

# Looking for Alibrandi



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MELINA MARCHETTA

Melina Marchetta was born into a family of Australian immigrants, like the character Josie in *Looking for Alibrandi*—the story of Marchetta’s grandmother immigrating to Australia from Italy in the 1930s loosely inspired novel. Unsure of her academic abilities, Marchetta left school at age 15, but later earned a teaching degree. She taught at a Catholic boys’ school in Sydney for 10 years. *Looking for Alibrandi* was her first novel; published in 1992, it became an instant hit and sold out its first print run in only two months. It earned a number of prestigious awards, both in Australia and worldwide. Marchetta continued to teach until 2006, after the publication of her third young adult novel, *On the Jellicoe Road*. In addition to writing full-time, Marchetta often gives interviews and lectures about her books and her writing process, and she also wrote the screenplay for the award-winning 2000 film adaptation of *Looking for Alibrandi*. Marchetta lives in Sydney, Australia.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Looking for Alibrandi* draws heavily on the history of Italian immigration to Australia, which first began in earnest in the mid-19th century. However, prior to the completion and opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the journey from Italy to Australia took a full two months, so Australia was a less popular destination for Italian immigrants than the U.S. or Canada. Australians’ perceptions of Italian immigrants shifted over the decades. As Australia’s government moved to shut down immigration from Asian countries and the Pacific Islands in the late 1800s, Italians and other European immigrants were considered good, necessary workers—especially since they often held difficult, undesirable jobs. But then, throughout the early 20th century, European immigrants were considered “pests,” especially during economic downturns. These views contributed to the racism that immigrants like Nonna, who came to Australia between World War I and World War II, experienced. However, immigration nevertheless boomed during this period and became even more prevalent after World War II ended. During World War II, as Nonna and Zia Patrizia describe in the book, the Australian government forcibly imprisoned Italians out of fear that they’d conspire with an invading Japanese force. According to the most recent census data, Italian Australians make up the sixth-largest ethnic group in Australia, and Italian is the fifth most-spoken language in the country.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Though *Looking for Alibrandi* is Melina Marchetta’s best-known novel, she’s written a number of others. In *Saving Francesca*, she revisits the Italian Australian community, and *On the Jellicoe Road* is another story of a teenager reconnecting with family members believed to be long gone. In Australia, *Alibrandi* is one of many books published in the 1990s and early 2000s that explored coming of age, specifically for and about teen girls. Other contemporaries include *Feeling Sorry for Celia* by Jaclyn Moriarty, *Raincheck on Timbuktu* by Kirsten Murphy, and *Queen Kat, Carmel, and St. Jude Get a Life* by Maureen McCarthy. A number of young adult novels deal with the immigrant experience. Ibi Zoboi’s [American Street](#) is about a Haitian teen navigating Detroit for the first time, while [The Go-Between](#) by Veronica Chambers tells the story of a wealthy, somewhat famous teen from Mexico City moving to Los Angeles so her mother can take a new TV job. In *Alibrandi*, Josie and her classmates study Shakespeare’s play [Macbeth](#), while she and Jacob discuss seeing a film adaptation of Jane Austen’s novel [Pride and Prejudice](#).

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Looking for Alibrandi
- **When Written:** Marchetta wrote what would become the final version in 1990-1991, but she began writing it almost a decade earlier, when she was 17.
- **Where Written:** Australia
- **When Published:** 1992
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Novel, Bildungsroman
- **Setting:** The suburbs of Sydney, Australia, in the early 1990s
- **Climax:** John Barton commits suicide.
- **Antagonist:** Though Josie thinks Ivy is an antagonist for much of the novel, she eventually realizes that gossip and the pressure to conform are the real antagonists.
- **Point of View:** First Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Happy Endings.** Marchetta has said in interviews that in her imagination, Josie and Jacob end up together after the end of the novel.

**Girl Power.** The film adaptation of *Looking for Alibrandi* was released in theaters the same weekend as *Gladiator*—and when it came to the Australian awards season, it was up against the Eric Bana film *Chopper* in a number of categories. Because of the competition and because stories about teenage girls tends

to be taken less seriously than stories about men, Marchetta didn't expect *Alibrandi* to perform well. But much to her surprise, *Looking for Alibrandi* beat out *Chopper* in several categories, winning Australian Film Institute awards for Best Film and Best Screenplay Adapted from Another Source.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Josie introduces herself to the reader: she's 17, lives in Sydney, Australia, and is in her final year of school at a prestigious Catholic girls' school called St. Martha's. She'll take the tests for her High School Certificate (HSC) at the end of the year and then plans to study law and become a barrister. She's her school's vice captain and believes herself to be unpopular, in part because she's Italian, illegitimate, and attends St. Martha's on a scholarship. Though Josie vows to be a "saint" for her final year of school, this flies out the window on the first day when Sister Gregory catches Josie reading a **Hot Pants** magazine during religion class. Later that evening, as Josie and her single mother, Mama, have dinner, Mama reveals that Josie's long-lost father, Michael Andretti, is back in Sydney for the year; he's been in Adelaide since just after Mama became pregnant with Josie at age 17. He doesn't know Mama went through with her pregnancy.

Sydney holds its annual Have a Say Day, where students from schools all over the city come together to "gripe" about things. St. Martha's school captain, a wealthy girl whom Josie calls Poison Ivy, gets to ask the Premier questions on national television. But as a vice captain, Josie has to give a speech to a bunch of students. She hates it—until she realizes the boy she's sitting next to, Jacob Coote, is extremely attractive. After school Josie goes to visit her grandmother, Nonna, which she does nearly every day. Josie hates this arrangement because Nonna is old, vain, and constantly scolds Josie for being disrespectful. Josie also resents Nonna because when Mama got pregnant years ago, Nonna and her husband, Nonno, kicked Mama out. Nonna and Mama only reconnected once Nonno died a decade ago, and their relationship is still fraught.

When debate season starts up, Josie is thrilled at the prospect of spending time with John Barton, a rival whom Josie is secretly in love with. But when they talk after their first debate, John reveals that he's feeling depressed and possibly suicidal. His father wants him to go into law, but John doesn't want to. A week or so later, Josie goes with her friends Sera, Anna, and Lee to the first regional dance. She hopes John will ask her to dance but ends up dancing with Jacob all night. Jacob takes Josie home on his motorcycle afterwards.

At a family barbecue that weekend, Josie comes face to face with Michael Andretti for the first time. She first overhears him telling Mama that Josie is an unwanted "complication" in his life. Josie also notices that Nonna seems to put it together that

Michael is Josie's father. When Josie corners Michael in Nonna's sitting room, they angrily vow to never speak to each other. But not a week later, Josie hits a popular girl in the nose for calling her a slur—and she calls Michael, who's a barrister (i.e., lawyer), to come get her out of what might become a sticky legal situation. She's surprised when he comes to her rescue.

Over the next several weeks, as Josie spends afternoons with Nonna, Nonna starts to tell Josie about her young adulthood. She married Nonno in Sicily when she was only 17, and they immigrated to Australia in the 1930s. Nonna was often lonely, since Nonno worked away from home most of the time and no Australian people would teach Nonna English. Things began to change when Nonna met Marcus Sandford, an Australian policeman. He treated Nonna kindly, taught her English, and helped her grow a garden. When Nonno found out about Marcus, he forbade Nonna from seeing him again.

When Josie isn't with Nonna, she's working at McDonald's or fighting with Mama; Mama is casually dating a man named Paul Presilio, whom Josie hates. One night after Josie's McDonald's shift, a bully, Greg Sims, assaults her, but Jacob intervenes. They agree to a date the following weekend, but Jacob is upset that Josie wants him to meet Mama. He's so upset that he purposefully shows up in ratty clothes and is rude to Mama. Enraged, Josie leaves their date within 10 minutes. But as she's walking home, Michael stops and offers to take Josie for pizza. As they eat, Josie realizes she actually likes Michael, especially when he offers her a job at his law firm photocopying.

As the weeks pass, Josie spends time with her friends and runs into John again—he's still depressed. She and Jacob also decide to go on another date. They skip school and take the ferry to Manly, where they kiss. Josie knows she's in love, so it's difficult to be away from Jacob when Michael takes her to Adelaide for her three-week June vacation. Michael tells Josie the story of how he and Mama grew up together and fell in love.

Not long after Josie gets back, it's Tomato Day, the day her family gets together to make **spaghetti sauce**. As they all work, Nonna and Zia Patrizia tell Josie more about Marcus Sandford. During World War II, when Australia interned Italian men—Nonno included—Marcus tried to get Nonno released. When he couldn't, he continued to help Nonna and Zia Patrizia. Both women moved to Sydney not long after, but Nonna was by herself for four months over Christmas before she could join Nonno in Sydney.

At the end of July, St. Martha's holds its annual walkathon. Josie, as the school's vice captain, is supposed to walk at the back of the crowd to keep an eye out for younger students—but Sera, Lee, and Anna convince Josie to skip the walkathon altogether and take a bus to a fancy hotel, where a pop star is supposedly staying. They don't see the pop star, but they do accidentally end up on TV in the background of a press conference. When the school principal, Sister Louise, scolds Josie for her behavior the next day, she reveals that Josie was

actually voted school captain—not vice captain—but Sister Louise didn't think Josie could handle the responsibility. Josie is upset about this, but also realizes that she's more popular than she thought.

Josie and Jacob's relationship is tumultuous: one minute they're madly in love, and the next they're yelling at each other. Jacob is upset when Josie goes to see a [Macbeth](#) film adaptation with John, and Josie is upset when Jacob tries to pressure her to have sex.

Josie's world turns upside-down at Mama's birthday party. As people joke about when Mama was conceived, Josie realizes that Nonno isn't Mama's father—Marcus Sandford is, as Mama was conceived during the four months that Nonno was out of town. After the party, Nonna confirms that Josie is correct. After a week of ignoring Nonna, Josie finally asks Nonna about what happened. Nonna explains that Nonno was a cruel husband, while Marcus treated her kindly and gently, and even wanted Nonna to leave Nonno. When Nonna joined Nonno in Sydney and revealed that she was pregnant, Nonno was enraged. He knew she'd conceived Mama with Marcus because Nonno knew he was infertile—something he'd purposefully concealed from Nonna over the course of their marriage. But Nonno agreed to raise Mama as his own, though he resented both her and Nonna. This is why Nonno kicked Mama out when she became pregnant. Nonna swears Josie to secrecy.

The weekend before Josie's HSC exams, she runs into John at a rugby match and is surprised to find that he's lighthearted and happy. But the next day, when Josie gets to school, Ivy is sobbing: John committed suicide. Josie spends the next week grieving and feeling angry. She doesn't think John had a right to kill himself when he had everything—everything Josie wishes she had—though Michael reminds her that wealth isn't the key to happiness.

A few weeks later, at a school awards ceremony, Josie and Ivy find themselves in the restroom at the same time. Josie realizes they're not so different—something John tried to tell her the day before he died—and invites Ivy to have coffee once they're both in college. After the event, Michael takes Josie for pizza. He reveals that he bought a house in Sydney, and that he'd like Josie to take his last name and allow him to adopt her. Josie asks for time to think and later, tells Mama that she might take Michael's last name, but he doesn't have to adopt her to be her father.

Not long after, Jacob breaks up with Josie. She sobs for days. But in the aftermath, Josie realizes that she's become "emancipated" in the last year. Now, she feels at peace with her family history and her Italian identity. She's ready for the future

**Josephine "Josie" Alibrandi** – The protagonist of the novel, Josie is a 17-year-old Italian Australian girl living in Sydney. Over the course of the novel, she prepares for her High School Certificate (HSC) exams; reconnects with her long-lost father, Michael; and develops a strong relationship with her maternal grandmother, Nonna. Josie is driven and wants to study law and become a barrister (lawyer) after college. Her Mama is a single mother, and the two have a close and loving relationship. At the beginning of the novel, Josie is loud, dramatic, and self-absorbed. She is extremely concerned with what other kids at school think of her (and believes that nobody likes her), while also resenting how much Nonna cares about what people think about the family. She believes that money is the key to happiness and thus hopes to be wealthy and influential when she grows up. Josie's relationship to her Italian heritage is complicated: though she loves some of the Italian traditions and knows that she has a huge, supportive community to call on, she also hates that her classmates use racist slurs and discriminate against her because she's Italian. Over the course of the novel, Josie embarks on a relationship with a white Australian boy named Jacob. Jacob isn't the type of person Josie expected to fall for—he's middle class and wants to be a mechanic, while Josie's former crush, John Barton, is wealthy and conventionally successful. Though Jacob and Josie fight often, they teach each other the importance of being open to new things. Meanwhile, as Josie connects with Michael, she's able to piece together some of her family history and learn more about Mama. And through her afternoons listening to Nonna's life story, Josie learns that Mama's father isn't Josie's overbearing and cruel deceased grandfather, Nonno. Rather, Mama's father is a white Australian man whom Nonna had an affair with. Learning these secrets about her family helps Josie to see her family members as people, not as one-dimensional caricatures, and to feel more secure in her own identity as an upwardly mobile Italian Australian.

**Mama** – Mama is Josie's mother and Nonna's daughter. She's described as being "natural" and gorgeous, as well as extremely gentle and kind. She works as a secretary for several doctors' offices in Sydney. Mama had Josie when she was 17 with Michael Andretti, though Michael moved away to Adelaide believing that Mama was going to have an abortion. Her relationship with her parents, Nonna and Nonno, was strained when she was a child—she could never understand why Nonno seemed to resent her and why Nonna always kept her at a distance. So Mama makes a point to cultivate a close, loving relationship with Josie. Josie feels protective of her relationship with Mama, so she becomes extremely afraid when Mama starts to become more serious with a coworker, Paul Presilio. Josie also regularly stands up for Mama to Nonna, who likes to critique how Mama is raising Josie (Nonna believes it's Mama's fault that Josie is disrespectful). But Mama is just as loyal to Josie in return—when Michael returns to Sydney and discovers that Josie is his daughter, Mama is adamant that



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

Michael doesn't have to have a relationship with Josie, but she insists that he's the one losing out, and she vows to not let him hurt her. Throughout the novel, Mama is a constant, steady, supportive presence in Josie's life. She makes sure Josie knows she's loved and worries often about Josie's safety, especially during the period where Josie works at a busy McDonald's. She's extremely proud of all Josie accomplishes, from her academic achievements to improving her relationship with Nonna over the course of the novel. Mama also never gets in Josie's way when Josie expresses interest in getting to know Michael. She accepts that Josie has the agency to choose whether she wants a relationship with her father or not and doesn't try to forbid Josie from seeing him. Though Mama and Michael are able to coexist comfortably and amicably in the same space by the end of the novel, Josie nevertheless notices that they seem a little guarded with each other.

