. He routinely tips Henry twenty dollars every time Henry brings him a sandwich or a beer. Burke makes his money hijacking trucks. He loves to steal and is known as Jimmy the Gent because he always tips the hijacked truckers fifty dollars. This makes him so popular with the drivers that they often tip him off when they are carrying rich loads. When the cops try to stop Jimmy, he bribes them, too. Despite his popularity, Jimmy is a



dangerous man. He is quick to kill and no one can tell if they might be next on his list because Jimmy is unfailingly nice, even to the guys he is about to whack.

For a fourteenth-birthday present, Henry receives a union card for the bricklayers' local. The weekly salary and excellent benefits make such union jobs highly desirable, but most of the hard-working local men are unable to obtain such a plum job, and they lack the money or connections to buy it. Henry's real job, however, is to pick up gambling and loan-sharking payoffs from the construction sites. He enjoys spending his days in this manner, but one day his father receives a letter from the school informing him that Henry has not been in school for months. Henry has been lying to his parents, and lying to Tuddy, telling him that he is keeping up with his schoolwork with no problem. His father beats Henry severely that night. The next day Henry confesses all to Tuddy. Tuddy and his men respond by kidnapping Henry's mailman and threatening to kill him if he delivers any more mail from the school to Henry's house.

Henry no longer bothers to attend school; his real education is taking place at the cabstand. One night he is in the local pizzeria, also run by the wiseguys, when he sees a man running toward him. The man has been shot and is screaming for help. Henry already knows enough to realize that Paulie would not want the man dying in the pizzeria, so Henry takes a chair out to the street so the man can sit down while waiting for the ambulance. He also wraps the man's wound with aprons, adding more and more as the blood keeps seeping through. After the ambulance arrives, Henry is castigated by the wiseguys for wasting eight aprons on the guy. Henry feels bad about his mistake. This recollection shows the brainwashing influence the older wiseguys have on Henry. Henry is not being raised to show compassion for his fellow human beings; his training is teaching him to lie, cheat, steal, and feel superior to the suckers who take the honest route.

Henry's criminal activities advance to the next level when a competitor opens a cabstand around the corner. Tuddy teaches Henry the exciting art of firebombing the man's cabs. Henry gets a rush from pouring gasoline inside the cabs then setting them on fire, narrowly escaping with his life. Henry's first arrest comes at the age of sixteen, when Tuddy sends him for snow tires with a stolen credit card. Henry is bothered that Tuddy didn't tell him the card was stolen, for Henry could have simply bribed the clerk for half the reward money for turning in the stolen card. Instead, the cops pinch Henry. Henry sticks with the advice he's received from the wiseguys, refusing to talk or to sign anything at the precinct. The Varios send a lawyer and pay Henry's bail. When he is freed, the wiseguys make a big party for him to mark the occasion of his first arrest.

Again, these actions show an attempt by the wiseguys to brainwash Henry. While this brainwashing may be an unconscious process, spurred only by the wiseguys' desire to justify and perpetuate their culture and lifestyle, it has the effect of influencing Henry in his formative years. How better to appeal to a rebellious sixteen-year-old than to offer him praise and adult-style partying? He is rewarded for getting arrested and keeping his mouth shut. The mobsters do not want to lose a valuable recruit like Henry, thus it is important to them that Henry not learn a lesson from his arrest. They seek to reinforce Henry's pursuit of the criminal lifestyle for their own profit and gain.



Henry winds up with a six month suspended sentence that his parents never learn about. However, Henry's father does discover that Henry has been sneaking his gun out of the house. His father hides the gun in a different location, alerting Henry to the fact that he has been caught. Henry is terrified as he waits to see what his father will do to him. As a result, he decides to enlist in the military. His father is thrilled with his decision. Paulie, on the other hand, offers to get Henry out of it, but Henry decides to go ahead.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3 dissects the culture of the Brownsville-East New York area, an area that eventually gave rise to organized crime in America as it is known today. The author depicts the insularity of the neighborhood in an attempt to explain the allure of the "everyone's doing it" attitude. Indeed, in Brownsville-East New York, it certainly did seem as if everyone was involved in crime, from the man on the street to the politicians and judges representing the law. Through this cultural depiction, the author builds on his thesis that Henry Hill is a product of his culture. Pileggi hopes to inform and also entertain the reader by showing how integral to the American culture the mafia really was. Pileggi's unstated premise is that something cannot be stopped if it is not understood, and his search for the roots of organized crime reveals its all-pervasive stranglehold on society.

In 1943 when Henry was born, the Brownsville-East New York area was populated by working class families. In the 1920s, the area had become home to Italian-American immigrants and Eastern European Jews, all seeking to improve their lots beyond the tenement squalor of their former homes on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. This was a hard-working group of people, eager to own the modest houses in the neighborhood, and willing to work two jobs to afford them. The neighborhood also attracted Italian Mafiosi and Jewish hoods during Prohibition, when its close proximity to overland and water liquor smuggling routes made it a hijacker's dream. This area gave rise to the original, ethnically diverse mobster alliances, which set the precedent for later organized crime. By the time Henry Hill came along, the neighborhood's culture supported and approved of its local mafia heroes. Honest businessmen and criminals lived side-by-side in a cultural environment that applauded the independent strength of the mafiosos.

Paulie Vario's gang is known as one of the toughest around, and in the 1960s and 1970s, his thugs are responsible for most of the muscle work required by the powerful Lucchese crime family. Jimmy Burke, Anthony Stabile, and Tommy DeSimone take on much of this violent work, yet they and the other wiseguys are also entrepreneurial businessmen who own restaurants, trucking firms, and factory sweatshops on the side. These "sidewalk soldiers," including Henry Hill, live without restraints. Although they are frequently under police suspicion, they are not bothered by it. Henry and his friends are intimately acquainted with the vagaries of the law, and know whom to call to bribe themselves out of most any predicament. In this environment, these men come to believe that anyone who does not break the law is foolish, and is treated as prey. "To wiseguys, 'working guys' were already dead. Henry and his pals had long ago dismissed the idea of security and the relative tranquility that went with obeying the law" (pp. 36-37).

The kinds of guys who become wiseguys are ill suited to succeed in the civilian world. They are not the smartest, richest, toughest, or most talented guys in the neighborhood.



Their main advantage is their appetite for violence. This anti-social bent allows them to intimidate or kill anyone who stands in their way. By exercising this talent for the benefit of the local mob bosses, the wiseguys find acceptance in their community. The community looks out for its own, and the wiseguys are protected by other wiseguys as well as by the teachers, businessmen, and politicians who grew up with them in this close-knit territory. In return, the wiseguys "protect" their community. Only mafia-sanctioned violence is allowed. Henry recalls one occasion when a young, black stranger tried to attack a neighborhood girl. The wiseguys, keeping their ever-present watch on the street, rushed to prevent the attack and threw the stranger to his death from the roof.

In the army, Henry quickly puts his scheming skills to use. He attributes the mismanagement of the food supply to some behind the scenes kickback operation, and quickly decides to take advantage of the excess food by selling it for profit. He also begins loan-sharking, lending out money for profit just before payday. He stays in touch with Paulie and Tuddy during this time; they even bail him out after he is arrested for a barroom brawl. Henry convinces his sergeant to fake double work shifts for him in the kitchen so he can escape to New York and visit his friends at the pizzeria. Paulie is thrilled with Henry's initiative when Henry brings home bootleg booze from the officers' club, untaxed cigarettes, and fireworks to re-sell in the neighborhood. Paulie presents him with a wide-angle rearview mirror as a gift, to help Henry spot tails on his car.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4 discusses Henry's homecoming and further develops his criminal career. Henry has come of age by the time he returns to New York in 1963. Although he has spent the last two months of his enlistment in the stockade for getting into another barroom brawl and stealing a police car in an attempt to escape, his friends in the neighborhood consider his incarceration as a badge of manhood. Paulie is serving six months for contempt of court when Henry returns from the army, so Paulie's favorite son, sixteen-year-old Lenny Vario, gravitates toward Henry as a role model. Henry realizes he will help his mafia career by taking Lenny under his wing, and the two become partners. Henry does not want to go back to running errands at the cabstand like a kid, so by staying close to Lenny, he ensures he is given all the same advantages Lenny receives from his father.

From jail, Paulie gets Lenny and Henry jobs as union bricklayers. In hindsight, Henry realizes how spoiled and ungrateful he and Lenny were, but at the time they enjoyed the fact that they had prestigious jobs and did not even have to work to keep them. They get so lazy they don't even collect their own paychecks, asking co-workers to deliver the checks to the cabstand. When Paulie's union contact begs for mercy, Paulie reassigns the boys to the Azores, a fancy beachside restaurant in the Rockaways. Paul's motive is to get Lenny and Henry in good with the big boss, Gaetano Lucchese, who frequents the restaurant. A lot of big money men drive many miles to eat at the Azores, hoping to get a chance to say hello to Lucchese, known as Tommy Brown on the streets. Lenny and Henry take good care of Tommy Brown and are treated royally by the high rollers who hope to get in a word with Tommy Brown.

Lenny and Henry get an apartment across the street and party at the Azores with their gang every night after closing time, treating the place like their own private club. Henry and Lenny are drinking, eating, giving away, or stealing everything in the restaurant. Tommy Morton, the nominal owner of the Azores, is just a front man for the wiseguys who cannot get a liquor license in their own names. Nonetheless, even with Henry and Lenny destroying all the profits, Morton is still responsible for paying his silent mafia partners each week. Yet, Morton is a friend of Paulie's, and when the boys scare off Morton's chef by trying to shove him in a 450-degree oven, Paulie punishes the boys by making Henry torch Lenny's car.

After the Azores, Henry gets into stealing MasterCard cards using inside information from a neighborhood girl working for the company. They would buy cards from post office employees, too; this was in the days before credit card companies began sending out separate letters to confirm delivery of the new cards. Henry would have a month before the cards were reported stolen, and in that time, he bought items in stores with the complicity of the clerks and storeowners who appreciated the business, since they got paid either way. Then Henry would re-sell the ill-gotten merchandise; he brags that



he could easily obtain \$10,000 worth of merchandise in a single day. Tony the Baker, a connected bakery owner who sells fake drivers licenses, helps Henry's scheme; Tony gets inside information from the Department of Motor Vehicles so his licenses are capable of fooling even state troopers. When Henry has maxed out the card limits, he sells them to "under the limits" specialists, guys who earn a profit by using the cards for small purchases, under the authorization limit. Such men are able to walk out of the store with the purchase long before the credit card company is notified of the small amount by the store.

Jimmy Burke gets Henry into the cigarette business as well. Jimmy buys cigarettes by the truckload in North Carolina, where the taxes are much lower than New York, saving him a dollar sixty-five a pack. Henry sells these cigarettes at construction sites to working guys glad to save a dollar a carton on their smokes. One day Jimmy introduces Henry to Tommy DeSimone. Jimmy asks Henry to look out for Tommy and teach him the cigarette business. Henry and Tommy are soon earning three to four hundred dollars a day selling cigarettes. They are able to sell them openly as the cops don't take this offense seriously and can be convinced to look the other way if given a few cartons.

The cigarette business booms, and soon lots of criminal entrepreneurs are renting trucks and driving out of state to buy cigarettes. Now law enforcement begins to crack down, confiscating the trucks along with the illegal loads of cigarettes. Tommy and Henry lose so many trucks they bankrupt half the U-Haul businesses in Washington, DC. They resort to renting trucks from a wiseguy with a trucking concern, and Paulie has to intervene to keep them alive when the wiseguy's trucks are seized by the state. Tommy and Henry buy themselves a truck after that, but the cigarette market is by now flooded, and Henry moves on to other things. He steals cars and sells them to an import-export agent who gets the stolen cars out of the country to be sold in Haiti for further profit. Henry rarely steals the cars himself; he pays neighborhood kids a few hundred dollars per car and gets \$750 back from the exporter. Meanwhile, Henry drives Paulie around all day as well.

Paulie is into multiple schemes even more than Henry and spends his days overseeing gambling clubs, loan sharks, hijackings, fences, and unions. Paulie gets a piece of all this action because the men who run the schemes are only able to work with Paulie's approval. Henry explains that Paulie kept himself distant from all the illegal activity. His right-hand man, Steve DePasquale, meets with the various groups and presents Paulie with the information. Steve assists with the decision-making and implements Paulie's decisions. Paulie keeps track of everything in his head. He doesn't write down the details and he refuses to talk on the phone except to make appointments from a phone booth. The only material support Paulie provides to his schemers is protection. "That's what the FBI can never understand - that what Paulie and the organization offer is protection for the kinds of guys who can't go to the cops" (p. 57). Paulie also pays off the cops to keep them off his people's backs.

Henry recalls that he made a lot of trouble for people in his youth. Henry hangs out with a dozen young wiseguys his age, and they love to run up big tabs in connected joints. When the tabs get so large that the owner becomes concerned, Henry and his friends





pretend to be insulted, threatening the owner with bodily harm. The owner, connected to the mafia on a lower level, knows Henry and his pals could hurt him with impunity. His only option to avoid going broke or getting hurt is to go to Paulie for help. Paulie always sympathizes with the beleaguered business owner, telling him those psycho kids are making trouble all over town for Paulie. In order to get protection, the guy has to put Paulie on the payroll as a silent partner. The bar tab is forgotten and the owner goes to Paulie with problems he may have with suppliers or policemen. Paulie can put people on the restaurant's payroll to get them early parole, and makes liberal use of the food and liquor on the premises.

Once a business gets a wiseguy partner, it is only a matter of time before the wiseguy decides to break the business for a quick profit. Credit ratings that took years to establish are used to take out large loans that never get paid back. The credit rating is also exploited to order large deliveries that are instantly diverted for resale at a discount to other establishments. When the creditors catch up, the place is simply burned for the insurance money. In the sixties, Paulie is part owner of some three-dozen restaurants and is making a handsome profit from the misfortune of the restaurateurs. Henry explains that the wiseguys never got caught, and their schemes earn the respect of the neighborhood for their ability to get one over on the establishment. Of course, much of the profit goes to gambling. All the wiseguys gamble. They go so far as to buy off a few jockeys in each horse race to improve their odds. After stealing some three million dollars through this method, several dozen conspirators are brought to trial. Two of the three wiseguys involved beat the case; the third receives six months probation.

Henry speaks in the first person through most of this chapter. With hindsight, it is clear Henry understands the damage he did to the business owners in his neighborhood. Raised in an environment that considered honest businessmen to be suckers, Henry still retains this viewpoint to an extent. He expresses no remorse; in fact, he conveys the glee he felt at successfully conning so many. Yet Henry's elaborate justifications are telling. He has shifted his personal responsibility onto society, claiming that he did what he did because no one else stopped him. By quoting him verbatim, Pileggi allows Henry to hang himself with his own words.





# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

In 1965, Henry is twenty-two and enjoying the high life afforded by his hustling and scheming. He considers himself a good earner, and works harder at his illicit schemes than many people do at honest jobs. Like many young men, however, Henry throws away his money. He tips heavily and gambles away the rest, then borrows money from his friends until his next scheme pays off. He has no social security number, pays no bills, and has no dependents. He sleeps at friends' houses or in "comped" motel rooms and keeps his clothes at his parents' house. He womanizes with prostitutes and neighborhood girls and enjoys his freedom. Then he meets Karen.

Henry gets stuck on a double date with Karen because Paulie Jr. wants to date her friend, Diane. Henry has to meet Tuddy for a deal later that same night, and rushes Karen, Diane, and Paulie through dinner. Nonetheless, he agrees to another double date so Paulie Jr. can see Diane again. Henry forgets about the date, though, and stands Karen up that night. Karen makes Paulie drive her around to find Henry, who is at the pizzeria. When they find him, Karen confronts him loudly on the sidewalk, berating him for standing her up. Henry is impressed with her fire and can't help but notice her attractiveness. He smooths things over and asks her out on a real date. This time, Henry is attentive, and eighteen-year-old Karen is quickly intoxicated by Henry's glamorous world. She believes he is a bricklayer when he shows her his union card, yet everyone treats him like royalty. They get star treatment at every restaurant and nightclub they frequent and Karen finds him much more sophisticated than the other boys she's dated.

Karen's parents are unhappy that Henry is not Jewish. She comes from the wealthy country club set, and Henry is pleased to have captured the attention of such a woman. One day, Karen is assaulted and insulted by a neighbor, Steve. Too ashamed to tell her mother, Karen tells Henry instead. Henry is ready to kill the spoiled young man who lives across the street from Karen and drives a Corvette. He beats him with a gun then asks Karen to hide the gun before the police arrive. Karen realizes in hindsight that she must have had a predisposition for the mafia life, because instead of being shocked or horrified by being handed the gun she is instead turned on by it.

Henry gets tired of sneaking around Karen's parents and convinces her to elope with him. Confronted with a *fait accompli*, her parents accept their marriage and suggest the newlyweds live with them. Henry had not even considered the idea of getting them a place to live for he has never bothered to get a place for himself. At first, all things go well. Henry is warm to Karen's parents and takes religious instruction to convert to Judaism. He leaves for work every day for his job as a bricklayer and within a few months, they are able to have a big Jewish wedding.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

Karen is gradually drawn in and desensitized to her husband's criminal lifestyle. At first, Henry brings home \$135 a week as a "bricklayer," and she does not suspect he is anything other than a bricklayer. She realizes he makes some money on the side selling cigarettes and that he sometimes carries a gun, but she insists on blinding herself to these signs because her mother insists on calling them to her attention. Karen gives herself the same excuses she gives her mother, but as she gets to know the other wiseguy wives, Karen quickly realizes their talk centers on jail time. The wives know which prisons are good and which bad. No one talks about what their husbands do to earn jail time; the women focus on how the cops are picking on their men. She notices the other wives look bad; they are stressed out and don't take good care of themselves.

Karen speaks to Henry about the jail talk, but he reassures her. Henry convinces her that he and his friends are simply hard-workers willing to bend a few rules to provide for their families. Henry tells her he knows the right people and that jail time is not a concern. She understands the lifestyle is not normal compared to her background, but the wiseguys and their families lead insular lives and within the confines of the group, it seems normal. Like the other wives, she learns to be proud of her husband for his willingness to take risks to earn money.

Then Henry gets arrested in connection with his illegal cigarette operation. Henry had been drinking the night before and trying to pick up a stripper at a topless club; he had gotten careless with the cigarette shipment and now he is worried about Paulie's reaction, and about Karen's. Karen hides the arrest from her parents; Mickey Burke, Jimmy's wife, and Phyllis, Paulie's wife, laugh off the arrest, assuring Karen it's nothing. At this point Karen still thinks Henry's a bricklayer. Her friends and family buy his illegal cigarettes; no one thinks much of it. However, Henry's carousing and late nights cause friction with Karen's parents. Karen defends him, irritated by her mother's prying. One night early in the marriage, Henry doesn't get home until six-thirty AM; his in-laws and Karen have been waiting up for him all night. When he hears Karen's angry mother yelling at him from the doorway, Henry turns around and drives off with his friends. Henry does not appreciate being fettered by his wife and parents. Later, however, he makes up with Karen. Henry tells Karen he was at a bachelor party but neglects to mention the prostitutes he slept with. Her mother is their common enemy, bringing the couple closer together.

Karen realizes that none of the wives know where their husbands spend their nights. She comes to accept that she is not married to a nine-to-five guy. Henry takes her out every Saturday night, but plays cards with his friends each Friday. Later Karen will learn that Friday nights are for the wiseguys to take their girlfriends out on the town. Wives are never allowed out on a Friday because that way all the men can keep the wives from learning about the girlfriends. One Saturday, however, Henry and Karen run into



their friend Patsy Fusco, who has brought his girlfriend to the Copa. Karen realizes that Henry knows the girlfriend, but she refuses to go over and say hello to the couple. In this way, she communicates her distaste to Henry, for she is a friend o Patsy's wife.