**Nonna Katia** – Nonna is Josie's maternal grandmother and Mama's mother. An Italian immigrant, Nonna came to Australia with her husband, Nonno, when she was a newly married teenager in the 1930s. At first, Josie knows only the broad strokes about Nonna's life—particularly that Nonna kicked Mama out when Mama became pregnant as a teen, and only started to cultivate a relationship with Mama and Josie after Nonno's death 10 years ago. Nonna is, in Josie's opinion, too focused on keeping up appearances and getting into everyone's business. She desperately wants Mama and Josie to come live with her, though she regularly criticizes Mama for the way she's raising Josie and criticizes Josie for being “untidy” and “disrespectful.” But eventually, Josie begins to listen more carefully to Nonna's stories. As their relationship improves and as Josie listens to Nonna's stories, Josie discovers that Nonna was a bright, beautiful young woman who ended up in a stifling, loveless marriage. Moving to Australia was difficult, as nobody in Australia spoke Italian, and Nonna alone a lot given that Nonno worked away from home for months at a time. But Nonna struck up a friendship with an Australian police officer, Marcus Sandford, and eventually began having an affair with him—and he's Mama's father. Nonna explains that her difficult relationship with Mama stems from the fact that Nonno essentially kept her from having a close relationship with her daughter out of spite. Learning about Nonna's deepest, darkest secret helps Josie develop empathy for the old woman. By the end of the novel, Josie sees her grandmother as a strong, supportive force in her life who had to make a number of impossibly difficult choices and did the best with what she was given.

**Nonno Francesco** – Nonno was Josie's tyrannical grandfather and Nonna's husband; he passed away about 10 years prior to the start of the novel. He was 15 years older than Nonna when they married in Italy, and throughout their marriage, he was controlling and cruel to her. He decided to move them to Australia without consulting Nonna, and once in Australia,

Nonna again had no choice as to where they settled down or what their lives looked like. Through the stories she tells Josie, Nonna implies that she didn't think too much about Nonno's poor treatment of her until she met the Australian man Marcus Sandford. Marcus, who was kind and gentle, made it clear to Nonna that Nonno treated her “like a farm animal,” especially when it came to sex. To make things even worse, when Nonna became pregnant with Marcus Sandford's baby—Mama—Nonno revealed that he'd been lying to Nonna throughout their marriage. After having mumps as a child, Nonno knew he was infertile and couldn't father children, so he beat Nonna for her transgression. But he agreed to raise Mama as his own, provided Nonna didn't step out of line again. Mama grew up believing Nonno was her father, but she could never figure out why Nonno treated her so poorly. He kicked Mama out when she became pregnant with Josie and refused to meet Josie. Even though he's been gone about a decade, Josie senses that Nonna is still afraid of Nonno.

**Marcus Sandford** – Marcus Sandford was Nonna's lover when she was a young woman; he never appears in the novel except for in old photographs. Marcus was an Australian police officer who met Nonna when she lost her composure in the post office. He was, in Nonna's retelling, one of the only Australians willing to befriend Italian immigrants, and he became extremely close with Nonna and with Zia Patrizia. When the Australian government imprisoned Italian men during World War II, Marcus did everything in his power to get Nonno and Zio Ricardo released; when he failed, he turned his attentions to helping Nonna and Patrizia keep their households running. Nonno disliked Marcus and forbade Nonna from seeing him. However, while it's common knowledge that Marcus was an important presence in Nonna's life, Josie is the only family member to ever learn the truth of just *how* important Marcus was to Nonna. While Nonno was away for several months working in the cane fields, Nonna and Marcus began a sexual relationship. Marcus wanted Nonna to leave Nonno, since he saw how poorly Nonno treated her. But Nonna refused to leave her husband—and though Mama grows up believing Nonno is her father, in truth, Marcus is. Nonna explains to Josie that Mama inherited her kindness and gentleness from Marcus.

**Michael Andretti** – Michael is Josie's father; he works as a barrister (lawyer) in Adelaide. When the novel begins, he's been absent for Josie's entire life, as he and Mama conceived Josie as teenagers—and Michael's family moved to Adelaide right after Mama became pregnant. Michael believed that Mama had an abortion and so didn't know Josie existed until he returns to Sydney, where he grew up, and reconnects with Nonna. The relation is obvious to Josie and to Nonna: Michael and Josie have similarly wild and curly hair, have similar statures, and are both extremely stubborn. When Michael first finds out about Josie, he wants nothing to do with her. He sees her as a “complication,” and though he offers Mama money to help

support Josie, he seems to offer only out of obligation. But when it becomes clear to Michael that Josie isn't just going to go away, he decides to take the time to get to know his daughter. They fight often (leading Michael to dub Josie his "obnoxious creation"), but Josie soon finds that she genuinely enjoys spending time with Michael. Michael generously offers Josie a job photocopying in his law office, and he's able to offer important insight on his and Mama's teenage relationship. A realist and endlessly practical, Michael tries to get Josie to realize that being an adult isn't all about getting to do everything you want—and especially when it comes to relationships, it's essential to compromise. He has a good relationship with Jacob and warns both Josie and Jacob away from having sex. Michael ultimately comes to value his relationship with Josie so much that, after she finishes her HSC exams, he asks her if she'd be willing to take his last name and allow him to adopt her. Michael buys a house in Sydney near the end of the novel so that he can stay close to Josie, and Josie wonders if her parents might one day get back together.

**Jacob Coote** – Jacob Coote is Josie's boyfriend for much of the novel. They're the same age; he attends and is the school captain of Cook High School, a public school in Sydney. When they were children, Jacob and a group of his friends accosted Josie and threw eggs and rotting produce at her for being Italian. As young adults, Josie initially struggles to reconcile this memory with the handsome, charming young man in front of her. Jacob is a compelling orator, though he doesn't have the skill or polish of someone on a debate team (like Josie or John Barton). But after seeing Jacob speak at Have a Say Day, Josie develops a crush on him. Jacob rides a motorcycle, wears T-shirts emblazoned with crude language, and is perfectly happy looking forward to a decidedly middle-class future. He takes issue with Josie's Italian heritage, her involved family, and her insistence that he speak correctly. Differences like these cause Josie and Jacob to fight regularly. This often takes the form of screaming matches in public—though they almost always make up right after. Jacob is also jealous and possessive, so he takes issue with Josie's friendship with John. As Jacob and Josie get to know each other, he shares more about himself: his mother died of cancer five years before the novel begins, and he lives with his single father, Mr. Coote. He and his family aren't concerned about premarital sex or having babies out of wedlock, which is one of the reasons he tries to convince Josie they should have sex. Josie remains firm in her desire not to. It hits Jacob hard when John commits suicide—it impresses upon Jacob how essential it is to have dreams to work for and keep a person motivated. At the end of the novel, Jacob breaks up with Josie, insisting that they need to figure out who they are separately. Josie believes that Jacob has become more driven as a result of her relationship—and she also believes that they'll get back together someday.

**John Barton** – John is one of Josie's love interests at first, but

over the course of the novel he becomes one of her best friends. Since Josie joined the debate team two years before the novel begins, she and John have made a tradition of sneaking away to talk after every debate competition and so have developed a comfortable friendship over the years. John's father is in Parliament and he comes from a family that's been in politics for generations. His family is wealthy and well-connected, so John grew up with Ivy. This is disheartening for Josie, as she believes it's inevitable that John will marry Ivy or someone like her, rather than Josie. John intends to study law with Josie, as that's what his family expects him to do. Because of John's wealth and privilege, Josie mistakenly believes that he shouldn't have any worries. But Josie becomes concerned about John when, after the first debate of the year, John reveals that he's depressed and suggests he doesn't want to live anymore. He hates that he doesn't have a choice when it comes to what he's supposed to do with his life—his father wants him to study law and go into politics. And in John's opinion, his father only loves him when John is winning and doing well. Throughout the year, as he and Josie run into each other, John goes back and forth between being his normal happy, levelheaded, practical self and seeming concerningly depressed. This culminates in John taking his own life the day before the High School Certificate exams are set to start. Josie is enraged and distraught that John killed himself; by this point, she sees him as a close friend and felt comfortable facing her future in college in part because she believed John would be there with her. But as she processes John's death, she eventually realizes that being wealthy and connected—as John was—isn't enough to guarantee that a person will be happy.

**Ivy Lloyd "Poison Ivy"** – Ivy is the school captain of St. Martha's and, for much of the novel, Josie thinks of her as an antagonist and refers to her as "Poison Ivy." Ivy's father is a wealthy, well-known doctor in Sydney, and Ivy hopes to follow in her father's footsteps. Josie detests Ivy and assumes that she doesn't have any cares in the world because of her wealth and social status. Ivy is the childhood friend of Josie's love interest, John Barton, and seems perfect in every way—Josie perceives Ivy as smarter than she is, with hair that's never out of place and a future that's guaranteed to be bright and successful. The girls often find themselves at odds, since they have to see each other regularly in the course of their duties as school captain and vice captain. Because Josie sees Ivy as evil and dissimilar to her, it's perplexing when John tells Josie that he'd like Josie to befriend Ivy—he doesn't think the two girls are all that different. His reasoning only becomes clear after he commits suicide. After John's death, Josie and Ivy find that they both relied on John's friendship to feel grounded and secure. And they realize that they're both equally afraid of the future after high school, and they were both driven throughout school by their dislike for the other. They decide that if they happen to run into each other in the future, they'll have coffee and talk.

**Sister Louise** – Sister Louise is the principal of St. Martha’s. Though she’s a nun, Josie describes her as “the most liberated” woman she knows. Sister Louise doesn’t wear a habit and seems to know everything about the students in her school—and she also admits at one point that she rode a motorcycle when she was a young woman. But though Josie admires Sister Louise, she also resents the woman for being nosy and somewhat judgmental. Josie finds it extremely obnoxious when Sister Louise warns Josie not to have sex with Jacob, and she’s incensed when she learns that Sister Louise gave Ivy the role of school captain when Josie won the election. But Sister Louise is one of Josie’s most important mentors and, in explaining why she didn’t make Josie school captain, she encourages Josie to think for herself and be a dependable leader. As much as Josie resents Sister Louise, she also realizes Sister Louise is right—and later credits Sister Louise’s talk as a pivotal moment in her process of becoming “emancipated.”

**Anna** – Anna is one of Josie’s best friends. She’s blonde and timid and so is often the target of jokes within the girls’ friend group. At the first regional dance, Anna meets Jacob’s friend Anton Valavic and immediately falls in love with him. The two enter a slow, gradual relationship over the course of the novel. Because Anna is so timid and quiet, Josie shares comparatively little about Anna’s personality. Anna is one of the two in the group who can drive, along with Sera, and tends to be naïve and romantic.

**Sera** – Sera is one of Josie’s best friends. Sera is Italian, like Josie, but that’s where the similarities end: Sera’s family is wealthy, and Sera always has the fanciest clothes, hairstyles, and makeup. Sera’s love of hairspray is a running joke amongst their group of friends. She’s described as promiscuous and dates a boy named Angelo, whom nobody else likes. Sera is known for doing whatever she wants, whenever she wants, and for dragging others along with her. She regularly dares her friends to do silly or embarrassing things in public, and she has no qualms about publicly humiliating her friends. She’s insistent that sex isn’t a big deal and that everyone should have sex before marriage, despite her Catholic upbringing.

**Lee** – Lee is one of Josie’s best friends. Lee is popular and enjoys drinking and hanging out with surfers, something that Josie finds perplexing given that Lee’s father is a verbally abusive alcoholic. Josie insists that she and Lee don’t have much in common aside from both being part of their group of four friends, though she and Lee can talk for hours about anything and nothing. The biggest difference between them is that Lee’s white Australian family uses anti-Italian slurs. Within the group, Lee is kind and is the only girl capable of reining in Sera at all. She’s not sure what she wants to do after she graduates.

**Zia Patrizia** – Zia Patrizia is Nonna’s younger sister and Josie’s great-aunt. She and her husband, Zio Ricardo, are regular fixtures at family functions. Zia Patrizia immigrated to Australia

a little more than a year after Nonna and Nonno did, and she arrived in the country pregnant with her first child. Patrizia and Nonna were extremely close as young women, and their relationship continues to be close into their old age. Zia Patrizia also knew and liked Marcus Sandford—he delivered one of her babies—though she doesn’t know or even seem to suspect that Nonna was sexually involved with him.

**Greg Sims** – Greg Sims is a bully who assaults Josie. Years ago, Greg’s family lived next door to Josie and Mama, and he regularly tormented Josie for being illegitimate. As teenagers, Greg and his gang assault and threaten to rape Josie and Anna after the girls finish their late shift at McDonald’s one night. Jacob Coote beats Greg up, and that seems to scare Greg into not targeting the girls again.

**Father Stephen** – Father Stephen holds quarterly confession at St. Martha’s for students. Josie admires him and thinks he’s a wonderful mentor. He takes a practical approach to his students’ spiritual education, so, for instance, he insists on holding talks about AIDS so that students aren’t ignorant about the risks of having unprotected sex.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Zio Ricardo** – Zio Ricardo is Zia Patrizia’s husband and one of Josie’s great-uncles. Josie adores him and thinks of him as the kind of good, strong man who isn’t around much anymore. Everyone else who speaks about him, from Nonna to Mama, confirms that Josie’s assessment is correct.

**Carly Bishop** – Carly is one of the “beautiful people” at St. Martha’s. Nobody likes her, but she’s gorgeous and sometimes models for the magazine **Hot Pants**. When she uses racist slurs one day before school, Josie hits Carly in the face with her science book and even breaks Carly’s nose.