Karen's initiation into the wiseguy lifestyle forces her to choose her loyalties, and she chooses Henry above all. Henry, however, demonstrates his immaturity and selfishness in this chapter by revealing the many lies he told his young wife. He has never learned to value people or take anything in life seriously, and through Henry's relationship with Karen, the author conveys the self-serving nature of the wiseguy lifestyle.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 delves into one of the biggest moneymaking operations of the wiseguys, the airport in Queens. Valuable cargo is shipped in and out of the airport regularly, and the wiseguys learn to bribe and employ everyone from customs officials to cargo loaders to truck drivers and security men. In addition to stealing cargo, Jimmy Burke's men use stolen credit cards to buy airline tickets for resale. Frank Sinatra Jr.'s manager is a frequent customer, and is eventually convicted for using the stolen tickets; the wiseguys who sell him the tickets, however, are untouchable. Jimmy arranges for perhaps a dozen murders a year to silence people foolish enough to threaten to reveal his operation. Jimmy's love for hijacking finds its highest expression at the airport, and his reputation for violence frightens even the most hardened mafiosos. In fact, on his wedding day, the body of his wife's former boyfriend turns up inside a car, cut to pieces.

As a child, Jimmy is raised at the Manhattan Foundling Home and later goes through a series of foster homes. His psychiatric records from that period reveal that he was physically, sexually, and emotionally abused. He started running away from foster homes at age thirteen, and shortly thereafter is locked away in a juvenile jail. He receives his first adult prison sentence at the age of eighteen. Inside, he is treated with respect by the friends of the gangster for whom young Jimmy then works. He learns to kill in prison and earns the further respect of the mob. By 1970, Jimmy is running the hijacking operation by himself; he has Paulie's approval, but oversees his own crew. The mafia has the airport staff sewn up; if occasionally a driver gets in trouble for tipping them off to a large load, Paulie's union men file a grievance ensuring the driver keeps his job.

Henry goes on his first hijacking at age twenty-three. It is the easiest five thousand dollars he has ever earned and whets his appetite for more. Their inside information is so good that buyers are arranged before the cargo is even stolen. Jimmy's bar, Robert's, is hijacking headquarters. Most of the customers go there to buy or sell stolen goods. The hijackings themselves are often "give-ups" where the drivers tip off the mob and expect to be robbed. Jimmy, Henry, Tommy DeSimone and several other regulars hold the trucks up; they know in advance the security codes, cargo, and routes of the trucks. They always take the driver's license as a warning that they know where he lives if he is foolish enough to talk to the cops. Jimmy follows through on these threats, killing many drivers before they can testify in court. The trucks are unloaded at legitimate warehouses whose owners receive a piece of the profit.

Henry's specialty is lining up big buyers for the merchandise. Another great place to unload it is Sonny Bamboo's lounge on Rockaway Parkway. "Sonny Bamboo's was practically a supermarket for airport swag. It was so well-protected by politicians and the cops that nobody even bothered to pretend it was anything but what it was. It was like a commodities exchange for stolen goods" (pp. 102-103). Henry states that no one went



to jail for hijacking in the sixties and seventies. The airlines underestimated their losses and saved money on additional security by accepting the insurance money whenever a cargo was lost; the truckers blamed the unions and the unions blamed the airlines for not protecting the drivers with better security. The crime of hijacking did not even exist as such in New York law at the time. The few cases that made it to court were given fines or probation by crooked judges.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

Many of the airport hijackings occurred off airport property, at the nearby Air Cargo Center. Here Henry and his friends make their first big score; they steal \$480,000 in cash from the Air France cargo building. Their friend Frenchy, a long-time employee of Air France, tips Henry off that a new strong room is being built to house valuable cargo. There are two keys. One belongs to the Air France supervisor who is too high up for Henry to reach, but a private security guard holds the other. The guard takes his job seriously and guards the key carefully. However, while searching his apartment, Henry discovers his weakness for pornographic magazines. He instructs Frenchy to make friends with the guard and refer to an ex-girlfriend who enjoys kinky sex. The ex-girlfriend is actually a prostitute hired by Henry. Frenchy sets up a mynage a trois with the guard and the girl. The first couple of times, Henry makes no move on the key, hoping the guard will let his guard down. However, when word filters down that a large amount of cash will be in the storeroom that night, a Friday, Henry tells Frenchy to arrange another session with the girl.

While the prostitute, Frenchy, and the guard are in a hotel sauna together, Henry enters their hotel room and takes the guard's key ring. He and Jimmy drive to a locksmith and request duplicates of all eighteen keys on the ring. The locksmith only has blanks for fifteen of the keys, but Henry has no time to argue. He gets the ring back into the hotel room before the threesome returns from the steam room. Frenchy tries the keys at work and discovers that the key they need is amongst the fifteen copies. Frenchy delays the pickup of the money until Monday. On Saturday night, just before midnight, Henry and Tommy arrive to steal the money. Frenchy runs interference so Henry can enter the locked room surreptitiously. He walks out with the money in a large, heavy suitcase.

Henry's detailed description of his first major score speaks to his enjoyment of the process. Henry has carefully thought out each detail and shares his tense moments with colorful candor for the reader's benefit. This exuberant tone, often used in his descriptions of particularly juicy scores, lends the book its unique character. Author Pileggi organizes Henry's material, and places each chapter in historical context, but then he steps back and allows Henry's voice to communicate the story. This minimalist approach by the author makes excellent use of his subject's perspective. Through Henry, Pileggi shows the reader the mafia through the eyes of one of the mafia's own.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

The theft is not discovered until Monday. By this time, Henry has already given \$120,000 of the money in tribute to the mafia bosses. His boss, Paulie, receives \$60,000, and Buster Aloï receives another \$60,000 as the Colombo crime family's man in charge at the airport, which is under their control. Jimmy, Tommy, and Henry go to Vegas and return bragging of their lucky streak as a cover story to justify the cash they have stolen. They spend it cautiously. Henry puts a down payment on a new car, but finances the balance under his brother's name. He also buys things for the new apartment and for Karen and the kids. Paulie makes them a business proposition for investing the money, giving Henry and his friends an opportunity to buy a fifty-one percent interest in a bookmaking operation. Twenty-four-year-old Henry jumps at the opportunity.

The bookmaker puts him on the payroll for \$500 a week plus expenses, and Henry learns the ins and outs of running a gambling operation. Once a week he helps straighten up, which means paying out and collecting on wagers. Since Henry gambles as much as he earns, he sometimes has to borrow money to make the payouts. Henry is arrested in a routine sweep but gets off with a fine. Karen, aware of all this, convinces him to invest in a legitimate business opportunity with his Air France money before he gambles it all away. They have two young children now and Karen wants Henry to have a legitimate source of income. Henry buys a restaurant called The Suite after first discussing it with Paulie. Paulie supports him by ordering The Suite off limits to the wiseguys. The place is clean of mafia influence. At first The Suite turns a healthy profit. Karen and the kids spend time there; she keeps the books, including the secret books that the IRS will never see. However, within a few months, Henry's friends start to frequent the place. Within six months it becomes an after hours mafia hangout and Henry starts losing money from comping all his friends.

Henry's life is busier than ever between his bookmaking business and the restaurant. With Karen keeping books, she needs help around the house but wiseguy families do not hire help because they have too much to hide. Henry solves the problem by buying an immigrant girl from a friend for six hundred dollars. The girl is overweight and Henry quickly sends her back to his friend. Around this time, Karen starts getting harassing phone calls from a strange man. Henry beats up an innocent man he believes to be the culprit and is arrested for assault. After being released, Henry realizes the caller must have obtained their unlisted number by spying through the window with binoculars; the number is written on the kitchen phone and visible from the window. Henry changes their number and does not write it on the phone and the telephone calls stop.

Henry sums up this chapter by stating that his "attack first and ask questions later" policy led him into trouble when he assaulted the innocent man. Ironically, that is the only thing he seems to have learned. His willingness to buy a woman in order to have a



slave is overlooked. Henry's recounting of this episode is chilling because he considers it an amusing story, and bemoans his bad luck that the girl he bought turned out to be fat. He returns the woman to the slave-trader who bought her in the first place and never spares another thought for her welfare.





# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

Henry acknowledges that most of his associates accept killing as part of their normal routine. He recalls Tommy DeSimone's feelings of pride when he takes young Frankie Burke on his first hit. Jimmy Burke, Frankie's father, has beaten Frankie for many years hoping to toughen up the timid boy. Jimmy is exultant when Jimmy kills his first man. Henry explains that the killings are necessary because so many wiseguys break the rules. Johnny Mazzolla, the man who used to take Henry out to cash counterfeit twenties, has a son who insists on robbing local bookies despite being warned away. Out of respect for Johnny, the kid is shot through the heart so that the family can have an open casket funeral. Jimmy Burke even kills his best friend, Remo, because Remo tells the cops about one of Jimmy's cigarette shipments in order to get out of jail. Remo has no idea Jimmy has found out and willingly accompanies Jimmy and Tommy on a car ride. Tommy kills him with a piano wire and the body is buried under the cement bocce court at Jimmy's bar, Robert's.

One night at Robert's, Tommy takes offense to some teasing by Billy Batts. Tommy tells Jimmy and Henry that he intends to kill Batts. Henry hopes Tommy will forget it because killing a made man is against the rules, but Tommy nurses his grudge and a couple of weeks later he kills Batts in The Suite, Henry's restaurant. Jimmy helps him with the hit while Henry sends another member of their crew and his girlfriend home before they get killed too. They throw Batts' body in the trunk and drive upstate to some property owned by a friend of Jimmy's. On the drive, they hear noises from the trunk. They pull over and Jimmy and Tommy bash Batts until they are sure he is dead. They bury him in a deep hole and cover him with lime. Three months later, they are forced to dig up the body because Jimmy's friend sells his upstate property. They put the decomposed body in Henry's trunk and take it to a junkyard where Batts is smashed into a cube inside a junk car. Henry can't get the smell out of his car and has to junk it as well. Killing Batts was a dangerous thing to do, but Tommy's temper does not stop there. He later kills a harmless kid named Spider who refuses to dance for Tommy's entertainment. By now, Henry is convinced Tommy is a sociopath.

Yet, Tommy is hardly the only killer in the group. Henry recalls a night when Paulie has everybody at Robert's ambush the staff of a restaurant a few blocks away. The entire staff is hunted and killed with baseball bats and lead pipes because the maotre d' was surly to Paulie and spilled wine on his wife, Phyllis. Henry realizes that this senseless violence was beginning to damage their business interests. He recalls a hijacking in which the manager of a legitimate warehouse gave Jimmy a hard time because Jimmy's men are not union workers. Jimmy sends Tommy and Stanley Diamond to the man's house to rough him up a little so he will cooperate in the future; instead, Tommy and Stanley lose control and kill the man.



Wiseguys kill with little provocation, for they enjoy the killings. "They enjoyed talking about them. They liked to relive the moment while repeating how miserable the guy was. He was always the worst sonofabitch they knew. He was always a rat bastard, and most of the time it wasn't even business. Guys would get into arguments with each other and before you knew it one of them was dead" (p. 129). By demonizing their victims in this manner, the wiseguys justify their murderous acts. Henry blames the victims for their deaths in his narrative even as he refers to the killings as senseless. He believes these men deserve to die because they do not follow the rules. Here the author lets the irony speak for itself. The only real rule the wiseguy culture teaches is that there are no rules. Wiseguys are encouraged to break all the rules, and they are applauded for getting away with lying and scheming. Thus lying to each other is a natural result; but for doing what they are taught to do, wiseguys are killed. Henry's narrative tone in this section indicates remorse for the senseless violence, yet he does not fully grasp the paradoxical nature of his world. He states that wiseguys have trouble believing their friends could actually kill them; this statement foreshadows Henry's own denial when he later learns that Jimmy and Paulie want him dead.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

At twenty-six, Henry is living the good life. He and Karen drive brand-new Buick Rivas and the closets of their rental home are filled with designer clothes, shoes, and jewelry. Karen does her grocery shopping in a mink coat, one of four furs she owns. Their home is filled with luxury items, but Henry's biggest luxury purchase is his girlfriend, Linda. Girlfriends are considered status symbols in the wiseguy world, for a man must earn enough to keep his wife and family and his girlfriend in luxurious surroundings.

Henry meets Linda in 1969 while he is out to dinner with Peter Vario, Paulie's son. Henry and Peter are taken with Linda and her friend, Verallynn, and the foursome begin dating regularly. Paulie worries about this turn of events because he is paranoid that Linda and Verallynn are undercover FBI agents seeking to get close to Paulie's operatives. Paulie insists on meeting Linda and is relieved to find out she works in a bridal boutique run by Buster Alois's son, Vinnie. For the first few weeks, Henry has Linda convinced he is a CPA. Linda is easygoing and Henry loves their no-strings-attached relationship. They party late into the night, and when Linda starts oversleeping and gets in trouble at work, Henry intimidates her boss so that she still gets a paycheck but no longer has to report for work. He puts her up in an apartment and she accompanies him on his late-night partying lifestyle. Linda recognizes that Henry enjoys spending time with her because it gets him away from his responsibilities.

Like many mistresses, Linda believes Henry does not love Karen and only stays for the children's sake. She becomes an integral part of his life and knows all his wiseguy friends, but Linda still spends every holiday alone. After a while, Linda begins to expect more from Henry. Meanwhile, Karen becomes suspicious that Henry has a girlfriend. Karen does some detective work and tracks Linda to her apartment, where she screams at her through the closed door. Linda thinks Karen is desperate because she knows she is losing Henry. Karen is desperate, so desperate that she confronts Henry at gunpoint, demanding to know the truth about Linda. Henry takes the gun away, hits Karen, and moves in with Linda for a couple of weeks. Karen refuses to give up on Henry. She still loves him and despite all the problems his lifestyle causes them, they remain very attracted to one another. She is also pregnant with his second child. Karen learns that Henry treats Linda badly and realizes that Linda is getting his worst side while Karen gets his best.

During a brief stint Henry spends in jail at Riker's Island, Karen finds Linda's name on Henry's list of approved guests. She is furious. Karen spends her days writing letters on Henry's behalf to obtain him an early release and she smuggles food and other luxuries into him each week. She insists that Henry take Linda's name off the list or he will lose her support. Henry capitulates, but he does not stop seeing Linda. Linda is furious at not being allowed to visit him in jail because of Karen's demand, but Henry smoothes it over



the day he gets out of jail. Henry is tired of fighting with both women, but he refuses to give up either.

Henry does not recognize the impossibility of his desire to have a steady relationship without strings any more than he recognized, in the previous chapter, the impossibility of maintaining loyal friendships with disloyal men. Again, author Pileggi allows Henry to present his perspective without interruption, yet Pileggi organizes the material so that Karen and Linda's viewpoints are also represented in a way that underscores Henry's naivety.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

Henry laments his bad luck; his first major arrest involving significant prison time occurs because he gets in a barroom brawl with a man whose sister happens to work for the FBI. Henry agrees to accompany Jimmy and Casey Rosado on an impromptu vacation to Florida, where Casey intends to visit family and pick up some money that is owed him. Casey's cousin takes them out on the town and they stop into the Temple Terrace Lounge, owned by the guy who owes Casey the money, John Ciaccio. When Casey and Ciaccio get into a dispute, Casey's cousin hands Henry a gun and Jimmy strong-arms Ciaccio out of the bar. In the parking lot, in the rental car provided by Casey's cousin, Henry pistol-whips Ciaccio until he agrees to pay half. The bleeding man leads them to another bar where his partner is supposed to pay the other half. By the end of the night, Casey has his money and the wiseguys spend the rest of the weekend drinking and enjoying their time.

Henry doesn't give the incident another thought until a month later when he discovers that he, Jimmy, and Casey are all wanted by the FBI. Ciaccio's sister, a typist for the FBI, had confessed to her employers her brother's troubles with betting and with organized crime. Both the State of Florida and the federal officials prosecute Henry and his gang. Casey, a union official with a clean record and earnest demeanor, testifies in the State trial and convinces the jury that Ciaccio is a liar. Henry and Jimmy expect Casey to do as well for them in the federal trial, but Casey dies of a heart attack before the trial. Without him, Henry and Jimmy have no chance to beat the case. They get ten years apiece.

Henry's attitude towards his arrest and sentencing builds further on the book's ironic tone. As a bookmaker, Henry can accurately calculate the odds that any given horse will win a race. Yet, in his own life, Henry persists in believing he can beat the odds time and again. Henry believes to this day that his prison sentence could have been avoided if he had not had such bad luck. This statement carries an echo of his compulsive gambling tendencies, for despite knowing the odds, when Henry gambles he believes he can beat the house every time: all he needs is a little good luck.



# Chapters 13

## Chapters 13 Summary and Analysis

Karen is devastated by the news. She cannot imagine spending ten years without Henry. She considers divorce, suicide, and homicide, but instead spends every moment she can with Henry before his sentence begins. Henry's lawyers stall for nearly two years, during which time Henry schemes manically to steal as much cash as possible because he will not be able to earn while in prison. Henry even busts his restaurant, The Suite, using up its credit and burglarizing its supplies after the IRS padlocks the door, then he starts another restaurant called Roger's Place to provide some income for his family while he's gone. Eventually he surrenders himself and begins serving hard time. It is Henry's first time in real prison and he prepares by researching which guards and prison officials are corrupt. Henry's goals are to make his stay as pleasant as possible by buying himself extra privileges and to shorten his stay by taking advantage of the various rehabilitation programs. He learns that if he takes classes and a prison job, and if Karen commences a letter-writing campaign as she's done in the past, he can be out in three to four years.

He spends his final night of freedom partying at Roger's Place, staying long after Karen and the kids have gone home. The next day he stops at a bar instead of reporting to prison. Henry considers going to Canada, but he receives calls from his bail bondsman and from Karen, who is afraid she'll get stuck with his fifty thousand dollar bond if he does not report. Reluctantly, Henry agrees to leave the bar and report to the Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary. Here his dismay quickly turns to elation as he realizes that Paulie and the other high-level mafia inmates practically own the place. However, Henry's soft prison time comes at a high price. His gourmet diet costs him two to three hundred dollars a week in guard bribes; Paulie spends a thousand a week.

Karen visits every weekend with the kids and smuggles in food and wine. Henry takes a job and enrolls in Community College classes. Paulie has a job, too, but pays another inmate to do it for him. Paulie introduces Henry around and soon Henry is bookmaking in jail. Karen makes the payouts and collections on the outside and begins her letter-writing campaign. Her persistence helps get Henry reassigned to the farm after two and a half years. The farm is a dairy farm that provides milk to the prison; inmates assigned to the farm enjoy extraordinary freedom. Henry is able to make love to his wife again in the fields. From his new home, Henry is able to increase his bookmaking business and begins to sell drugs smuggled in by a host of contacts and sometimes by Karen. Paulie has a strict rule against his guys selling drugs because of the heat drugs attract to his operation, but in prison, Henry is on his own. Any wiseguy not on the street earning Paulie money cannot expect Paulie to take care of him or his family; Henry must do whatever he can to get by.

This chapter is told from Henry's perspective. Henry clearly relishes the lifestyle he maintains in prison and exults in the power that wiseguys have, even in the joint. Henry



describes the eighteen-hour days he puts in between his legitimate prison jobs, which he performs with pride, and his extracurricular activities. Henry is also proud of himself for obtaining an Associates degree during this time; he sees himself as a hard-working man willing to go the extra mile to take care of his family. The perks of being a wiseguy are privileges he feels he's earned. The next chapter contains the same events from Karen's point of view, and the contrast this provides shows Henry in a much less flattering light.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary and Analysis

For the first two years of Henry's incarceration, Karen visits him once a week. By the third year, the children are unable to bear the twelve-hour round-trip drive every weekend so Karen reduces the visits to once or twice a month. Young Judy suffers from stomach cramps each time she has to visit the prison. She and her sister Ruth find the ten to twelve-hour visits interminable; there is no daycare at the prison and the girls quickly get bored while their parents and their friends socialize in the bare visiting room. Karen works two jobs while Henry is in prison, in addition to helping Henry with his drug sales and bookmaking operations. She knows it costs Henry \$500 a week to live in prison between guard payoffs and special food and privileges. Henry sends her the \$673 a month he receives from the Army in veteran's benefits, and later, when he convinces her to smuggle in drugs for him, he gives her some of that money, too. From the beginning, he insists that she smuggle in foodstuffs for him; all the mafia wives are expected to do this. Karen relates that some of the wives are very frightened of getting caught.