**Paul Presilio** – Paul is one of Mama’s coworkers; they briefly date. Josie hates him because he seems to want to get married, and she doesn’t want to share Mama with anyone. He never appears in person in the novel.

**Anton Valavic** – Anton is one of Jacob’s friends. He meets Anna at the regional dance and falls for her instantly. Anton is tall and handsome, and though Sera insists Anton is “too much of a man” to take interest in Anna, their relationship is described as strong and healthy.

**Robert** – Robert is one of Josie’s cousins. They’re the same age and in the same grade at school, though Robert attends St. Anthony’s. Robert is a constant presence in Josie’s life, particularly at family gatherings, but Josie shares little about his personality.

**Angelo Pezzini** – Angelo is Sera’s boyfriend. He drives a loud car, plays obnoxious music, and no one aside from Sera likes him.

**Sister Gregory** – Sister Gregory is Josie’s religion teacher.

**Mr. Coote** – Jacob’s father, Mr. Coote, is a kindly widower. His wife died from cancer five years prior to the start of the novel.

**Mr. Bishop** – Mr. Bishop is Carly Bishop’s father. He’s a wealthy talk show host.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### FAMILY

*Looking for Alibrandi* follows a 17-year-old Australian girl named Josie as she prepares to take the exams for her High School Certificate (HSC) at the end of the school year. Josie lives with her Mama: a single mother who had Josie at age 17, much to the chagrin of Josie’s grandmother, Nonna. Josie detests having to see Nonna every day after school, as Nonna annoyingly always wants to talk about the past and what it was like being an Italian immigrant in Australia in the 1930s and 40s. To make things even worse for Josie, her long-lost father, Michael Andretti, moves back to Sydney at the beginning of the school year and learns that Josie is his daughter. At first, Josie sees family as something constricting, controlling, and burdensome. But particularly as Josie becomes closer to Nonna, learns some family secrets, and accepts Michael into her life, she gradually comes to see that family can be a source of love and sacrifice—and that one’s family can grow to accommodate new members.

At first, Josie believes that her family’s sole purpose is to make her feel inadequate and stifled. Josie has dealt with this feeling for much of her life—and even before she was born. When, as a teenager, Mama revealed she was pregnant out of wedlock, Josie’s very traditional and overbearing grandfather, Nonno, kicked Mama out of his home and refused to ever meet baby Josie. He died about a decade before the novel begins, and it was only at that point that Mama and Josie were accepted back into the fold. So Josie has grown up seeing firsthand that family isn’t always supportive or loving—indeed, she was deprived of even knowing much of her extended family until the time of Nonno’s death. In the present, Josie’s family makes her feel inadequate in a different way. During the afternoons she spends with Nonna after school, Josie feels like Nonna constantly picks on her for being “untidy” and “disrespectful.” Josie finds Nonna’s constant criticism grating, and it makes her feel like Nonna doesn’t truly love her or Mama (Nonna insists it’s Mama’s fault that Josie is so supposedly disrespectful). And because of this, Josie intends to get as far away from her family as possible when she grows up. In her mind, she can only

become who she wants to be if she’s free of their stifling expectations of her.

Part of the reason that Josie feels so distanced from Nonna in particular is because she believes she and Nonna have nothing in common. Josie’s primary complaint about Nonna is that Nonna is old—Josie sees elderly people in general as out of touch and boring. She attributes much of Nonna’s obnoxious behavior, such as insisting on respect and tidiness, to Nonna’s age. But more than this, Josie also resents Nonna for going along with it when Nonno chose to kick Mama out years ago. Despite Josie’s qualms about her extended family, she’s extremely close to Mama and believes that her grandparents committed an unspeakable crime by kicking Mama out when she became pregnant as a teen. Josie insists at several points that she would’ve never kicked Mama out had she been in Nonna and Nonno’s position. This gives Josie an even stronger sense that she and Nonna are irreconcilably different.

However, as Josie begins to grow closer to Nonna, she discovers that she and Nonna aren’t actually so different—and that they can deepen their relationship as they learn how similar they actually are. As Josie listens to Nonna’s stories of being a boy-crazy teen and immigrating to Australia immediately after her marriage to Nonno at 17, Josie can’t help but wonder how alike she and Nonna actually are—17-year-old Josie, like 17-year-old Nonna, is very interested in boys. And especially when Josie discovers that Nonno isn’t actually Mama’s father (Nonna had an affair with an Australian man named Marcus Sandford that resulted in Mama) Josie suddenly has to confront the possibility that Nonna isn’t as boring as she thought. Nonna, just like Josie, was once young, made questionable choices, and didn’t follow her community’s rules. Even more meaningful for Josie, though, is the fact that learning the truth about Mama’s paternity sheds light on the family’s relationship with Nonno and the circumstances surrounding Josie’s birth. Josie learns that Nonno resented Mama because she wasn’t his biological daughter. Though he agreed to raise Mama as his own, he did so on the condition that Nonna didn’t “embarrass” him again, putting Nonna in a very difficult position. Nonna’s distant relationship with Mama, Josie comes to realize, is so distant because Nonna feared retaliation if she were to actually be close to her daughter. So when Mama became pregnant with Josie, Nonna didn’t feel like she could safely or successfully advocate for Mama and thus allowed Nonna to kick Mama out.

Learning these family secrets makes it incredibly clear to Josie see that what’s most important in a family is love and support, not formal ties like marriage. Learning about Nonno’s cruelty starts to diminish his importance in Josie’s mind, even though he’s technically her grandfather. But on the other hand, figures like Marcus and Michael—who are biological members of the family, but aren’t bound to the Alibrandis by marriage—start to take on more importance. As Michael and Josie’s relationship

improves, Josie realizes it's silly to resent Michael for leaving Mama when they were 17; rather, it's healthier to focus on the fact that, in the present, Michael wants to be around for Josie and support her through her final year of high school. With this, the novel suggests that the way family members treat each other is far more meaningful than how exactly family members are related.



## IDENTITY, FREEDOM, AND COMING OF AGE

Josie frames the events of *Looking for Alibrandi* as the story of her “emancipation.” She tells readers that when she turns 18, she desperately wants to escape her tight-knit Italian family and community and become a barrister (lawyer). This, in her mind, would allow her to be able to leave behind her family’s outdated expectations and a gossip mill that can ruin people’s lives. However, over the course of the novel, Josie’s idea of what it means to be free and to be an adult shifts. *Looking for Alibrandi* suggests that a young person’s “emancipation” is tied to their ability to think for themselves, make their own choices, and discover who they want to be—while also balancing their individuality against familial and cultural expectations.

Josie begins the novel believing she knows exactly who and what she is: an Italian scholarship student who’s illegitimate and unpopular. Early on in the novel, many of Josie’s thoughts and actions reflect her belief that she’s just not quite as good as her classmates. Though she’s the vice captain of St. Martha’s, she resents the captain, Ivy—whom she bitterly calls “Poison Ivy”—because in her perception, Ivy is just a little bit better than she is. Josie also feels like she has to work hard to outperform Ivy academically whenever possible, because she’s not quite as academically talented. Josie views herself as an underdog, and she attributes this to the fact that she’s Italian, working-class, and illegitimate. Along with this, Josie believes she’ll have a harder time achieving her dream of becoming a barrister than her wealthier classmates. And while there may be some truth to this—Josie’s wealthy classmates likely will have more networking opportunities and familial support for higher education than a working-class person like Josie—Josie believes the expectation amongst her peers and their families that they will go into professional careers makes achieving a professional career easier.

But the novel suggests that, in many ways, Josie is holding herself back. By thinking of herself as a put-upon, unpopular underdog, Josie is essentially creating that reality for herself. In this way, the novel suggests that a young person’s “emancipation” has to do with how they choose to define *themselves*. As Josie learns that she’s actually popular at school (she discovers that her classmates voted her school captain, but the principal gave Ivy the job instead) and starts to care less about what gossips say about her, Josie finds that the anxiety

that plagues her every day lessens. Suddenly, she can look forward to the future and let go of her fear that nobody will ever like her—people clearly do like her, and Josie was only hurting herself by believing that nobody did. As Josie starts to simultaneously care less about what people think of her and also trust that she’s likeable, Josie becomes increasingly independent and confident. And by the end of the novel, Josie feels prepared to tackle her upcoming law degree knowing who she is—and that her various identifiers don’t make her lesser. Through this, the novel links “emancipation” and coming of age to coming to a more positive and truthful perception of self.

Through Josie’s friend John Barton, *Looking for Alibrandi* shows the negative consequences of a young person not achieving their “emancipation” and coming of age. John, the son of a wealthy politician, has had his life set out for him from a young age: like his grandfather and father before him, he’s expected to study law, go into politics, and possibly even become the Premier. Like Josie in the beginning of the novel, John feels stuck and burdened by his parents’ high expectations of him. He’s not sure what he wants to do with his life—but he’s also certain that he doesn’t want to study law and enter the world of politics. Tragically, because John feels so trapped by these expectations, he commits suicide. Josie conceptualizes this as John’s emancipation—but unlike her, John’s emancipation came through his death, not from realizing he had the power to make his own choices and control his life. Through John and Josie’s very different paths to emancipation, *Looking for Alibrandi* shows just how important it is for young people to be able to make choices for themselves and feel good about their place in the world—the alternative, as John demonstrates, can be fatal and tragic.



## THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Throughout *Looking for Alibrandi*, 17-year-old Josie vacillates between loving and resenting her Italian heritage. She acknowledges her Italian heritage makes her who she is, gives her a support system, and offers a number of traditions that she loves and finds meaningful—but she also can’t escape the slurs that her Australian classmates use, or the fact that some of her family’s more traditional ideas seem wildly outdated. Caught between her Italian home life and her modern Australian life at school, Josie feels somewhat out of place no matter where she goes. But as Josie grows closer to her grandmother, Nonna, over the course of the novel, she comes to realize that she’s not the first member of the family to find herself caught between cultures, be the victim of prejudice, or feel unsure of how to balance her desire to celebrate her Italian identity alongside the fact that she’s also a proud Australian. Through Josie and her family, the novel shows how being an immigrant can make a person vulnerable to racism and painful feelings of unbelonging. But the novel also suggests—as in Josie’s case—that having ties to multiple places



can actually widen a person's community and strengthen their connection to both cultures.

Throughout the novel, Josie's Italian heritage is something she both appreciates and resents: it sets her apart, but it also gives her a source of belonging. Josie focuses more on the negative aspects of being Italian than she does on the positives, in part because the negative parts make her so miserable. At one point, Josie recounts going to school as a child and having Australian girls ask if her if she was Italian. When Josie said she was, the girls informed her she was Australian—but the next day, when the girls asked Josie if she was Australian, they informed her she was Italian. Instances like this made Josie feel from an early age that because she's Italian, she's not as welcome in Australia as her classmates. And throughout Josie's life, her white Australian classmates have regularly referred to her with slurs and made fun of her for being Italian. Indeed, at St. Martha's, Josie initially feels like she's not popular primarily *because* she's Italian. But at home, Josie takes pride in many Italian traditions. Though she finds Tomato Day, the day on which she and her family members make and can **spaghetti sauce**, somewhat embarrassing, she also tells readers that it's a tradition she'll never stop observing. And Josie also leans heavily on her Italian Catholic faith and the ways in which that guides her conduct, such as by not having sex before marriage.

Josie believes that her struggle to balance two cultures is unique to her, as a third-generation Italian immigrant—but Nonna's stories make it clear that immigrants have had to deal with the same difficulties for generations. Indeed, Nonna's stories help explain to Josie why she experiences the racism and prejudice she does, three generations on. Nonna explains, for instance, that Italian immigrants of her generation don't speak English well because when they first arrived in Australia, few Australians would speak with them and help them learn. And even back then, Nonna says that the few Italian immigrants formed their own communities and, in part because they couldn't integrate into white Australian society, became very insular. For Josie, this helps illuminate why her classmates think she lives so differently from them—the Italian Australian community is historically insular. And because of this separation between the white Australians and the Italian immigrants, the two groups haven't had many opportunities to learn about each other, reevaluate their prejudices, and create a kinder, more generous relationship.

Getting to know someone of a different ethnic group, the novel shows, can help broaden people's worldview and dismantle any prejudices about certain ethnicities for everyone involved. *Looking for Alibrandi* showcases two relationships involving people of different ethnicities: Nonna and Marcus Sandford in the 1940s and 50s, and Josie and Jacob in the novel's present. Though Josie and Jacob struggle throughout their relationship because of their cultural differences and even some moments of outright racism on Jacob's part, Jacob eventually finds that

dating Josie opens his eyes to different ways of living and different priorities. Spending so much time with someone who's so culturally different causes him to, in Josie's opinion, become far more ambitious—and perhaps even more importantly, shows Jacob the value in spending time with people who are different from him. Though the novel ends with Josie feeling more comfortable in her Italian identity while still able to take pride in being Australian, it nevertheless doesn't tie up neatly when it comes to racism and immigration. Some of this has to do with the fact that Josie is well aware that Australia is still plagued by racism and prejudice, though she believes it's improving. But she suggests that, as Jacob's and Marcus Sandford's relationships with Italian women highlighted, getting to know someone from a different cultural background is something worth striving for—it makes life more interesting, and it makes Australian culture on the whole richer.



## GOSSIP AND APPEARANCES

At 17 years old, Josie is very concerned with what her peers think of her. She dreams of being popular at school and eventually, of being wealthy and influential in adulthood—but for a variety of reasons, Josie fears she's never going to achieve these dreams. Both Mama and Josie's grandmother, Nonna, meanwhile, are very tuned in to their Italian community's gossip mill—and, in Josie's opinion, are far too afraid of what people might say about them, even though she shares the same fears. Through Josie, Mama, and Nonna's experiences with gossip and their perceived need to keep up appearances, *Looking for Alibrandi* shows that communities use gossip as a means of control—namely, to keep members from behaving in ways the community deems inappropriate. The novel ultimately suggests that gossip (or even just the threat of gossip) can have outsize power to influence people's lives and choices, often in unhealthy or dangerous ways.