It is interesting that Karen does not complain about Henry's behavior during this time. She devotes her entire existence to supplying him with smuggled contraband so that he can have an easy existence while she and the kids are living in a cheap two-room apartment. She works two jobs, takes care of his two children, and takes many personal risks and puts in many hours to help her husband with his illegal schemes. Karen directs her anger not at her husband, but at his mafia employers who refuse to help Karen or even pay Henry any of the money he is owed. Henry gets angry and frustrated with Karen because she dares to express this anger or hold any expectations of his wiseguy friends; Henry knows he can expect no help earning money in prison. Yet, he does not seem to notice that his wife helps a great deal; she supports his luxurious prison lifestyle and accepts without question his belief that he needs luxury items to make up for the fact that he is in prison. Meanwhile, Karen and the children suffer the most.

Henry has a "relatively comfortable and unfettered" lifestyle in prison, especially after his transfer to the farm. He sees a better opportunity, however, and asks his already overburdened wife to engage in another campaign to get him transferred to Allenwood. Allenwood is considered a country club prison; it features private rooms, telephone and television access, a day-care center and kitchens where visiting wives and maids can prepare gourmet meals, and tennis courts. Inmates are held on the honor system and have many opportunities to leave the prison for extended periods. Henry spends his last year of incarceration in Allenwood. Despite Karen's support throughout this time, Henry spends more of his prison furloughs partying with Jimmy in Las Vegas than at home with his family. He continues to sell drugs to support his lifestyle and is soon released for good behavior. His wiseguy friends set him up with a fake office-manager job in Long



Island to convince the prison officials that he has ties to the community and is not likely to return to a life of crime.

# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary and Analysis

Upon his release, Henry tells Karen to start looking for a house. He has lined up several moneymaking schemes and is thrilled to be back in action. He quickly finds the right contacts to help him sell drugs on the outside and buys his daughter an expensive doll with the profits. Young Ruth cries when she receives the doll, telling her father they cannot afford it. Henry has begun wholesaling drugs, and quickly puts together a team of people to help him. Bobby Germaine, a stickup artist, Robin Cooperman, a clerical worker at an airfreight company, and Judy Wicks, a courier, are recruited to help Henry since he cannot use his wiseguy contacts to sell forbidden drugs. Henry's other new projects include selling guns, fencing stolen jewelry, and fixing college basketball games. Henry is also earning money from illegal liquor distribution, and he collects \$225 a week from the office manager job that he holds only on paper to satisfy his parole officer.

Henry describes the basketball games he fixes with his associate, Tony Perla. Tony has recruited two willing Boston College basketball players to shave points off key games. The players agree so long as they don't have to throw the games; they are willing to win by a few less points in order to help Tony and Henry beat the point-spread. Henry lines up bookies to help him take more bets and increase his winnings. Jimmy and Paulie are impressed with his scheme initially, but one of the players, Rick Kuhn, has an attack of conscience and refuses to shave the points. Jimmy and Henry lose money and Jimmy wants revenge on the two basketball players. However, Jimmy is soon distracted from his revenge by larger problems.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary and Analysis

Two months after Henry gets out of prison, his bookmaker friend, Marty Krugman, tells him about a potential score of enormous proportions. Marty and his wife, Fran, arrive at Karen and Henry's new three-bedroom house for a visit. Marty takes Henry aside and tells him about Lufthansa. According to Marty, there are millions of dollars in untraceable cash sitting in the Lufthansa cargo vaults at Kennedy Airport. Marty has been tipped off to the money by a man named Lou Werner, a compulsive gambler who owes Marty a great deal of money. Werner is so desperate to repay Marty and get a piece of the money himself that he has worked out all the details, including how to bypass the security systems.

Henry leaps at the idea. Jimmy Burke is about to be released from Allenwood, and Tommy DeSimone is recently out of prison. "Henry realized that he, Jimmy, and Tommy could beat by ten times their glorious \$480,000 Air France score of 1967. It was the best welcome-home present any of them could ever receive" (p. 204). Henry's only problem is that Jimmy hates Marty Krugman. He takes care to sell Jimmy on the Lufthansa heist before he tells him that the information comes from Marty. Jimmy is sold on the heist and agrees to meet Marty. At the meeting, Jimmy is suspicious and paranoid of Marty; Henry realizes his friend has changed in prison. Nonetheless, Jimmy begins planning the heist.

Jimmy needs eight men to do the job, two outside, and six inside. He begins recruiting; not all of the original recruits make the final cut. Henry hears that Tommy, Joe Buddha, Angelo Sepe, Anthony Rodriguez, Fat Louie Cafora, Stacks Edwards, and Frenchy McMahon are in on the job, but Henry knows better than to ask for confirmation of details he does not need to know. Jimmy advises Paulie and the Bonanno family of the impending score; the Bonannos run half the airport and Jimmy must pay them tribute as well as Paulie. On December 11, 1978, a Lufthansa security guard named Kerry Whalen is knocked over the head with the barrel of a .45 automatic. He gets a glimpse of the stickup man before the man pulls his ski mask over his face. Whalen is forced to deactivate the alarms by a group of armed men. Using Whalen's keys, the gunmen penetrate the high-security area where the vaults lie.

The gunmen round up all the Lufthansa employees and hold them at gunpoint in the third floor cafeteria. The gunmen grab Rudi Eirich, the only man with access to the vaults. When Eirich sees ten of his employees bound and held by the gunmen, he agrees to cooperate. Eirich opens the first vault door. The gunmen are familiar enough with the system to know that Eirich must lock the first door behind them before opening the second door. Inside the vault, the gunmen remove bound stacks of currency and then order Eirich to relock the vault doors. They leave Eirich bound in the cafeteria with his employees. Before they leave, one of the gunmen takes off his ski mask to wipe his face. His cohorts yell at him to put it back on, but several employees sneak looks at his



face. The gunmen make off with five million dollars in cash plus \$875,000 in jewels; it is the single most successful robbery in the history of the nation.

The robbery seems too good to be true. It is planned and executed with ease; Henry and his friends have made the ultimate score. However, in this chapter, the seeds of destruction have already been planted. Jimmy's paranoia foreshadows the coming events, as does the fact that so many people know about the robbery plan. The gunmen's hubris is evidenced by their casual removals of their masks. This hubris permeates the entire plan; it never occurs to Henry or his friends that five million dollars may bring more heat onto their operation than any of their previous, smaller hold-up jobs. Given what the reader has already learned about the wiseguys' natures, it seems highly unlikely that Henry and his friends will live in peace and prosperity in the wake of the Lufthansa heist.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary and Analysis

The Lufthansa dream quickly begins to unravel. Henry is so busy with his point-shaving scheme on the weekend of the robbery that he first hears about it on the news Monday morning. Henry has spent the previous evening getting drunk with Marty Krugman; as a result, he gets in a fight with Karen and winds up spending the night at a girlfriend's house. Jimmy calls him that morning and summons him to a meeting. Fat Louie Cafora, one of the Lufthansa gunmen, is there with the new Cadillac he has bought for his soon-to-be wife, Joanna. Henry knows better than to bring up Lufthansa, but the news is all over the radio. Jimmy pressures Henry into going home to Karen. Henry now realizes that Jimmy didn't want any personal issues to call attention to them in the wake of the heist. Jimmy gives Henry and Fat Louie each five hundred dollars and arranges to meet Henry again the next day.

The following day, Henry meets Jimmy and they take care of some bookmaking business. One of the bookies they need to meet with is Marty Krugman. In the car on the way, Jimmy asks Henry if he thinks Marty has told his wife, Fran, about Lufthansa. Henry feels sick; he knows Jimmy well enough to realize that Jimmy has just decided to whack Marty. Henry indirectly tries to talk Jimmy out of it by talking about how unreliable Marty's word is, meaning the police would find him a useless witness. Henry pretends to go along with Jimmy's plan, even calling Marty to set up a fateful meeting for later. Henry knows he has about six hours to talk Jimmy out of killing Marty. Henry pleads Marty's case to Jimmy all afternoon, reminding Jimmy that Marty's bookmaking business is a valuable asset to them. By the time they arrive to meet Marty, Jimmy has changed his mind to Henry's vast relief.

Marty is his own worst enemy, however. Unaware of his narrow escape, Marty begins hounding Jimmy for his share of the take, some \$500,000. Henry realizes that Jimmy wants to kill Marty because he doesn't want to give \$500,000 to a guy he doesn't like in the first place. Marty does not understand that they all have to wait for their money until the heat dies down anyway. Jimmy doesn't want anyone making major purchases and does not intend to divvy up the proceeds until the police investigation has tapered down. Marty is not the only one pushing his luck. Stacks Edwards begins complaining that he hasn't received his share. Henry cannot believe Stacks; Stacks was supposed to take the robbery truck to a junkyard and have it compacted, but instead he had gotten high and gone home to sleep. The police have found the truck and Stacks' prints are all over it. Henry knows Jimmy will kill Stacks over this, but Stacks does not realize he is in trouble and keeps carrying on about his money. As Stacks talks, Henry sees Paulie nod at Jimmy and knows that Stacks' execution has just been ordered.

Tommy DeSimone and Angelo Sepe kill Stacks that weekend. When Marty hears about it, he assumes Stacks was killed over an unrelated drug deal. "And that's the way everybody played it. Jimmy sent me over to Stacks's family. We paid for everything. I



spent Christmas Eve in the funeral parlor with Stacks's family" (p. 218). Marty is in debt to some loan sharks and continually harasses Jimmy and Henry for his share of the money. Meanwhile, federal law enforcement agents are maintaining constant surveillance on the entire gang. Henry knows better than to ask Jimmy for the money; he is content to wait until things cool down. In gratitude for his patience, Jimmy gives him ten thousand dollars before Christmas. The week after Christmas, Tommy DeSimone is scheduled to become a made man. It is Tommy's dream come true; he'll be a true wiseguy at last. Jimmy is not Italian and can't be made, so he is especially proud of Tommy. Instead of being made, however, Tommy is whacked. The whole thing was setup by the Gambino family in revenge for Tommy killing Billy Batts.

By New Year's, the Lufthansa heat forces the men to abandon Roberts. They start meeting at a new place on Rockaway Boulevard owned by Vinnie Asaro. Marty realizes that something is wrong and shows up night after night hoping to get information about Tommy and Stacks from Henry. Vinnie's is where Jimmy chooses to have Marty whacked. Jimmy sends Henry and Karen over to see Marty's wife, Fran; their job is to convince Fran that Marty has run off with a girlfriend. Henry does his best, but Fran knows about Lufthansa and demands the truth from Henry. Henry lies to her and she realizes Marty is dead. Henry visualizes a similar scene taking place in his own kitchen; with Jimmy's wife Mickey consoling Karen while Jimmy buries Henry's body in the Jamaica Marshes. This vision foreshadows events to come; yet, despite Henry's awareness of Jimmy's treacherous nature, he still cannot believe his friend would ever turn on him.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary and Analysis

The Lufthansa robbery is a media sensation, making law enforcement even more eager to catch the perpetrators. Edward A. McDonald is the assistant US attorney in charge of the case. He and his men learn that Jimmy Burke and his crew are responsible for the robbery within hours of the event, but proving it is another matter. Informants and partial witness identifications give law enforcement the names of Jimmy Burke, Angelo Sepe, Anthony Rodriguez, Tommy DeSimone, and Frankie Burke, Jimmy's son. The police are able to put these suspects under surveillance and undercover cops infiltrate Robert's Lounge. Jimmy's, Tommy's, and Sepe's cars are bugged, but all three men know to be careful to turn up their car radios before discussing anything incriminating. The FBI obtains no hard evidence, but they do get a lead from their recordings of Sepe that convince them the money is buried in his girlfriend's cellar. As time goes on, Jimmy and his crew become quite good at losing their police tails and manage to disappear for days at a time.

McDonald tries other avenues. He knows Lufthansa must have been an inside job, and quickly learns that Lufthansa employee Lou Werner had prevented a Brink's truck from picking up the money a few hours before the robbery; Werner is one of the only employees who knew the money was still there at the time of the robbery. Since the professional criminals like Jimmy Burke are too wise to implicate themselves even in the privacy of their own cars, McDonald decides to bug Werner's car and telephone, hoping the amateur criminal will be less circumspect. Indeed, Werner talks freely about the robbery, trying to impress his ex-wife, his new girlfriend, and even his local bartender. The FBI speaks to all of Werner's acquaintances, and Werner's acquaintances speak to the FBI. They learn that Werner and a man named Gruenewald were the original planners of the heist. Since he did not have the contacts to carry out the job, Werner had enlisted his bookie, Marty Krugman, who then brought in Jimmy's gang.

In February, Gruenewald is arrested, quickly followed by Werner. McDonald arrests Angelo Sepe as well, but has insufficient evidence to indict him because the search warrant of his girlfriend's place fails to turn up any stolen money. McDonald only has enough evidence to convict Werner, but he knows Werner is only an amateur. McDonald hopes to pressure Werner into testifying against his criminal associates. Simultaneously, however, McDonald learns that the key suspects are beginning to disappear. Stacks is found dead, Tommy DeSimone is reported missing by his wife and presumed dead, and a man named Richard Eaton is found in a frozen meat locker with a broken neck. Reportedly, Eaton had recently laundered a vast amount of money in Florida. Next, Marty Krugman disappears and with him goes McDonald's entire case. Lou Werner has no idea who Krugman got to do the actual heist; Marty Krugman is the only name Werner had to give the police.



The killings continue as McDonald prepares for Werner's trial. Theresa Ferrara, Tommy DeSimone's girlfriend, is found in the water off the coast of New Jersey. McDonald has Werner, Gruenewald, and all the witnesses against Werner under protection. The night of Werner's conviction, Joe Buddha and Frenchy McMahan are found dead in the front seat of a Buick parked in Brooklyn.

With this chapter, Pileggi has introduced a solid dose of reality into Henry Hill's dream world by introducing the law enforcement's perspective for the first time. Henry has bragged for eighteen chapters about his invulnerability, but Pileggi dispels that myth by showing how quickly McDonald and his men target the perpetrators. Henry's belief system is thus proven wrong; foreshadowing the demise of the lifestyle he has built upon lies.





# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary and Analysis

Henry describes the day of his arrest. He is busy from morning to night and snorts cocaine all day to maintain his frantic pace. Henry's income has been limited since the Lufthansa heist because his partner, Jimmy, is laying low. Thus, despite Paulie's prohibition against drugs, Henry is more involved than ever in the business. His assistant and now girlfriend, Robin, is strung out on dope and is pressuring Henry for a commitment. Henry starts his day by picking up his brother from the hospital; he has a big welcome home dinner planned for him later that night which he intends to cook himself. First, he has to drop off some guns to Jimmy that Jimmy wants to buy from him. On the way, Henry notices a red helicopter following him but tells himself he's being paranoid. The helicopter is gone before he gets to Jimmy's, but Jimmy decides not to buy the guns so Henry leaves with them still in the trunk of his car.

Heading for the hospital, the helicopter picks up Henry's car again; Henry is nervous because of the guns in the trunk. He nearly has an accident en route to the hospital and the helicopter follows him from the hospital to his house. At home, Henry braises the meat for that night's sauce and then heads out with Karen to unload Jimmy's guns after ducking the helicopter tail. Henry's drug courier, Judy Wicks, is waiting at the house when they return; she is supposed to take Henry's drugs on a flight to Pittsburgh that night. Henry drops off Karen, stirs the sauce, and then heads to Robin's house to get the drugs. Robin tries to corner him into discussing the relationship. He leaves with her heated words still ringing in his ears. Henry instructs Judy to call and make her flight reservations from a payphone, but Judy ignores him and calls the airlines from Henry's house. Henry finishes dinner at the house and eats with his family. Judy suddenly realizes she left her lucky hat at home and refuses to go on the courier mission without it. Henry jumps into the car still carrying the half-kilo of heroin that Judy is supposed to fly out with. Thinking of the helicopter, he returns to the entryway of his house and hides the packet in a recessed light. Henry gets back in the car and that is when the cops arrest him.



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary and Analysis

Pileggi shifts the viewpoint back to law enforcement in Chapter 20. Nassau County Narcotics Detective Daniel Mann describes how he first comes across Henry Hill. A nineteen-year-old from Long Island is arrested in a routine drug bust. Eager to make a deal, the teenager offers Mann information on an organized-crime heroin and cocaine ring. Mann checks out the kid's story and learns it is legitimate. The young man tells Mann that the ring is connected with Paul Vario and is run by members of the Lucchese crime family. Henry Hill is the leader. When Mann learns Hill is close to Paul Vario, he is pleased. The police have not found many people who know Vario well enough to implicate the mob boss in anything serious.

Mann and his men begin taping Henry's calls and have him under constant surveillance. Before long, they realize Henry is connected with organized crime on all levels, from the street hoods to the bosses. Generally, mob bosses are insulated from the crimes and criminals they direct, but Henry has direct access to Paul Vario. Although Henry speaks in code when he refers to drug deals on the telephone, the police are very familiar with such codes and have no trouble explaining them to juries. Mann notes that real wiseguys like Paul Vario don't even have phones; this remark shows his understanding of the wiseguy ethos and echoes a similar comment made by Henry earlier in the book. The law enforcement perspective revealed in Chapters 18 and 20 show how vulnerable Henry Hill actually is despite his belief in his own invulnerability. The police are able to arrest thirteen other organized-crime members through the information they obtain from Henry's surveillance. When Robin is arrested, the police find cocaine and heroin all over her kitchen because she hates to do the dishes. Henry had even bought her a dishwasher so she could clean up after mixing the drugs, but she did not use it.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary and Analysis

Henry's first response to being arrested is to try to con the police. He dangles information as bait but refuses to actually divulge any names or details. "Henry continued to scramble, hustle, and con for days after his arrest, but these were the last spastic jerks of a hood whose time had expired, the final reflex actions of a wiseguy who did not yet know that he was already dead" (p. 261). Karen and the children are not immediately alarmed by Henry's arrest. The kids are so inured to having their home searched by police that they continue watching television during the search. Karen soon realizes that Henry is nervous; Jimmy and Mickey are acting strange, too, calling her frequently to ask when Henry is getting home. Henry instructs Karen to tell the Burkes that he has decided to stay in jail for a little while to get off the drugs and to try to get his bail reduced.

During the first week of Henry's arrest, Jimmy insists on meeting with Karen. He tries to send her down the block to pick up some t-shirt material. Karen notices all the windows on the block are boarded up. When she gets to the building Jimmy is motioning her towards, she sees one of Jimmy's hit men inside. Karen's instincts compel her to tell Jimmy she doesn't have time to pick up the material right now and then she jumps in her car. Later, Karen realizes she has had a narrow shave. The next day she visits Paulie, who tells her that he is turning his back on Henry.

Jimmy is rightly paranoid about Henry cooperating with the police. Most of the witnesses and participants in Lufthansa have been killed or have vanished, including Fat Louie Cafora and his new wife, Joe Buddha, and Frenchy McMahan. As one of the few survivors, Henry's testimony is invaluable. He faces twenty-five years to life on a narcotics conspiracy charge, and he knows that both Karen and Robin can be charged as well. With Paulie refusing to help Henry bribe his way free, Henry knows he will face a maximum sentence. The only way Henry will avoid serious jail time is if his wiseguy friends arrange to have him killed. Henry begins to consider cooperating with the police. At the same time, he must make a show of non-cooperation in order to avoid being whacked before he can get out on bail.

Henry understands that Jimmy will decide to have him whacked in order to keep the Lufthansa money, and he knows Paulie will allow it. Paulie's greatest fear is to die in jail like his friend, Carmine Tramunti, who received fifteen years on a drug charge at the age of fifty-seven. Paulie's prohibition on drug-dealing stems from his desire to avoid a similar sentence at his advanced age. To confirm his suspicions, the federal agents play Henry a tape of a conversation between Sepe, Stabile, and Jimmy in which they discuss the threat Henry poses. Jimmy tells Sepe and Stabile not to worry about it, which Henry knows is Jimmy's code for saying he wants Henry dead. Despite everything, Henry cannot believe his long-time friend would actually kill him.