At first, Josie characterizes gossip as a fact of life that's unpleasant and annoying, but unavoidable. Josie describes experiencing gossip at school and at home, in her close-knit Italian community. At school, Josie believes her classmates gossip about her because she's Italian, illegitimate, and attends St. Martha's on a scholarship. Gossip, then, keeps Josie from ever forgetting what she perceives as her lower-class position—students of a higher class, or who are more popular, don't suffer the same kind of gossip as far as Josie knows. And at home, gossip is merely annoying. Josie jokes sarcastically about the Italian gossip mill keeping the phone companies in business—the Italian gossips are the ones who alert Mama and Nonna, for instance, to the fact that Josie was seen with her friends riding in a boy's car wearing skimpy clothes. So in Josie's opinion, gossip is unfortunate and unavoidable—but it's merely annoying.

The novel also offers clues that show gossip is a way to control

others' perceptions and behaviors. Josie knows full well that she needs to behave in a very specific way in order to not give the Italian gossips in particular anything to talk about. She tells Jacob at one point that she'd like to be a "rebel Italian" and go against all the cultural rules and expectations guiding, for instance, when and with whom Josie has sex or marries. But because Josie knows she's under increased scrutiny by the Italian community due to her being illegitimate, she insists that being a "rebel Italian" is out of the question. So in this way, Josie clearly modifies or polices her own behavior so that she doesn't inspire gossip. But in the same vein, Josie also knows how to manipulate gossip to help herself. She does this most notably when she calls her father, Michael Andretti, to help her at school after she breaks a popular girl's nose with her science textbook. As Josie walks down the hallway with Michael after leaving Sister Louise's office, she loudly engages Michael in a conversation about his job as a barrister, knowing full well that people are going to be incredulous that she has a father—and that she has a father who also happens to be a barrister. In this way, Josie uses gossip to help her own position at school.

However, *Looking for Alibrandi* also makes it clear that gossip's ability to control people can be extremely sinister and damaging. This becomes especially apparent as Nonna gradually tells Josie about her affair with an Australian man named Marcus Sandford many years ago. As a young, beautiful Italian woman married to a cruel older man, Nonna fell in love and had sex with Marcus out of loneliness. Though Nonna's choice to enter the relationship in the first place might read as a rejection of the gossip mill's power, her choices once she discovered she was pregnant show just how much Nonna feared gossip. Nonna feared that leaving Nonno for Marcus would have subjected Mama to a life of gossip and ridicule. She explains that at that time, a child born to one Italian parent and one Australian parent would've been widely scorned. Nonna believed the only way to give Mama a chance at a normal life was to stay with Nonno and raise Mama as Nonno's daughter, keeping Mama's true paternity a secret from everyone—Mama included. And this is only the first of many instances in which Josie's family members make painful and even harmful choices out of fear of attracting gossip. Nonno was so afraid of what people might say if they found out that it took another man to give Nonna a child that he agreed to raise Mama as his own, something that was no doubt painful for him. But he treated Mama terribly throughout her childhood, and even kicked her out when she became pregnant with Josie. Though Josie realizes that part of Nonno's reasoning had to do with the fact that he resented Mama for not being his biological child, the generally accepted story is that he wasn't going to stand by his daughter while the gossips said horrible things about his family.

While *Looking for Alibrandi* doesn't come to any clear conclusions on how people should handle gossip, it's nevertheless significant that Josie attributes her eventual

"emancipation" (which she defines as coming of age) to the fact that she gradually starts to care less about what the gossips think of her. There's freedom to be had, this suggests, by not putting so much stock in what other people say or think—but that doesn't mean that what other people say isn't still dangerous or worth paying attention to. And the novel does offer hope that as social mores change over the decades, things once considered worthy of gossip, scorn, and estrangement—like having a baby out of wedlock—will become more accepted and, as this happens, gossip will naturally become less powerful.



## SOCIAL STATUS AND WEALTH

Seventeen-year-old Josie is extremely caught up in the differences between people of different social classes. As someone of a lower social class (her single mother is a second-generation Italian immigrant) who nevertheless attends a prestigious high school on a scholarship, Josie fears that she's never going to fit in with the popular, wealthy girls at her school. So Josie's goal for much of the novel is to attain wealth and prestige once she's an adult—she believes that's the only guaranteed way to become happy and successful. But when Josie's wealthy and successful friend John commits suicide, Josie is forced to reevaluate the relationship between wealth and happiness. *Looking for Alibrandi* proposes that wealth, popularity, and social status might make a person's path to success easier, but that success by those metrics is no guarantee of happiness.

At the beginning of the novel, Josie believes that the most important things a person can have are wealth and connections—two things she doesn't have. Josie and her mother, Mama, live a modest, middle-class life. Mama owns their home, but it's small: Josie describes how their dining room and living room are one room. But by herself at home, this doesn't bother Josie—she explains that it's all the better to be able to watch TV while eating dinner or studying. While she's around her classmates, though, Josie is plagued by the thought that she's not as good as her wealthy, connected peers. In addition to her Italian heritage, her being at St. Martha's on a scholarship is something that Josie believes marks her as being fundamentally different from her classmates and contributes to her self-consciousness. And Josie constantly makes comments about how different she is from her classmates. When she's called to the office for breaking Carly Bishop's nose, for instance, she wants to laugh when Mr. Bishop tells Josie to call her lawyer—she's not wealthy enough to have a lawyer, let alone have one who's on call. Similarly, as she thinks of her crush on her wealthy friend John Barton, she imagines Mama and Nonna having dinner with John's parents—and believing their families have nothing in common, Josie can't come up with anything that the adults might talk about. Wealth, in Josie's mind, is an insurmountable difference between her

working-class family and wealthy families like John's.

Josie aspires to be wealthy and connected because she believes wealthy people are happier and have more freedom. This is part of the reason why Josie wants to become a barrister: she sees a career in law as catapulting her away from her working-class origins and giving her the opportunity to choose what she'd like to do with her life. In her understanding, working-class adults are constrained by the unskilled or low-level jobs available to them. Josie doesn't consider those jobs shameful, but she does imply—at least in the first half of the novel—that they're not as meaningful, important, or fulfilling as a professional career. So when Josie looks at her friend John, for instance, she sees someone who has it all. John's father is in Parliament, and his family is extremely wealthy and well-connected. John's life is all laid out for him: he's going to study law with Josie, he's going to go into politics, and according to his grandfather, he could become the first Premier in the family. To Josie, it seems as though John shouldn't have any cares in the world. He can afford fancy clothes, he fits in wherever he goes, and entering a skilled, white-collar profession after college is guaranteed.

But as John's worsening mental health and suicide ultimately show, having wealth isn't a guarantee of happiness. Indeed, Josie's early interactions with John, in which his mental health is worsening and he expresses suicidal ideation and bitterness about his future, shows that John isn't happy. To him, his family's prestige and their expectation that he enter politics is stifling, not freeing. And this, Josie believes and John implies, is why John chooses to commit suicide. He feels so constricted by the expectation that he follow in his father and grandfather's footsteps, go into law and then politics, and continue to live a life of wealth and prestige that in his mind, the only way to escape is by killing himself. John's suicide forces Josie to see that wealth isn't an indicator of a person's happiness. Wealth wasn't enough to keep John alive—and, Josie realizes, becoming a wealthy barrister and breaking into the upper echelons of society isn't going to guarantee that she'll be happy, either. Rather, *Looking for Alibrandi* suggests that what's far more likely to influence a person's happiness is whether or not their family is supportive of a person's dreams and desires—no matter how much money that family makes.



## LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS

*Looking for Alibrandi* follows three major relationships: the one in the present between Josie and Jacob; the past and present relationship between Mama and Josie's absent father, Michael Andretti; and the 1950s affair between Nonna and a white Australian man, Marcus Sandford. Through these relationships—none of which are lasting in that they don't result in marriage—*Looking for Alibrandi* suggests that longevity isn't the only marker of a healthy or meaningful relationship. Rather, it suggests that

even short-lived relationships can be fulfilling when they're fueled by love, respect, and the willingness to better oneself.

*Looking for Alibrandi* shows that relationships often arise to fill gaps in a person's life. Nonna shares with Josie that she embarked on her relationship with Marcus Sandford because her husband, Josie's grandfather Nonno, treated her so poorly. Where Nonno barely seemed to notice that he was married to a beautiful woman 15 years younger than him and treated Nonna "like a farm animal," Marcus Sandford treated Nonna with kindness, respect, and gentleness. Nonna acknowledges that she had a choice when she first slept with Marcus—but she also suggests that it was an easy choice to make, given how unappreciated and unloved she felt in her marriage. Mama, too, turned to Michael as a teenager to cope with her difficult relationship with Nonno, who she grew up believing was her father. Nonno resented Mama and treated her poorly throughout her childhood, but Mama never understood why. Both Mama and Michael either imply or say outright that Mama entered into a romantic and sexual relationship with Michael in part to make up for the fact that Nonno didn't seem to love her—it was important to her, as a teen, to connect with a man who would love and appreciate her.

The novel also shows that relationships are learning experiences, and that—more than how long they last—is what makes them meaningful. During Nonna and Marcus Sandford's relationship, for instance, Marcus taught Nonna English—he was one of the only white Australians who would speak with Nonna. They were able to share some of their respective cultures and traditions with the other, thereby expanding each other's worlds. As the novel's narrator, Josie's experience of dating Jacob receives the most attention—and the most in-depth exploration of how she and Jacob teach each other new things. And Josie's experience shows that learning new things in a romantic relationship can be emotionally challenging. It's extremely frustrating for her when Jacob first refuses to meet Mama, and then agrees to meet her but doesn't take it seriously. Jacob ultimately comes around and eventually even asks to meet Nonna, though he never does. Being more connected to a partner's family, Jacob learns, isn't ridiculous—it can give him important information about his partner. From Jacob, Josie discovers that class isn't everything. Jacob wants to be a mechanic, a profession Josie had never even thought about before meeting him. This shows Josie that her path (a prestigious high school, a college degree, and a professional job) isn't the only valuable path. Through her relationship with Jacob, she develops empathy for other working-class people (of which she is one) and learns that being a "laborer," as she and her classmates call it, isn't anything shameful.

Finally, the novel makes it very clear that relationships don't have to continue long-term to have a positive effect on a person's life. Both Nonna and Mama, for instance, conceived babies as a result of their relationships. Nonna desperately

wanted to have children as a young woman and only discovered after becoming pregnant with Mama that Nonno had lied to her and couldn't father children. So her short-lived relationship with Marcus got her the one thing she wanted most: a daughter. And though Mama wasn't ready to be a parent when she and Michael conceived Josie, Mama nevertheless makes it very clear to Josie on numerous occasions that she doesn't regret the relationship, and definitely doesn't regret Josie. In the novel's final chapter, Josie suggests that she and Jacob taught each other some very important lessons as well: she thinks that Jacob has become more ambitious as a result of their relationship (he insists he'd like to do more with his life than become just another working-class mechanic), while Josie has become less ambitious. This, she makes clear, is a good thing—her decreased ambition means that she's able to look to her future in law with hope and happiness, rather than fear and anxiety. And though she's certainly sad when Jacob breaks up with her at the end of the novel, she makes a point to focus on the fact that he did change her outlook for the better. No relationship that ends, the novel suggests, is worthless or a bad thing, provided that relationship was happy and fulfilling while it lasted, and taught its participants something new.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## SPAGHETTI SAUCE

The spaghetti sauce that Josie helps her family make every year represents her relationship to her Italian heritage. The tomato sauce makes it clear that Josie isn't totally at peace with her Italian identity—she and her cousin Robert refer to the day when the family makes their tomato sauce alternatively as “Tomato Day” or “Wog Day,” using an anti-Italian slur that illustrates how embarrassed they are about this ritual and the Italian culture it symbolizes. Josie is certain that other Italian Australian teenagers in Sydney observe the same tradition—and that they are just as embarrassed about it as Josie and Robert are. At least in part, Josie sees her Italian identity as something to mock and be ashamed of.

Josie nevertheless insists that she'll always observe Tomato Day. In particular, she notes that she'll always enjoy the huge spaghetti dinner she and her family always have after making their tomato sauce. Her Italian identity is something that's an essential part of her, and though it may be embarrassing sometimes, Josie nevertheless finds it meaningful.



## HOT PANTS MAGAZINE

While **spaghetti sauce** symbolizes Josie's relationship to her Italian heritage, *Hot Pants* magazine represents how much Josie wants to be a part of Australian mainstream culture. Josie regularly reads *Hot Pants* and refers to the magazine often throughout the novel. It is, in her opinion, the pinnacle of white Australian youth culture—the models in the magazine are gorgeous, the quizzes teach Josie how she should behave in social situations, and its discussions of sex present premarital sex positively (unlike Josie's conservative Italian Catholic community). But as with the tomato sauce, Josie isn't entirely sold on the ideals that *Hot Pants* sells. Though she aspires to look beautiful enough to model for the magazine and occasionally thinks she does, Josie also resents her classmates who actually model for *Hot Pants*. And as much as *Hot Pants* encourages and normalizes having premarital sex for its teenaged readership, Josie chooses not to have sex for the duration of the novel.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Knopf edition of *Looking for Alibrandi* published in 2006.

### Chapter 1 Quotes

●● I think things got worse when I started at St. Martha's because I began to understand what the absence of a father meant. Also there were no Europeans like me. No Europeans who didn't have money to back them up. The ones like me didn't belong in the eastern and northern suburbs.

**Related Characters:** Josephine “Josie” Alibrandi (speaker), Michael Andretti, Sera

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 9

### Explanation and Analysis

Josie introduces herself to the reader and describes how she feels about attending St. Martha's, a prestigious Catholic girls' high school, making it clear that she feels out of place there because she's Italian, middle-class, and illegitimate.