As a precaution, Henry arranges for Karen to bail him out without telling anyone. To his chagrin, he learns that Karen has flushed the heroin packet down the toilet to destroy the evidence. He berates her for flushing away \$18,000. Back home, Henry sets up a meeting with Jimmy. Both Jimmy and Henry pretend everything is fine as they discuss his case. When Jimmy sets up a meeting for the following day in a bar Henry has never been to, Henry realizes Jimmy plans to whack him. Henry drives by the bar to check it out, and it is exactly the kind of place Jimmy would choose for a hit. Instead of going to the meeting, Henry and Karen drop by Jimmy's sweatshop. Jimmy asks Henry to go to Florida with Stabile to whack Bobby Germaine's son; the son is the nineteen-year-old drug dealer who first tipped the police off to Henry's drug ring. Jimmy has never asked Henry to do a killing before, and Henry knows if he goes to Florida with Stabile, Stabile will kill him. Henry plans to stay on the street to accumulate as much money as possible but the police don't give him the chance; they arrest him that day as a material witness in Lufthansa.

# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary and Analysis

Ed McDonald explains to Karen that she, the children, and Henry are all in danger and all have to go into the federal witness protection program. McDonald gives Karen her options, and none of them are appealing. Karen realizes she has no real choice. Henry is relieved, as he has only agreed to enter the witness protection program if Karen and the kids join him. Karen's mother is devastated but the kids are excited. Karen finds the situation surreal as she, Henry, and the children receive new identities.

The federal marshals are kind to the family during this difficult transition period while the family stays in motel rooms and Henry begins to talk. Henry receives full immunity from all past and future crimes provided he cooperates fully in testifying against his old friends. The FBI agents escort Karen and her mother home so she can pack, then Karen says goodbye to her mother and heads into her new life. Part of Karen is happy to be leaving her mother behind; she has felt smothered by her mother and thinks for the first time in her life she will be truly independent. Karen is also hopeful about having a fresh start with Henry. Now he will have to lead a normal life with her and the children.

Henry, however, still loves the wiseguy lifestyle. "We walked into a room and the place stopped. Everyone knew who we were, and we were treated like movie stars with muscle. We had it all and it was all free" (p. 283). Henry is unhappy to have to lead a regular life, to be average, to be nobody. This statement speaks volumes about the maturity level of a wiseguy. Henry's narcissism is such that he believes he is nobody unless he can materially demonstrate his superiority with intimidation or violence. The book's chronological structure builds on the foundation of Henry's belief system and shows the ultimate consequences of such beliefs, yet Henry has not learned the lesson that his own life has presented him.

# Epilogue

## Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Henry joins the ranks of the forty-four hundred accused criminals in the witness protection program. Ed McDonald quickly learns that crime is so much a part of Henry's lifestyle that he does not give a second thought to the ramifications of his acts. Henry's casual admission about bribing Boston College basketball players in a point-shaving scheme infuriates McDonald, a former Boston College basketball player, but McDonald realizes to Henry this was business as usual. Henry's testimony leads to multiple convictions. On February 6, 1984, Henry testifies against Paulie Vario, who receives four years and a ten-thousand-dollar fine for helping Henry arrange fake employment to get out of Allenwood prison early. Jimmy Burke fares worse; in 1985, he is put on trial for the murder of Richie Eaton. Henry stares across the courtroom at Jimmy as he speaks the words that will put Jimmy away for life.

Ironically, Henry cannot help McDonald crack the Lufthansa case because Henry and Jimmy are now the only survivors. Henry now lives in a nice home in a neighborhood with a low crime rate; he owns a successful business and his children attend private school. Henry travels to New York frequently at government expense to testify in other trials and he earns a monthly stipend from the government. He is so fiercely protected that even the IRS was refused the opportunity to dun him for his back taxes.



# Characters

Henry Hill

Paul Vario

Vito "Tuddy" Vario

Jimmy Burke

Tommy DeSimone

Karen Hill

Linda

Edward A. McDonald

Henry Hill Sr.

Carmela Costa Hill



# Objects/Places

## The Cabstand

Located at 391 Pine Street in Brooklyn, New York, the cabstand is a hub for the local mafia. Henry Hill's part-time job at the cabstand becomes his entry into a life of crime.

## Robert's Lounge

Robert's is a bar on Lefferts Boulevard in South Ozone Park. Located close to the Queens airport and owned by Jimmy Burke, Robert's becomes their unofficial headquarters for arranging airport hijackings and disposing of the ill-gotten cargo. After the infamous Lufthansa heist, the wiseguys stop meeting at Robert's as the police have the place under constant surveillance.

## Sonny Bamboo's

Angelo McConnach goes by the street name of Sonny Bamboo. His Bamboo Lounge on Rockaway Parkway near the airport is the place to go to buy stolen airport merchandise. His clientele includes insurance adjusters, truckers, union delegates, wholesalers, discount-store owners, and others interested in buying stolen goods cheaply.

## John F. Kennedy Airport

JFK Airport in New York is the central hub for mafia hijackings in the 1960s and 1970s. Billions of dollars worth of cargo pass through the airport each year, and for the wiseguys, there is no better place to hijack a valuable load.

## The Air Cargo Center

The Air Cargo Center is a thirteen-building complex of warehouses and truck-loading ramps spread over 159 acres near Kennedy Airport. During the 1960s and 1970s, it is the site of countless cargo thefts and hijackings. It is also the site of Henry Hill's first big score, when he steals \$480,000 in cash from the Air France cargo building.

## The Suite

The Suite is the name of Henry's restaurant, his first legitimate business. At first, Paulie helps him succeed by ordering the mafia to stay away, but eventually Henry's friends do begin to drop by and soon enough, the restaurant starts losing money like so many before due to the mafia influence.





## **The Temple Terrace Lounge**

Owned by John Ciaccio, the Temple Terrace Lounge is the site of the barroom brawl which leads to Henry Hill's first significant prison sentence.

## **The Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary**

Henry's first real prison time is served at the Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary in Pennsylvania. Here he takes advantage of every prison rehabilitation program to shorten his ten-year sentence by more than half. Henry and his wiseguy friends live like kings in the penitentiary, where everyone else serves hard time. Only the influential mafia inmates are allowed to smuggle in food and cook in their rooms; their safety is guaranteed and they do not have to personally perform the jobs they take on to get them out of prison early.

## **Allenwood**

Allenwood is the name of the federal prison, which inmates refer to as the country club. Well-connected, wealthy prisoners are housed here and their incarceration is based on the honor system. Allenwood features tennis courts, private rooms, day care facilities, and other amenities, including kitchenettes where visiting wives or maids can prepare meals.

## **The Lufthansa Cargo Vaults**

Lufthansa airlines stores millions of dollars in cash in their cargo vaults at Kennedy Airport. When Henry Hill hears about this potential score, he gets his wiseguy friends to help him steal it. The Lufthansa job is the most successful robbery in American history, but Henry's greatest triumph leads to his ultimate downfall.



# Themes

## Peter Pan Complex

Henry Hill is a little boy who chooses to never grow up; as such, he follows in the literary footsteps of Peter Pan and Huckleberry Finn. Henry's fun-loving inner child is not nearly as innocuous as these two fictional examples, however, although he believes he is not hurting anyone; or, rather, he believes he is not hurting anyone important. Henry, like many other maladjusted sociopaths, justifies his crimes by convincing himself that his needs outweigh everyone else's. Henry convinces himself of his own superiority and considers individuals who are trusting and honest to be weak; they are easy prey and they only have their own stupidity to blame if someone takes advantage of them. Henry is the product of an immature mindset. He develops no internal sense of right and wrong, no belief system to guide him through life. He embraces the wiseguy belief system, which only serves to teach him to believe in nothing. Henry lacks mercy, he lacks integrity, and he lacks respect for his fellow human beings. The world is his plaything; other people are merely objects to be used for his pleasure and gain.

How did he come to such a turn? Henry has elevated ordinary boyhood fantasies to a life philosophy. How many young schoolboys wish they could ditch school with impunity, never suffering a single consequence? Certainly many do, but most children receive guidance from older and wiser adults, which keeps them on solid ground until they are old enough to internalize that guidance and live as mature adults. Sadly for Henry, his adult role models themselves suffer from the Peter Pan Syndrome. Paulie, Jimmy, and the other wiseguys are dangerous men with the mentality of children. Unaccepted in regular society, the wiseguys insulate themselves and recruit impressionable youngsters to validate their childish philosophies. Henry is indoctrinated from a young age. He is rewarded with adolescent desires like alcohol, cars, and women for pleasing his mentors. The mafia in the era in which this book takes place use the same tactics as the Taliban use today to dupe and recruit young men into dangerous lifestyles for the benefits of the group's elders. Because the wiseguys are so isolated from regular society, they never get to know or appreciate the benefits of maturity, and they pass their immature lifestyle down from generation to generation.

## Loyalty

Loyalty is perhaps the biggest irony in *Wiseguy*. Henry's initial acceptance into the mafia underworld results from his perceived loyalty to mob boss Paul Varo. "Jimmy the Gent" Burke is also accepted by the mafia for his demonstration of loyalty. An important, unwritten rule of the wiseguy ethos is that one must be loyal to one's organized crime family above all. Committing crimes with one's fellows certainly gives one ammunition to use against a fellow wiseguy; thus only by proving that one will never turn against his fellows can a man be accepted as a wiseguy. The disloyalty of a single individual can



lead to the arrest and conviction of multiple crewmembers; thus, disloyalty is punishable by death. Everyone in the life knows and accepts this, including Henry Hill.

Ironically, disloyalty to everyone else is a must for wiseguys. Wiseguys cannot afford to develop strong ties or loyal bonds with anyone outside the life, nor with institutions, schools, or even one's own family relations. No one but a wiseguy can understand; no one but a wiseguy can be trusted. Loyalty to any party outside the organized-crime family leads to conflicts of interest and is therefore discouraged. This situation leads to an obvious paradox. Human beings cannot move through life without developing loyalties to family, friends, and organizations.

At some point, every wiseguy is expected to use these loyalties to profit the mafia. Wiseguys inevitably must choose between their loyalty to friends and family and their loyalty to the mob. Henry learns this lesson very young when he tries to refuse the Varios' request that he steal his father's gun. Henry does not want to jeopardize his father by using his gun for criminal activity, especially as the wiseguys can easily obtain other guns, but Henry is not given a choice. Amazingly, none of the wiseguys seem to notice this paradox until it is too late. It is virtually inevitable that every wiseguy will be disloyal to his mob bosses at some point; the very nature of the organization places every member in this position. When this happens, the wiseguy becomes a marked man. Ultimately, Henry's "loyal" friends order his death when Henry attempts to be loyal to his family and act in his own best interests.

## Organized Crime

Organized crime is the primary focus of the non-fiction book, *Wiseguy*. Nicholas Pileggi's mission in writing Henry Hill's story is to demonstrate to the public the all-pervasive nature of organized crime. Henry's story makes a strong case for the inevitability of conducting one's personal and professional business in a criminal manner. The fact that Henry never faces any consequences for his crimes, and indeed, is admired by many, supports the allure of the mafia lifestyle. Organized crime is portrayed as an alternate form of social order and governance. Mafia bosses function as police protection for the criminal class, which cannot go to legitimate police for protection. Police and government corruption also forces otherwise honest people to seek the support of mafia bosses. Ironically, the mafia's corruption helps keep the corruption of legitimate police and government in check.

Pileggi's organized-crime theme in *Wiseguy* is intended to undermine the organized-crime mindset. Pileggi quietly, and without comment, presents the true facts related to mafia activity. He shows the businesses and lives which are broken by the selfish mobsters who rejoice in their ability to destroy what others have worked hard to create. Pileggi's book is a condemnation of corrupt individuals in the legal and judicial professions. Such people provide the role models that Henry follows. Had Henry grown up witnessing the integrity of such role models instead of witnessing their corruption, he would have learned different values. Pileggi makes no specific comment about the "everybody's doing it" philosophy that the mafia exploits, but by presenting the painful

details resulting from this philosophy, he creates a powerful story that serves as a moral warning to the public.



# Style

## Perspective

Henry Hill is the main subject of *Wiseguy*, and the story is predominantly told through his perspective. Henry's first-person narration is couched in the context provided by Nicholas Pileggi, which provides a subtle counterpoint to Henry's point of view. Henry Hill is a huge fan of the mafia and the wiseguy lifestyle. His words express his glee over living a life devoid of responsibility or consequence. Henry is the ultimate Peter Pan: a little boy in a man's body. Henry believes he is entitled to luxury, wealth, and control, and does not believe in paying dues of any kind to society. He is encouraged from a young age to take advantage of the honest workingmen who keep the wheels of civilization turning. Henry's justification for his selfish behavior is that he can get away with it, so why shouldn't he? The word accountability is not in his vocabulary.

Henry's point of view is engaging because he speaks for the shadow side of humanity. Many schoolboys dream of playing hooky every day and of having the power to get away with such behavior. Henry achieves this dream when he is a boy, thanks to the backing of the local mob boss. The popularity of *Wiseguy* and the movie *GoodFellas*, also based on Henry's life, stems from that innate human desire to have it all--popularity, power, sex, and money--with no attendant responsibilities or consequences. Yet Pileggi's perspective, muted but ever-present with his quiet sense of irony, shows that there are a great many consequences to Henry's actions. Henry is willing to ignore the consequences and allows his friends, family, and loved ones to take the fall for him every time so that he can continue to live in the lap of luxury, unfettered and untroubled.

## Tone

The tone of *Wiseguy* is driven by Henry Hill's point of view. As such, the story's tone takes on the tone of Henry's life; it is a wild romp, a constant party. Henry has a zest for life paired with an ignorant lack of concern for his impact on society. One might find these qualities in many young people, but usually, over time, experience and natural consequence teach people to be mindful of the impact they have on others. As human society is interdependent, maturity brings the realization that one's greatest benefit is just as often found by working to benefit another. Henry, however, is shielded from natural consequence thanks to the influence of the powerful mafia bosses who have taken him under their wings. Their actions allow Henry and his fellow wiseguys to quite literally get away with murder. Henry feels liberated by his above-the-law status and enjoys every minute of being a wiseguy.

However, a darker tone lurks underneath Henry's carefree attitude. The author's quiet voice maintains a through-line of reality which grounds the reader, if not Henry, in the knowledge that Henry's life is built on a quicksand foundation. Henry's own words, and the words of his fellow wiseguys, reveal a buried knowledge of this hard truth. In



Chapter 10, in which Henry addresses the rampant killings that even he acknowledges are getting out of control, Henry inadvertently reveals the mentality of enforced denial that his friends hold. Guilt over killing friends and associates is dealt with by dehumanizing the dead men. The hit men vilify each of their victims to an absurd degree to help cope with their own guilt. Each man killed is "always the worst sonofabitch they knew. He was always a rat bastard" (Chapter 10, p. 129). Through such dark musings, the book's tone takes on a darker perspective, reminding the reader that regardless of Henry's insensibility to his own cruelty and joyful attitude toward crime, he and his friends are living in a constant state of unease.

## Structure

*Wiseguy* is divided into twenty-two chapters, chronicling the life of Henry Hill in chronological order. An Introduction and an Epilogue explain the author's thesis and place Henry's story in context. The twenty-two chapters are primarily told in Henry's own words. Initially, each chapter is grounded with an opening section in which the author places the coming events in context, much as he does in the Introduction. Beginning around the mid-point of the book, Henry's words take over completely and the author fades, for a time, into the background. In Chapters 5 and 6, Henry's perspective is amplified by his wife Karen's words as they jointly relate the story of their courtship. Karen is not heard from directly again until Chapter 11, when she and Henry's mistress, Linda, each relate their separate perspectives on the love triangle Henry has initiated.

Linda's perspective quickly disappears, but from this point forward, Karen speaks more frequently. This method of organization by the author subtly reveals Pileggi's own perspective on Henry's selfish views. Henry gloats about his luxurious lifestyle in jail, and Pileggi follows this with Karen's description of the difficulties she and the children face during this period. Chapter 18 marks the point of no return for Henry's criminal lifestyle, and here for the first time the voice of law enforcement is introduced through the personage of assistant US attorney Ed McDonald. Henry's perspective alternates with law enforcement perspective throughout the final chapters of the book, and in Chapter 22, Karen and Henry collectively have the last word.



## Quotes

"Other youngsters, including his own son, Vito junior, had been hopeless. They dawdled. They moped. They lived in a fog. Sometimes one would take an order and disappear. Tuddy needed a sharp kid who knew his way around. A kid who wanted to hustle." Chapter 1, p. 14

"There was no question - Jimmy could plant you just as fast as shake your hand. It didn't matter to him. At dinner he could be the nicest guy in the world, but then he could blow you away for dessert." Chapter 2, p. 24

"He had to pay us two hundred a week apiece, and for that he could have hired a real maotre d' and bartender. Also, we were stealing him blind. Everything we stole or gave away came out of his pocket. I know that we used to drive him nuts, but he couldn't do a thing about it.

'But by the end of the summer we were bored.'" Chapter 4, p. 49

"I'm walking along the street near the pizzeria when Paul pulls up and Karen comes charging out the car door. It was like a hit. She's really steamed. She comes running right up to me and yelling that nobody stands her up. 'Nobody does that to me!' she's screaming on the street." Chapter 5, p. 68

"Sonny Bamboo's was practically a supermarket for airport swag. It was so well protected by politicians and the cops that nobody even bothered to pretend it was anything but what it was. It was like a commodities exchange for stolen goods. Outside there were big cars double-parked and inside guys were screaming and drinking and yelling about what they wanted to buy or what they needed to have stolen." Chapter 7, pp. 102-103

"Eventually Henry was questioned by police so many times and became so familiar with the process and its loopholes that he no longer worried about getting caught. Of course he tried not to get caught. It was not profitable to get caught. You had to pay the lawyers and the bondsmen, and you had to pay off cops and witnesses and sometimes even the prosecutors and judges." Chapter 7, p. 105

"They were so pissed that the guy wouldn't listen to Jimmy, that he lived in the boondocks of Jersey, and that they had to go all the way out there just to talk to him, they got themselves so worked up that they just couldn't keep from killing him." Chapter 10, p. 138

"I had to get Paulie to talk to his son on the outside before we could convince him not to have me killed. Paulie wanted to know if I was selling dope. I lied. Of course not, I told him. Paulie believed me. Why shouldn't he believe me? Until I started selling stuff in Lewisburg I didn't even know how to roll a joint." Chapter 13, p. 176



"It was the heist of a lifetime. The one robbery where there should have been enough for everyone. Six million dollars in cash and jewels. And yet, within days of the robbery the dream score turned into a nightmare. What should have been the crew's happiest moment turned out to be the beginning of the end." Chapter 17, p. 211

"That's how it happens. That's how fast it takes for a guy to get whacked. It was getting crazy, but I still had from two in the afternoon until eight or nine o'clock that night to talk Jimmy out of killing Marty. Meanwhile I'm going along with the program." Chapter 17, p. 215

"We exchanged Christmas presents. We went on vacations together. Still, I knew he could blow me away right there and get Mickey, his wife, to call Karen and ask where I was. "We're real worried," Mickey would say. "We've been waiting for him. Did he leave yet? What could be holding him up? Do you think he's okay?" Meanwhile Jimmy's planting me with a boxful of lime in the Jamaica Marshes, across the street from where he lives." Chapter 17, p. 222

"First the detectives wanted to know where everyone in the house was, and they wanted us all to go into one room while they searched. They never said what they were looking for. The kids, who had been through it all before, just kept watching television." Chapter 21, p. 261

"The kids had read the papers. They knew about all the people who had been killed. There were stories every week about Jimmy and Paulie. They knew about Stacks and Marty Krugman. They knew Tommy had disappeared. They could see that everything we had was falling apart." Chapter 22, p. 279

"Henry was never able to help McDonald crack Lufthansa - the case that essentially had gotten Henry into the witness program in the first place. By the time McDonald had Henry as a witness of Lufthansa, the people who could trace the robbery back to Jimmy were all dead." Epilogue, p. 287





## Topics for Discussion

Describe Henry Hill's views about honest, working-class people.

What, if any, contradictions do you notice in Henry's wiseguy philosophy?

Henry becomes angry with Karen for her refusal to understand why the wiseguys will not help her or Henry while Henry is in prison. Explain this issue from both of their viewpoints and comment as to your views on this dispute.

What rules is Henry expected to follow as a wiseguy?

*Wiseguy* is told primarily in Henry's own words. What, if anything, do you believe he has learned from his experience with the mafia?

Do you believe, as Henry does, that the ability to get away with wrong-doing makes wrong-doing inevitable? Why or why not?

Ultimately, what effect do you believe Henry's actions will have on his two daughters?