Throughout the novel, Josie shares numerous instances of being called a slur for an Italian person and looked down upon because she's one of only a handful of Italian students at St. Martha's. Especially after spending her early years attending school with other Italian and Greek

students—who, Josie says, understood what it's like to live in the insular immigrant communities in Sydney—it's uncomfortable for Josie to suddenly stand out so much. Her lower economic standing makes this sense of unbelonging even worse. While Josie's Italian friend Sera comes from a wealthy family and is at the school because her family can afford to send her there, Josie's at St. Martha's on a scholarship. Sera is one of those Europeans with "money to back them up," but Josie isn't—and so she feels even less like she fits in. And because of how out of place Josie already feels at St. Martha's, it's perhaps not surprising that this is where she starts to understand what it means to be illegitimate. It's one more aspect of her identity that separates and differentiates her from her wealthy, white classmates with two married parents.

☝ Even though the girls at St. Martha's don't mention it, I bet you they're talking about me behind my back. I can feel it in my bones. It makes me feel I will never be a part of their society and I hate that because I'm just as smart as they are.

**Related Characters:** Josephine "Josie" Alibrandi (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 9

### Explanation and Analysis

As Josie finishes telling readers about all the ways she doesn't fit in at St. Martha's, she shares that she's certain everyone is talking about her. This fear drives home just how self-conscious Josie feels about her economic status, being a third-generation immigrant, and being the daughter of an unwed mother. Though Josie shares several anecdotes throughout the novel that show some of her classmates saying rude things to her face, there's not actually any evidence that they're talking about Josie behind her back. Though the novel's first-person narration would make this difficult to confirm, it nevertheless suggests that Josie is making this a bigger deal than it perhaps is. She's so concerned about the possibility that people are talking about her, that it's impossible for her to comprehend that that might not actually be the case.

The consequence of this line of thinking, Josie shows, is that she feels like she's never going to fit in. Again, if it's true that Josie is blowing things way out of proportion and that people aren't talking about her as much as she thinks (which the novel suggests throughout is likely), this makes it clear that Josie is the one who isn't allowing herself to fit in. She

knows on some level that she should be able to fit in; she's smart enough to have earned a scholarship to attend St. Martha's, after all. But because of how self-conscious she is about her other identity markers, she's unable to see that she may have more in common with her classmates than she thinks.

☝ "Our circumstances are different, Josephine. I've never gotten on with her. When I was young she used to keep me at such a distance that I used to wonder what I could possibly have done wrong. My father was much worse and it was only after he died that she took a step toward me. By then I kept my distance. With you, it's different. She's always wanted to be close to you."

**Related Characters:** Mama (speaker), Marcus Sandford, Nonno Francesco, Nonna Katia, Josephine "Josie" Alibrandi

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 20

### Explanation and Analysis

Here, Mama encourages Josie to try to form a relationship with Nonna—especially since Nonna wants to have a relationship with Josie.

The novel eventually reveals why Nonna and Mama's relationship is so fraught: Mama is Marcus Sandford's biological daughter, not Nonno's. Nonna kept Mama at a distance throughout Mama's life out of fear for her own and Mama's safety from Nonno. So Mama's levelheaded explanation to Josie shows how destabilizing it can be for a family to keep secrets like this. Josie thinks that Mama would understand if Nonna chose to tell her the truth—and telling the truth might enable the two women to form a healthier relationship. But Nonna insists on keeping Mama's paternity a secret. And this, as Mama shows here, leads to confusion, upset, and anger. Mama blames herself for Nonno and Nonna's coldness towards her, though she can't figure out what she did to upset her parents. She doesn't have all the information she'd need to show Nonna compassion and take a step toward Nonna in return.

But though Josie doesn't have all the information either at this point in the novel, Mama makes an important point: that if Josie were to try to get close to Nonna, something good might come of it. Indeed, as Josie gets close to Nonna and is able to put together her family's history, Josie comes to a better understanding of Nonna's motivations—and why Nonna behaved so oddly throughout her life. This offers

hope that when family members are able to be open and honest with each other, relationships can improve, as they ultimately do between Josie and Nonna.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ We weren't on the news that night. Poison Ivy was, because she was in the group that threw questions at the Premier. As usual she was there in Technicolor, sitting on top of the world. No matter how much I hate Poison Ivy, I want to belong to her world. The world of sleek haircuts and upper-class privileges. People who know famous people and lead educated lives. A world where I can be accepted.

**Related Characters:** Josephine "Josie" Alibrandi (speaker), Ivy Lloyd "Poison Ivy"

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 38

### Explanation and Analysis

After Sydney's annual Have a Say Day, during which graduating students get together to give speeches, Josie watches the St. Martha's school captain, Ivy Lloyd, on TV. While Josie, as the school's vice captain, had to give a speech in front of a bunch of students and businessmen having lunch, Ivy got to be part of an exclusive group that got to question the Premier. The "we" Josie refers to in the first sentence is her and her friends Sera, Anna, and Lee.

The tone here reveals how conflicted Josie feels about class. She hates Ivy, in part because Ivy is in the upper class and gets opportunities like this one to speak to the Premier. But this doesn't mean that Josie doesn't also want what Ivy has—she wants to be able to converse easily with famous, influential people like the Premier, she wants to be able to afford haircuts that make her hair sleek (Josie describes her hair throughout the novel as curly and a bit wild), and she wants to be as educated as possible. In other words, Josie wants to be a part of Ivy's world, but she also resents the people who are a part of Ivy's world.

It's interesting, then, that Josie believes she'll be accepted if she can break into Ivy's world. Indeed, Josie describes Ivy as being one of her biggest and most consistent bullies at school, as Ivy teases Josie about being unattractive and about being at St. Martha's on a scholarship. Though Josie's friend John Barton, who's also wealthy, treats Josie kindly and with respect, the simple fact that Ivy treats Josie so poorly raises the possibility that Josie won't find the happiness and sense of belonging she craves just by

becoming wealthy and gaining influence.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

☝☝ Illegitimacy isn't a big deal anymore. But it was back then and I remember the lies my grandmother would tell me. That I did have a father who died. My mother never lied to me that way. Maybe that's what I dislike about Nonna. That she couldn't accept things as they were. That she probably would have been spitting out some girl's name and saying "They don't even know who he is" if it weren't her daughter.

Sometimes I feel really sorry for her. I think that my birth must have cut her like a knife and I feel as if she's never forgiven Mama. But she loves us, even if it is in a suffocating way, and that makes me feel very guilty.

**Related Characters:** Josephine "Josie" Alibrandi (speaker), Mama, Nonna Katia

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 42

### Explanation and Analysis

As Josie heads to visit Nonna after school, she reflects on why she doesn't like Nonna very much. Nonna did everything she could to obscure or ignore the truth of the circumstances surrounding Josie's birth—even going so far as to lie to Josie that she had a father who died (the implication, presumably, being that Mama was married and is now a widow, and that Josie wasn't born out of wedlock).

Josie prizes honesty, so she sees Nonna's willingness to lie as an unforgivable offense. It shows her that Nonna believes it's more important to make Mama's pregnancy and Josie's birth seem socially acceptable than it is to be truthful with her granddaughter about the circumstances surrounding her birth. Some of this, Josie acknowledges, has to do with the generational difference. Josie may care a lot about the fact that she's illegitimate, but she suggests that's only because she's teased about it at school. Were it not something that people brought up to insult her, she suggests that it wouldn't matter at all. Nonna, though, comes from a different time and a different set of social mores, so it's far more important to her to spin this story and cover up what she perceives as an unforgivable social misstep. But as much as Josie resents how Nonna treats Mama for getting pregnant at 17, she also recognizes that Mama received special treatment, in a way, because she's family. Nonna and Mama's bond as mother and daughter

meant that Nonna wasn't out insulting Mama—but, Josie believes, it's all too easy to imagine Nonna speaking poorly about any 17-year-old mother to be who isn't her daughter. This damages Nonna's reputation in Josie's mind even more, as it makes Nonna seem all the more hypocritical.

And yet, Josie can still find it in herself to sympathize with Nonna. Josie may be from a younger generation than Nonna, but she's still grown up in the tight-knit Italian community and understands how shameful it is in this circle for one's daughter to get pregnant out of wedlock. This shame naturally changes how one expresses their love, Josie believes, and contributes to Nonna loving her and Mama in a "suffocating way." In this moment, Josie reveals that she'd like to have a better relationship with Nonna—or at least, she feels bad for how their relationship is at present. But she's not quite mature enough yet to be able to change how she and Nonna interact with each other.

☝ “It's not the youth of today, Nonna,” I said angrily. “It's you and people like you. Always worrying about what other people think. Always talking about other people. Well, we get spoken about as well, Nonna, and that's your fault because you have no respect for other people's privacy, including your daughter's and granddaughter's.”

**Related Characters:** Josephine “Josie” Alibrandi (speaker), Mama, Nonna Katia

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 44

### Explanation and Analysis

Nonna has just accused Josie of being so rude because the “youth of today” are rude. To Josie, this is ridiculous—in her mind, she's being truthful, not rude. More importantly, though, Josie takes issue here with the Italian gossip mill and how much older generations rely on it to police the conduct of younger people in the Italian Australian community.

For someone like Nonna who wants to be immersed in the community and appear respectable, the threat of talk is a big deal. In this social circle, it's acceptable to gossip about someone else, but becoming the subject of gossip should be avoided at all costs. So in Nonna's opinion, Josie is hurting her with her rudeness because she believes people will talk about how horrible Josie is—and by extension, how horrible Mama and Nonna are too. Josie seems, to Nonna, to be inviting gossip that will hurt them all.

But Josie makes an important point here: nobody would talk about how supposedly rude she is, how poor of a parent Mama is, or how poor of a grandmother Nonna is if Nonna didn't complain so much about Josie. So Josie reveals that Nonna is playing a difficult game: Nonna doesn't want her family to be the subject of gossip, but she also knows that if she gets other people to talk about Josie, Josie might modify her behavior to get it to stop.

Of course, Josie's insistence that Nonna cares too much about what other people think is humorous and hypocritical when one considers that, at school, Josie is overwhelmed thinking about what other people are saying about her. But this just reveals what Josie cares more about. At this point in the novel, she's intent on breaking into society's upper echelons, which means figuring out how to fit in at school with her wealthy classmates. The Italian community may be important to her on some level, but she nevertheless wants to escape it.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ I could picture [Ivy's] parents at dinner with [John's]. They'd talk about politics, the arts and world affairs. Then I tried to picture them at dinner with Nonna and Mama. Not that I have ever been ashamed of them, by any means. But what would they talk about? The best way of making lasagna? Our families had nothing in common.

**Related Characters:** Josephine “Josie” Alibrandi (speaker), Nonna Katia, Mama, John Barton, Ivy Lloyd “Poison Ivy”

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 51

### Explanation and Analysis

As Josie and John Barton talk after a debate one night, Josie thinks about how different her family is from John and Ivy's families. At this point in the novel, she sees wealth and her family's status as immigrants as insurmountable hurdles.

Importantly, what Josie thinks John and Ivy's parents talk about at dinner is pure conjecture. Their parents never appear in person in the novel, and both John and Ivy only talk about their parents briefly. So Josie may be very off-base when it comes to what they'd talk about. It seems just as likely that, at dinner with each other, they'd discuss their children—just like Mama and Nonna do when they have dinner together. The fact that Josie is making up information here shows how she's keeping herself from

seeing John and Ivy as people who aren't so different from her. They may be of different economic classes, but it's possible their families have more in common with Josie's family than Josie is giving them credit for.

Though Josie insists she's never been ashamed of Nonna and Mama, it seems like this might not be true given her tone. This illustrates how uncomfortable Josie is at times with her Italian heritage. To Josie, her ethnicity is somewhat embarrassing, and it keeps her from connecting with her white, upper-class peers.

☝ “It's different for you,” he sighed. “You haven't got any pressures in life. I've always had to be the best because it's been expected of me. [...]”


I was surprised at his bitterness and tried to cut the mood.

“I haven't got any pressures?” I asked, grabbing his sleeves dramatically. “I could write a book about them.”

“You always seem so in control!”

“And you don't?”

**Related Characters:** John Barton, Josephine “Josie” Alibrandi (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 54-55

### Explanation and Analysis

Josie and John are discussing the pressures their families put on them after a debate competition. This passage illuminates how Josie's beliefs about what it must be like to be upper-class keep her from taking John seriously. Because Josie idealizes an upper-class lifestyle and thinks that being wealthy and well connected is the key to happiness, it's a shock to her when John insists that his wealth brings with it a lot of expectations that are hard to meet. Essentially, this is the first time that Josie gets any indication that being wealthy and connected isn't as great as she believes—but she's unwilling to take John at his word because she's so intent on achieving a lifestyle more like his.

This passage makes it clear that Josie and John are both making assumptions about the other's way of life. While Josie idealizes an upper-class lifestyle and thinks being wealthy must make life easier, John shows that he thinks it must be easier to be in the working class. Clearly, both Josie and John are wrong—John is experiencing major mental health issues in part because of the expectations his family puts on him; and *Looking for Alibrandi* is itself a book about


the various pressures in Josie's life. But the fact that they're each under a great deal of pressure doesn't mean that they look outwardly like they're struggling, hence their exchange at the end of this passage. Both Josie and John believe the other is handling their pressures perfectly—even though neither of them feels particularly successful. With this, the novel starts to show how making assumptions about another person's life and what they're dealing with often doesn't work out for the better. Josie's assumptions about John, for instance, mean that she doesn't see or take seriously the signs that his mental health issue poses a threat to his life. Though she of course can't be blamed for his eventual choice to commit suicide, this illustrates how assumptions can make it harder to ask for help, or make it less likely that a person who seems to be doing great will get the help they need if they do ask for it.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ “Well, I'd run and run and run so I couldn't think.”

“And when you'd finished running you'd be thousands of miles away from people who love you and your problem would still be there except you'd have nobody to help you,” he said with a shrug.

**Related Characters:** Jacob Coote, Josephine “Josie” Alibrandi (speaker), Mama

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 74

### Explanation and Analysis

When Jacob takes Josie home after the regional dance, he reveals that his mother died of cancer several years ago. Josie insists that if Mama died, she'd run away so she didn't have to think about her grief. Throughout this passage, it's somewhat difficult to tell how serious Josie is being—it's very possible she's modifying her behavior to impress Jacob. But taking her at face value, it's interesting that she believes her only option would be to run if Mama weren't around. This reinforces how close Josie and Mama are. It suggests that at this point, Mama is Josie's link to the rest of the extended family—which biologically speaking may be true, but it also suggests that Josie doesn't necessarily have close enough relationships with extended family members to want to stick around without Mama.

Jacob, however, suggests that Josie might want to rethink this assessment. While Josie has good reason to not feel as warm toward her family as she could (she resents people



like Nonna for ostracizing Mama years ago when Mama became pregnant with Josie as a teen), Jacob nevertheless suggests that family can be an important source of support. And trying to distance herself from the extended family, he suggests, isn't going to make Josie feel any better in Mama's theoretical absence—it's just going to make Josie feel even more alone. With this, Jacob starts to encourage Josie to give her extended family a chance and recognize that it can be an important source of support. She doesn't need to give up on Mama, but Josie will have a more robust support system if she feels like she can call on others in her family for help when she needs it.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

☝ “The Australians knew nuting about us. We were ignorant. They were ignorant. Jozzie, you wonder why some people my age cannot speak English well. It is because nobody would talk to them, and worse still, they did not want to talk to anyone.”

[...]

She went on, telling me more, and as I lay back I thought it was ironic that the same ignorance that was around that back then is still here now. An ignorance that will live on in this country for many years to come, I think.

**Related Characters:** Josephine “Josie” Alibrandi, Nonna Katia (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 94

### Explanation and Analysis

Josie has finally agreed to listen to Nonna's stories about her early years in Australia; Nonna is talking about what exactly made her first few years as an immigrant so difficult. It's important to note that Nonna doesn't just blame Australians for treating Italian immigrants poorly. Rather, she suggests both Australians and Italians were at fault because neither group was willing to get to know the other. Italians, Nonna implies, were put in an impossible position. They were ostracized because they didn't speak English—but they also didn't have a way to learn without anyone to teach them. And for that matter, Nonna makes it clear that the Italian community wasn't eager to integrate into white Australian society, as by learning English and communicating more openly with white Australians.


By sharing this, Nonna helps Josie make sense of the prejudice she experiences in the novel's present. People, she realizes, are still ignorant and not as willing to get to know

people of other ethnicities as they perhaps should be. And half a century later, this is still an issue—and it's not going to end any time soon, at least not without some concerted effort.

## Chapter 9 Quotes

☝ The first time I saw a nun without a habit, I prayed for her, thinking that she'd go to hell. But I think Sister Louise made me change my mind. I've never met a more liberated woman in my life and I realize now that these women do not live in cloistered worlds far away from reality. They know reality better than we do. I just wonder whether she was ever boy-crazy.

**Related Characters:** Josephine “Josie” Alibrandi (speaker), Nonna Katia, Sister Louise

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 110

### Explanation and Analysis

Here, Josie introduces readers to Sister Louise, the principal of St. Martha's, and explains how much she admires her. First, it's important to note that Josie seems to imply that she came to the understanding that Sister Louise was “liberated” long ago. This shows that Josie's coming of age journey has been going on for quite some time; Josie doesn't start the novel as a small, innocent child and end a fully-fledged adult. Readers meet her somewhere in the middle, after she's already been learning for years that there are a number of different ways that women can be as adults.

This is important because Josie has previously implied that she doesn't think adults are particularly interesting or have compelling backstories. The way she speaks about Nonna at the beginning of the novel, for instance, makes it seem like Josie doesn't know or care that Nonna was ever 17 and had dreams of her own—to Josie, Nonna is just old. Recognizing that Sister Louise is “liberated,” in the know, and possibly was interested in boys once shows that Josie is learning that adults are people, just like her.

The fact that Josie has already put this together about Sister Louise offers hope that it won't be such a stretch for her to extend the same kind of understanding to other adults in her life, like Nonna and Mama. Realizing that other people aren't so different and that they have rich inner lives like Josie does is an important part of growing up—and Josie is well on her way by this point in the novel.

“He’s attracted to me and for once someone found me interesting, not because I was Josie’s mother or Katia’s daughter but because I was me, and there is *nothing*, Josie, *nothing* you can do to take that away from me.”

She slammed my door and I wanted to cry. Because I didn’t want to take that feeling away from Mama. I just didn’t want him to give it to her.

**Related Characters:** Josephine “Josie” Alibrandi, Mama (speaker), Paul Presilio

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 119-120

### Explanation and Analysis

Mama has just gotten home from a date with Paul Presilio. Both Josie and Nonna resented that Mama was going out with him at all—Josie sees it as a betrayal, while Nonna thinks Mama is neglecting Josie in order to date. The three of them had a huge fight before Mama left.

The very fact that Mama is so excited that someone liked her for who she is (rather than because of her family relationships) suggests that Mama has, for some time, felt trapped by her family. For years, she’s been Josie’s mother and Nonna’s daughter—she hasn’t been able to be Christina, a woman who’s interested in dating despite having a 17-year-old daughter. She shows here that it can be extremely difficult to go through life feeling as though one’s family relationships matter more than anything else.

For Josie, this is difficult to hear on several levels. On one hand, the novel as a whole is the story of Josie negotiating her relationships to her family, just as Mama is doing. Josie sympathizes with what Mama is going through—Josie explains later that because she’s related to Mama and Nonna, she has to behave in a certain way in order to not incite gossip. And she’s open about the fact that she thinks that’s silly, even if it’s a fact of life. But though Josie empathizes with Mama, she also can’t get away from the fact that Mama is her mother—and she selfishly doesn’t want Mama to be anyone but her mother. Acknowledging that Paul Presilio is able to make Mama feel whole and human in a way that Josie can’t would force Josie to acknowledge that unwittingly or not, she’s part of the reason Mama feels so trapped, which is a very uncomfortable feeling for her. So in this moment, it becomes clear to Josie that if she wants to help Mama feel good and like a real person, she needs to try to let go of her desire to control Mama. She needs to acknowledge Mama’s humanity—just as Mama does for Josie throughout the novel.

## Chapter 14 Quotes

“I felt guilty in a way. Because I go on so much about my problems, but compared to John and all the other lonely people out there, I’m the luckiest person in the world.”

**Related Characters:** Josephine “Josie” Alibrandi (speaker), John Barton

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 163

### Explanation and Analysis

Josie has just run into John Barton again; he’s still feeling stifled by his family’s expectations for him and through their conversation, even admits that he’s feeling suicidal.

By this point in the novel, Josie is starting to form closer relationships with her family members. She and Mama are improving their relationship after a huge fight, and Josie has nothing bad to say about Nonna at this point in time. She’s also getting to know Michael better, and she appreciates his insights. So in Josie’s opinion, she has a great family life and isn’t experiencing the same kind of pressures that John is. Nonna might have outdated ideas regarding who Josie should date and when she should get married, but Josie isn’t being forced into a career she doesn’t want, as John fears is going to happen to him.

Because of all of this, Josie thinks the problems she does have—Mama’s strict curfew, her residual issues with Nonna, the annoying fact that the Italian gossip mill is still going strong—don’t seem nearly as pressing. These issues might be annoying for Josie, but she’s starting to suspect that if she has close relationships with her family, those other annoyances are naturally going to matter less. For John, though, Josie realizes that he doesn’t have the kind of support she has. If his dad is really as domineering as John makes him out to be, John is totally alone at home and unable to express who he truly is.

While it’s possible to take issue with Josie’s assertion that John is just “lonely” when he’s actually dangerously depressed, this is nevertheless a turning point for Josie. At this point, she’s starting to see how important her family really is to her. She’s starting to see her Italian culture as a good thing that’s supportive, not something that’s going to hold her back.

☝ I just ignored her. I'm getting good that way. Things that worried me a few months ago no longer worry me as much. I can't say that I'm completely oblivious. The gossiping of the Italian community might not matter to some, but I belong to that community.

Sometimes I feel that no matter how smart or how beautiful I could be they would still remember me for the wrong things.

That's why I want to be rich and influential. I want to flaunt my status in front of those people and say, "See, look who I can become."

**Related Characters:** Josephine "Josie" Alibrandi (speaker), Sera

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 165

### Explanation and Analysis

On the day that Father Stephen comes to St. Martha's for confession, Sera teases Josie about sex—but Josie now finds Sera easier to ignore, in addition to other gossips.

This represents a huge change for Josie. In the first few chapters of *Looking for Alibrandi*, for instance, Josie is so caught up in what other people think of her and how she compares to her classmates that she's barely able to concentrate on anything else. Now, though Josie acknowledges that she's not totally able to tune out the gossips, she's nevertheless coming to a happier, healthier relationship with gossip. While it used to be something that ruled Josie's life, she's starting to see that she can tune it out and pay it less attention.

However, it's then interesting how Josie ties her changing relationship to gossip to her identity as an Italian. She suggests that she accepts now that the Italians will always gossip; it's part of the culture and it's not something she can change. And Josie makes it clear that she's part of the community that gossips. However, Josie nevertheless sees that the culture of gossip in the Italian community keeps people from reaching their full potential. Josie feels that the fact that she's illegitimate, for instance, is going to remain in the forefront of the gossips' minds, no matter how successful Josie ultimately becomes as a barrister. Josie's future job in law might make her feel better about herself, but she doesn't seem convinced that it's going to change how her community sees her much.

So this is why Josie prioritizes earning money over anything else. With enough money, she believes she'll be able to walk into a room full of Italians with her head held high, and show them that she's made something of herself. The novel doesn't give any indication of how true this might be in

Josie's world, but it nevertheless shows that she prioritizes wealth and prestige over anything else and thinks that wealth will make her happy. And the novel does suggest, time and again, that wealth isn't a guaranteed key to happiness—familial support is.

## Chapter 16 Quotes

☝ "But what's the big deal? Everyone has babies without being married these days. Everyone lives together and gets remarried," he said, turning on his side.

I shook my head. "I can't explain it to you. I can't even explain it to myself. We live in the same country, but we're different. What's taboo for Italians isn't taboo for Australians. People just talk, and if it doesn't hurt you, it hurts your mother or your grandmother or someone you care about."

**Related Characters:** Josephine "Josie" Alibrandi, Jacob Coote (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 182

### Explanation and Analysis

When Josie and Jacob go to Manly and eat lunch on the beach, they discuss how they're different because Jacob is a white Australian, while Josie is still entrenched in traditional Italian culture. Josie has just shared that it's considered inappropriate for women to remarry if they're widowed.

Jacob notes that "everyone" has babies out of wedlock, remarries after divorce or death, or lives together before marriage. In his experience, this is true—but he doesn't grasp that what's true for him, as a white Australian, isn't necessarily true for Josie as an Italian Australian. And Josie makes this clear in her response: she and Jacob might both live in the Sydney suburbs and be Australian, but they inhabit very different worlds. Josie and her Italian community lean heavily on traditional Italian ideas of how people should conduct themselves and navigate their relationships, while Jacob's community is perhaps freer to choose a path that works for them. So though Jacob offers hope that as time passes and as social mores change, it'll become more acceptable to do things like have babies out of wedlock or remarry, Josie suggests that the Italian community will almost always be a step behind.

Josie also makes it clear that the Italian community tends to be more conservative because of the intense Italian gossip mill. Though Josie has railed against the Italian gossips multiple times throughout the novel, she acknowledges

here that she's never going to be able to make the gossips go away or totally deprive them of their power. Whether she likes it or not, her behavior might attract gossip—and even if she doesn't suffer for it, someone else she loves might. In this way, Josie illuminates how the Italian community utilizes gossip to police its members' behavior. And until this dynamic changes, Josie implies, it's never going to be acceptable for women to remarry, have babies out of wedlock, or live with a man before marriage.

## Chapter 19 Quotes

### 🗨️ Tomato Day.

Oh God, if anyone ever found out about it I'd die. There we sat last Saturday in my grandmother's backyard cutting the bad bits off overripe tomatoes and squeezing them.



[...]


I can't understand why we can't go to Franklin's and buy Leggo's or Paul Newman's special sauce. Nonna had heart failure at this suggestion and looked at Mama.

"Where is the culture?" she asked in dismay. "She's going to grow up, marry an Australian and her children will eat fish-and-chips."

Robert and I call this annual event "Wog Day" or "National Wog Day." We sat around wondering how many other poor unfortunates our age were doing the same, but we were sure we'd never find out because nobody would admit to it.

**Related Characters:** Nonna Katia, Josephine "Josie" Alibrandi (speaker), Robert, Mama

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 205

### Explanation and Analysis

Josie tells readers about "Tomato Day," the day on which her family makes homemade spaghetti sauce. The way that Josie thinks about Tomato Day shows how conflicted she is about her Italian identity. She'd "die" if anyone found out about it, making it clear that she's very embarrassed that her family insists on making spaghetti sauce by hand. And while Josie equates this homemade spaghetti sauce with Italian heritage and traditions, Josie nevertheless doesn't let on that she sees the point in following these traditions. It's no different to her, she implies, if her family were to go to


the store and purchase spaghetti sauce. But Nonna's reaction suggests that to Nonna, making sauce is how she connects with her heritage, her memories of Italy, and is how she keeps Italian culture alive in her adoptive country. It might be embarrassing for her granddaughter, but it's nevertheless an essential practice as she works to keep her Italian culture alive.

Especially when Josie shares that she and Robert sometimes refer to Tomato Day as "Wog Day," it drives home just how embarrassing this tradition is for her. Making spaghetti sauce is something that marks Josie and Robert as different from their white Australian classmates. To Josie, because she's so embarrassed, the sauce reads as provincial and ridiculous, especially in a world where tomato sauce is readily available in the store. At this point in the chapter, then, Josie makes it clear that she sometimes resents being Italian because of how it makes her feel different and lesser than her white peers at school.

🗨️ Like all tomato days we had spaghetti that night. Made by our own hands. A tradition that we'll never let go. A tradition that I probably will never let go of either, simply because like religion, culture is nailed into you so deep you can't escape it. No matter how far you run.

**Related Characters:** Josephine "Josie" Alibrandi (speaker), Robert, Mama, Nonna Katia

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 209

### Explanation and Analysis



It's "Tomato Day" for Josie's family, the day on which the family gets together to make and eat homemade tomato sauce. At the beginning of the chapter, Josie made it clear to readers how utterly embarrassing she finds the tradition—but here, Josie changes her tune. This shift from being embarrassed to taking pride in the tradition shows how conflicted Josie is about her relationship to Italian culture. On one hand, it's something that marks Josie as different from her classmates. Since Josie wants so badly to fit in at school, this is uncomfortable and undesirable for her. But when Josie actually sits down to think about it—as she seems to here—she finds that this tradition offers her comfort and a sense of belonging within her family and her community.

Josie insists Italian culture and Tomato Day are “nailed into [her] so deep” that she couldn’t escape it even by running away. Earlier in the novel, with Jacob, Josie suggested that she’d like to run away and escape her family’s traditions—but here, she seems to acknowledge that no matter how far away she goes, she’s never going to stop being Italian. This is a turning point for Josie as she plays with her identity and what kind of woman she’d like to be. She’s realizing that no matter what else she does with her life, she’ll never be able to totally escape her Italian identity—and if she’s willing to lean into the traditions, they’ll help her feel grounded and at home.

## Chapter 22 Quotes

☝☝ “[Zio Ricardo] couldn’t take me in when I was pregnant with you. My father wouldn’t have let my mother see her sister again if he did. But he let Robert’s mother take me in, saying that he couldn’t govern who his daughter let into her house.” She looked pensive. “My father practically spat at me. Called me every name under the sun. A tramp, a slut. He hit me across the face and even hit my mother. Worse still, he never saw you, Josie. Never saw his own granddaughter. Tell me, what comes first? What other people think of your family, or love?”

**Related Characters:** Mama (speaker), Robert, Zio Ricardo, Nonna Katia, Nonno Francesco, Josephine “Josie” Alibrandi

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 235

### Explanation and Analysis

Mama and Josie are out having lunch for a “splurge day,” and Josie has just asked why Mama doesn’t talk much about Nonno, her father. Josie has also mentioned how much she admires Zio Ricardo for his kindness and generosity.

As Mama describes how Nonno reacted to finding out that she was pregnant, it becomes clear that Mama was caught up in a delicate political situation. Nonno was intent on getting Mama out of his sight and making sure that she wouldn’t be able to live with the family members she really wanted to, Zio Ricardo and Zia Patrizia. To Mama, none of this makes sense. Instead, it just seems like Nonno was controlling for no discernable reason aside from being afraid of what people would think. In Mama’s understanding, the threat of gossip caused Nonno to treat her so poorly, kick her out, and refuse to see Josie. To Mama, this is not only ridiculous, but a reflection of priorities that seem warped. There’s no excuse, Mama suggests, for a grandparent to not want to know their

grandchild, no matter how or when Josie was conceived. She and Nonno are still family, and in Mama’s opinion, Nonno should prioritize family over what the gossips might say.

But the novel underscores that there’s a lot Mama doesn’t know about the situation: most notably, that Nonno isn’t Mama’s father, and Marcus Sandford is. With this information, Nonno’s behavior after Mama revealed her pregnancy makes more sense—and looks even more controlling and sinister. As Nonna explains later, Nonno hated her for cheating on him with Marcus and it seems as though Nonna spent most of her marriage trying to appease her jealous, angry husband. So when Mama revealed her pregnancy, Nonno blamed not just Mama, but Nonna too for Mama’s transgression. In addition to punishing Mama by kicking her out, Nonno also seems to have threatened to separate Nonna from her family even more by refusing to let Nonna see Zia Patrizia again if Josie were to go live with them.

Josie and Mama aren’t aware of all of this now. But this information is nevertheless important, as once Josie realizes what exactly happened, she’s better able to empathize with Nonna—and see how much Mama has suffered as a result of her paternity. All of her family’s issues, Josie believes, stem from the fact that Nonna plans to take the secret of Mama’s paternity to the grave, believing it’s more important to look respectable than to tell Mama the truth.

## Chapter 23 Quotes

☝☝ I think my family has come a long way. The sad thing is that so many haven’t. So many have stayed in their own little world. Some because they don’t want to leave it, others because the world around them won’t let them in.

All this information I’ve gathered from Nonna and Mama, who was a child of the sixties, I’m going to try to remember it.

So one day I can tell my children. And so that one day my granddaughter can try to understand me, like I’m trying to understand Nonna.

**Related Characters:** Josephine “Josie” Alibrandi (speaker), Nonna Katia, Mama

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 241-242

### Explanation and Analysis

After listening to more of Nonna’s stories about being an

Italian immigrant, Josie reflects on how far her family has come in only three generations. But while her family may have done well, Josie also realizes that because of racism and anti-Italian sentiment, many other Italian Australian families like hers haven't been able to experience the same success.

As Josie makes this realization, she shows that she's becoming more mature and is developing the ability to think more critically about her place in the world. She still knows that she's Italian and Australian, but she also recognizes that she has a lot of privilege—she attends St. Martha's, after all, and her father is a barrister (lawyer). So though Josie still feels like her family is stuck in some old ways and traditions, compared to some other Italian families, Josie's family is pretty modern and successful.

Just as Josie acknowledged before, the Italian community has had a difficult time integrating into Australian society for multiple reasons. Some people, Josie realizes, want to keep the Italian culture alive and not integrate. And while this is valid, Josie also recognizes that this contributes to the bigotry and prejudice that Italians who do want to get to know their Australian neighbors experience. The Italians may be perceived as insular for a reason—but Josie also realizes that white Australians have used that perception to justify not allowing Italians to enter their world.

An even bigger indicator of Josie's growing maturity is her understanding that Nonna's stories are important. Stories, she realizes, are helping her to figure out what her family is all about, and learn who her family members truly are. And this isn't going to stop being the case once Josie marries, has children of her own, and one day has grandchildren. Rather, she realizes how important it is now to make sure that future generations learn their family history so they have all the context they need to feel at home in their family.

## Chapter 25 Quotes

💬 I wonder about life if Nonna had married Marcus Sandford. If Mama had been Christina Sandford, daughter of Marcus Sandford, and not Christina Alibrandi, daughter of an Italian immigrant. Would life have been different for her? Would she have depended on Michael so much and would she have slept with him like she did, which was more out of loneliness caused by her parents than pressured sex?

**Related Characters:** Josephine "Josie" Alibrandi (speaker), Michael Andretti, Nonno Francesco, Marcus Sandford, Nonna Katia, Mama

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 261

## Explanation and Analysis

Josie has just discovered that Nonno isn't Mama's father—Marcus Sandford, a white Australian man whom Nonna had an affair with, is. She's extremely upset about this revelation. As Josie considers how Mama's life might have been different had she grown up knowing the truth about her paternity, some of her questions have fairly obvious answers. Yes, Mama's life would've been different had she grown up knowing who her father was—she wouldn't have grown up with a father who resented her. And as Josie acknowledges, Mama may not have been so lonely that she felt she had to turn to a romantic relationship to fill the gaps that Nonno left.

But Josie doesn't take her questioning any further than to ask if life would be different. In her heightened emotional state, she's not yet able to question how Mama's life would've been different had she grown up as Christina Sandford rather than Christina Alibrandi. Adding some complexity to this is the fact that, as much as Josie appreciates her Italian heritage, she also dreams of living a life that's unbound by Italian traditions. Josie, in some ways and in some circumstances, wants to have grown up a Sandford rather than an Alibrandi, since she still believes that not being Italian would give her easier access to the wealthy, influential life she wants. So though Josie's questioning shows her maturity and her curiosity in some ways, it also shows how far Josie has yet to go. She's still so driven by her desire to be wealthy and influential that she's unable to consider all the other ways Mama's life might've been different had she been born a Sandford.

## Chapter 26 Quotes

💬 But I think I cried more out of relief than self-pity. Relief because I was beginning to feel free.

From whom?

Myself, I think.

**Related Characters:** Josephine "Josie" Alibrandi (speaker), Mama, Marcus Sandford, Nonna Katia

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 264

## Explanation and Analysis

It's been a week since Josie learned that Mama's father is

Marcus Sandford, not Nonno. She's still very emotional about the whole thing and has just declined to join her friends for a study session.

Here, Josie suggests that she's crying out of relief rather than self-pity. This suggests that she no longer sees a transgression like Nonna's affair as something particularly shameful—rather, decades after the fact, Josie's just glad to have this information. Now, she can figure out why her family members behave the way they do and interact with each other the way they do. So in this moment, Josie makes an important connection. Gossip not only controls people's behavior; it can also keep people from truly getting to know each other. If certain kinds of secrets are considered too shameful to share, people won't share them—and down the line, grandkids like Josie won't know why their families are so dysfunctional.

Then, when Josie suggests that she's feeling free from herself, it's an acknowledgement that Josie herself was part of the gossip problem. She bought into the system that policed people's behavior with gossip, and she modified her behavior to avoid it. Josie has also been on the other side, using gossip to control how other people treat her. Letting go of all of this, though, is freeing. Suddenly, Josie can make choices about who she wants to be and how she wants to act, without having to worry about what people think. In this way, Josie starts to come of age as she makes choices for herself.

“Oh, Jozzie, you still do not understand,” she sighed. “Could you imagine how life would be for me if I married Marcus? Could you imagine what life would be for my sister? People are cruel. They would make our lives hell. But mostly, Jozzie, tink of Christina. Back then, tink of the way my darling Christina would be treated. It is not like these times, Jozzie. She would have no one. No Australians, no Italians. People would spit at her and say she was nuting.”

**Related Characters:** Nonna Katia (speaker), Nonno Francesco, Mama, Marcus Sandford, Josephine “Josie” Alibrandi

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 264

### Explanation and Analysis

Nonna has finally told Josie the full story of what happened with Marcus. Josie's first response was to say that she would've married Marcus and left Nonno, but Nonna insists

that this view is naïve and betrays that Josie doesn't fully understand the situation. In this way, this passage essentially answers some of the question that Josie failed to ask earlier, when she wondered how life would've been different had Mama grown up as Christina Sandford rather than Christina Alibrandi.

Nonna makes the case that even though she decided to disregard the gossips when she slept with Marcus, that was a decision she made for herself. She was the only one who was going to suffer for sleeping with him—but once there was a baby in the mix, Nonna had to rethink her priorities. And Nonna, because she's so family-oriented, knew that she couldn't prioritize her happiness over the safety, wellbeing, and happiness of her family members, her unborn daughter most of all. So though Josie has felt throughout the novel that Nonna has consistently mistreated the family and made their lives miserable, this shows that Nonna has been trying to do the exact opposite. Some of Nonna's actions may have gotten lost in translation, but she's never tried to actually hurt her family members.

Then, when Nonna insists that she stayed with Nonno for Mama's sake, she essentially cites anti-Italian racism as her reasoning. She emphasizes that the 1950s were not permissive and accepting of people with mixed ancestry like they are today—and Mama would've suffered had she been raised as Marcus Sandford's son. By choosing to stay with Nonno, Nonna may have given up on the man who might have been the love of her life. But because she did that, she was able to give Mama access to the Italian community. And that community was able to be there for Mama when she became pregnant as a teen, even though Nonna couldn't be there for Mama herself, so this no doubt makes Nonna feel like she made the right choice.

## Chapter 28 Quotes

“How dare he kill himself when he's never had any worries! He's not a wog. People don't get offended when they see him and his friends. He had wealth and breeding. No one ever spoke about his family. Nobody ever needed to because everyone knew that his father was the man they wanted down in Canberra. Nobody ever told their kids they weren't allowed to play over at his place. Yet he killed himself. How could somebody with so much going for him do that?”

**Related Characters:** Josephine “Josie” Alibrandi (speaker), Michael Andretti, John Barton

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 281

### Explanation and Analysis

Josie has just left school early, after learning that John Barton committed suicide. Here, Josie suggests that John had no right to kill himself when he had, in essence, everything that Josie has ever wanted for himself. He's not Italian, he's wealthy, and his family doesn't attract gossip—indeed, his father is an influential politician, and John himself was on track to become a politician himself someday. Up until finding out about John's death, Josie has gone through life believing that being wealthy, white, and influential would guarantee her happiness. She wants to be a barrister in part because a white-collar job like that would guarantee her more income than her other family members, enabling her (in her understanding of the world) to be even happier than her family.

John's choice to kill himself, though, makes it clear to readers—if not to Josie—that Josie was misguided to believe that wealth equals happiness. John clearly wasn't happy. Throughout the novel, he's expressed suicidal thoughts to Josie, admitted that he doesn't have any support at home, and shared that he felt he had no choice but to study law and then become a politician. In this way, John felt alone and unsupported—and all the money in the world wasn't going to change that for him. With John's death, then, the novel makes it abundantly clear that having money can't buy a person happiness.

## Chapter 29 Quotes

💬 I've figured out that it doesn't matter whether I'm Josephine Andretti who was never an Alibrandi, who should have been a Sandford and who may never be a Coote. It matters who I feel like I am—and I feel like Michael and Christina's daughter and Katia's granddaughter; Sera, Anna, and Lee's friend, and Robert's cousin.

I met her at one stage in the ladies' and I realized that she wasn't Poison Ivy anymore. She was just Ivy. As scared as I was of what it meant to be out of our uniform. She smiled hesitantly and I smiled back, and I saw tears in her eyes.

**Related Characters:** Josephine "Josie" Alibrandi (speaker), Ivy Lloyd "Poison Ivy"

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 290

### Explanation and Analysis

On Speech Night, Josie explains that both she and Ivy got awards, though Ivy beat Josie and was named valedictorian. More importantly, though, Josie also realizes at this point that Ivy isn't an evil villain anymore.

Josie has gone through the novel believing that Ivy is fundamentally different from her. Ivy has money, prestige, and is guaranteed to go to a good university and get a good, white-collar job—all things that Josie wants, but doesn't have as much access to. And especially since Ivy seems perfect while Josie feels like she's constantly messing up, Ivy became an easy target for Josie's ire. It was easy to hate Ivy because Ivy has and seems to be everything Josie wants. But in this moment, Josie realizes that Ivy isn't actually so different. She is, like Josie, 17 and frightened of what the future holds—soon, they're not going to have their high school uniforms to protect them and mark them as young people full of potential. And though they come from different backgrounds, they're both going to have to work for what they want after they graduate.

Further, in this moment, Josie feels humbled. She recognizes that Ivy didn't earn valedictorian just to spite Josie—she earned it (though Ivy does go on to say that she worked so hard to spite Josie and keep Josie from becoming valedictorian). This is a major step for Josie, as Josie has gone through the novel insisting that she should simply be given everything that she wants. But now, she realizes that she has to earn it—a mark of her maturity.

## Chapter 32 Quotes

💬 I've figured out that it doesn't matter whether I'm Josephine Andretti who was never an Alibrandi, who should have been a Sandford and who may never be a Coote. It matters who I feel like I am—and I feel like Michael and Christina's daughter and Katia's granddaughter; Sera, Anna, and Lee's friend, and Robert's cousin.

**Related Characters:** Josephine "Josie" Alibrandi (speaker), Marcus Sandford, Robert, Lee, Anna, Sera, Nonna Katia, Mama, Michael Andretti

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 312-313

### Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's closing paragraphs, Josie shares what she's learned about her identity. Most importantly for her has been learning that she doesn't have to unthinkingly accept the identity that other people have given her—she can choose her identity for herself.

Josie has been able to come to this conclusion mostly because she now knows about Nonna's affair with Marcus Sandford. Though the revelation that Marcus is Mama's



father rocked Josie's world and caused her to rethink everything she thought she knew about her family, it also showed Josie that her family name isn't as important as she thought it was. It doesn't tell her who she is, necessarily, because it doesn't tell her who she's related to by blood.

But even more than that, Josie realizes that her last name—whether it's Alibrandi, Andretti, or Coote—doesn't dictate who loves her. For instance, Josie recognizes that she's only an Alibrandi because Nonno agreed to raise

Mama. But he didn't do this out of love; he did this because he feared what the gossips would say if they found out he couldn't father children. So Mama grew up with the last name of a man who resented her for not being his biological daughter, and Mama later passed that last name onto Josie. Put simply, a last name is only one identity marker—and as Josie learns, a person's family and other loved ones have a far greater effect on who they are and how they think of themselves than the specifics of their last name.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1

Josie studies the multiple-choice question in front of her in a panic—she doesn't want to get it wrong. Before she can decide whether answer B or answer C is correct, Sister Gregory asks what Josie is reading. (Josie vowed to be “a saint” this year, but she's always known she'd fail—just not on the first day.) Sister Gregory asks Josie to read it out loud. From **Hot Pants** magazine, Josie reads her test question: if a friend's boyfriend “tries to make a pass” at a party, what do you do? Sister Gregory asks what this has to do with her religion class.

Josie sputters for a moment and then says this has a lot to do with how today's influences “affect our Christian lives.” The magazine is “rubbish” that insults teens intelligence—and Josie wants to talk about how the magazine exploits its teen readers. Sister Gregory takes the magazine just before the bell rings. On the way out of class, Josie's friend Sera reminds Josie that she owes her a new magazine now, and another friend, Lee, wonders which answer she'd choose. Josie tells herself again to try to be a saint.

Josie introduces herself: her full name is Josephine Alibrandi and she recently turned 17. She attends St. Martha's, lives in a Sydney suburb called Glebe, and as this is her final year in school, she's gearing up for the HSC (High School Certificate) tests. The HSC determines whether students will be successful or not. But for Josie, the HSC isn't her biggest problem. She has lots of problems, but Mama naively tells her not to worry. She and Mama live in the lower-class part of Glebe, in a two-story house that Mama owns. Josie and Mama have a good relationship; one minute they're fine and the next they're screaming at each other.

Mama works as a secretary and translator for doctors' offices, which means that Josie has to go to her Nonna's house after school. Mama is strict and Nonna is too, but Mama and Nonna fight constantly—and if Josie joins in, the fights get heated. Josie doesn't get to go out a lot, which is a huge problem. Even worse, though, is the fact that she attends school with mostly rich students, many of whom are Anglo-Saxon Australians. They don't have any problems. There are also rich Europeans, who save the money they make as laborers or grocers to send their kids to fancy schools.

*Josie shows in the novel's introduction that she's trying very hard to fit in with a certain kind of ideal. She wants to be a “saint,” but she also wants to be the sort of person who knows what to do when her friend's boyfriend hits on her. Her tone suggests that these two identities are at odds with each other: being a “saint,” she implies, means paying attention in class, which Josie clearly isn't doing.*



*Josie's response is humorous, but it shows that she's adept at making a show of navigating these two different worlds (the one in which she's a saint and the other in which she's popular and attractive to boys). The fact that Sister Gregory seems to see right through this and confiscates the magazine anyway again shows that Josie might be fighting a losing battle.*



*It's telling that the HSC isn't Josie's biggest problem, though she doesn't say outright what her problems actually are. This suggests that out of all the things that might make Josie's life difficult, excelling in school isn't high on the list—perhaps because academia comes easily to her, or because her other problems are just much more pressing. Then, when Josie describes her relationship with Mama as good despite the fact that they seem to fight often, it suggests that it's normal for Josie to be in relationships with a lot of emotion and conflict.*



*Again, Josie suggests that it's normal for her to constantly be in conflict with loved ones like Mama and Nonna. Revealing that her biggest problem is her wealthy classmates shows that Josie is very concerned with a person's economic status. This also implies that Josie isn't wealthy. Because of the first-person narration, definitive statements—like that Josie's wealthy classmates don't have problems—reflect Josie's personal perception and thus are not necessarily fact. Josie is an unreliable narrator.*



Josie, though, is on a scholarship. She's always felt disadvantaged, maybe because she didn't go to the same primary school as her new classmates. Her old friends were Italian and Greek and knew about having strict parents. Everything is worse because Mama was born here, while Nonna was born in Italy, so Josie isn't really Australian or Italian. Mama is also unmarried; she slept with a boy when she was 16 and he promptly moved to Adelaide and became a barrister (lawyer). Everything got worse at St. Martha's, because Josie finally understood what it meant to be illegitimate—and there are no other girls like Josie. Josie is certain that people still talk about her not having a father.

After school, Josie gets her magazine from Sister Louise, the principal of St. Martha's, and then takes the bus home instead of to Nonna's. The HSC is going to be a great excuse to not have to see Nonna this year. It's scorching hot, so Josie changes into comfortable clothes to do homework. Mama comes home later, looking worried. They exchange good-natured insults and when Mama asks, Josie wails that she's studying and couldn't make dinner. Josie accuses Mama of having visited Nonna; she's always in a bad mood after she visits Nonna. Mama heard about what happened last week—someone saw Josie and her friends driving around in skimpy clothes, something that Josie isn't supposed to do. Mama growls for Josie to set the table.

Mama and Josie eat dinner quietly until Josie asks what else Nonna had to say today. Mama says Nonna had guests, but asks Josie about her day instead of elaborating. Then, she asks Josie if she'd like to go on vacation for Easter. This must mean something is wrong—Josie asks to go on vacation every year, but they never do. Josie shouts that she doesn't want to go. Later that night, Josie leaps out of bed, bursts into Mama's room, and yells that Mama must have cancer. Mama assures Josie that she doesn't have cancer and pats the bed. Josie sits next to Mama and asks why she's been acting weird all evening.

Mama reveals that Nonna's guest earlier was Michael Andretti—Josie's father. This is "mind-boggling" for Josie, because her father seems like a myth most of the time. Mama explains that he's going to be in Sydney for a year, and Nonna will make herself "his surrogate mother." Josie insists it'll be fine, but Mama says Josie won't be able to handle seeing him. Then, Mama says when she and Michael spoke privately, they both said they had no regrets—but he also doesn't know about Josie. When he said he'd like to have kids someday, Mama wanted to spit at him. Josie suggests they avoid him by never going back to Nonna's, but Mama insists Josie has to continue seeing Nonna. She says that she's never been close to Nonna for reasons she doesn't understand, but Nonna wants to be close to Josie.

*Josie defines herself as an underdog and an outsider. While her classmates can afford St. Martha's tuition, she's there on a scholarship—and she seems to imply that this makes her less deserving than her classmates, even if she earned her right to be at St. Martha's. And in Josie's personal life, she also feels lesser because she was born out of wedlock. Again, when Josie says she's sure people talk about her being illegitimate, it's hard to know if this is true or not—Josie might just be self-conscious about it.*



*It doesn't seem like either Josie or Mama have a good relationship with Nonna. Neither of them seem to enjoy spending time with her, and Josie makes it seem like Mama is never in a good mood after spending time with her mother. The revelation that Josie was driving around in skimpy clothes last week shows again how Josie is failing at being a "saint." She may say she wants to be good and focus on school (especially if school is an excuse not to have to see Nonna), but it seems that Josie only throws herself into being totally good when it's convenient.*



*Josie's reaction when Mama suggests a vacation suggests that Josie and Mama have a set routine. Josie might find that routine boring at times, but it also seems comforting to her that she always knows what to expect. So as much as Josie might like to dream about her life changing in various ways, it also seems like Josie might have a hard time adapting to any changes.*



*Given how poor Mama and Nonna's relationship seems, it's perhaps not surprising that Mama never revealed to Nonna who Josie's father was. This shows that secrets are just a part of how the Alibrandi family functions. On the other hand, though, it shows how much Mama trusts Josie that she's willing to level with Josie and tell her the truth about what's going on. Mama also shows that she doesn't think the way that the family interacts is the best way to do things. She'd like Josie to take the chance to get to know Nonna, since she never got to.*



## CHAPTER 2

Two days after Mama meets Michael Andretti, it's the annual Have a Say Day in Martin Place. The plan is for Sera to drive Josie and their two friends, Anna and Lee. The four girls are all misfits who don't fit into any other cliques at school. Anna is blond and gorgeous, but nervous. Sera is brazen, promiscuous, and the only other Italian in the group (though her family is wealthy). Josie doesn't like her much, but since they're both Italian, they accept each other. Lee just wants to hang out with surfers and drink. Lee and Josie have a weird relationship; they pretend they have nothing in common but can talk easily. Lee's family uses slurs like "wog," but she's also a middle-class scholarship student like Josie.

It's impossible for Josie to befriend the "snobs" at St. Martha's, which is why she detests the school captain, Ivy (whom she calls Poison Ivy). Poison Ivy is wealthy, blond, and highly intelligent. Josie loves the times when she scores higher than Ivy in class; Josie is "immature and vain about [her] brains." But most of the time, Josie and her friends are in the middle of the class in terms of grades.

Back in the present, Sera finally has enough hairspray in her hair and leads Josie, Anna, and Lee outside. Sera reveals that they're not taking her car: her boyfriend Angelo Pezzini is driving them. Josie shouts that she won't ride with him but gets in the backseat anyway when he pulls up. Sera sits in front and dances to his bad, loud music, while Josie, Anna, and Lee clutch each other in the back. Finally, Angelo crosses three lanes of traffic and stops the car short in front of Martin Place.

As soon as the girls get out of the car, Anna points to Sister Louise and Poison Ivy. They both look livid. Sister Louise reminds Josie that she's late and tells her that she'll have to give a speech on something of her choice. The purpose of Have a Say Day, Josie explains, is to give students a chance to "gripe" in a public place; it's been going on for 10 years now. Sister Louise heads toward the amphitheater in the square and shows Josie her seat. As Josie watches her friends talk to attractive guys from St. Anthony's, she curses Sister Louise. She's seated next to Jacob Coote from the public school Cook High; when they were 10, he and some friends threw rotten food at Josie.

*Josie shows again how interested she is in social class when she makes sure to comment on her friends' wealth or lack thereof. Further, it's telling that she suggests she's closest to Lee, since they can talk easily to each other. They may have an easier time connecting because they're both on a scholarship, but this still doesn't erase the fact that Lee's family uses racist slurs.*



*Importantly, it's Josie's opinion that she can't befriend St. Martha's "snobs." Josie and Poison Ivy might not be destined to be great friends, but at this point, it's difficult to tell if that's true just because Josie thinks wealth is an insurmountable obstacle that makes Ivy unknowable.*



*Josie shows here that while she's willing to make a fuss and act like she's comfortable making her own choices, she's still uncomfortable saying no to her friends. This may reflect Josie's desire to fit in—it could jeopardize her relationships with her friends if she refuses to ride with Angelo.*



*Josie feels even more inferior when Poison Ivy is there to witness Sister Louise scolding Josie for being late. Things get even worse when she has to sit next to Jacob and miss out on spending time with cute St. Anthony's boys. This, especially considered alongside how much thought Josie gave the quiz questions in Hot Pants earlier, shows that Josie is very interested in boys. Figuring out how relationships work is a mystery, though Josie seems very set on what kind of boy she'd like to date—a St. Anthony's boy, not someone from Cook High.*



Jacob tries to engage Josie in conversation, but Josie brushes him off. Students on the stage speak about careers, the environment, and the homeless. Josie decides to use one of her debate speeches to talk about sex education and the AIDS crisis. When she returns to her seat after her speech, Jacob pulls a condom out of his pocket and says he's going to show people how to use one. Josie is mortified but also curious. But when Jacob gets up, he tells the audience he's going to talk about voting. He's a surprisingly compelling speaker and receives a standing ovation.

Josie whispers to Jacob that she's impressed when he sits back down. He reveals that he watches current events shows on TV and was forced to speak because he's his school's captain. Josie shares that she's her school's vice captain and is speechless when he jokes that "It could have been beautiful between us." She thinks about his arms instead of listening to the other speeches. When the speeches are over and Josie rejoins her friends, Lee says she's in love with Jacob and Josie should be in love with him too. Josie says he's not her type, and Lee accuses her of being a snob because Jacob goes to public school. Josie refutes this. But later, as she watches the news broadcast of Poison Ivy asking the Premier questions, she admits she wants to be upper-class and accepted, like her.

### CHAPTER 3

Nothing bothers Josie more than having to see Nonna every afternoon. But today, since it's scorching despite being the end of February, Josie is looking forward to swimming in Nonna's pool. As soon as Josie enters Nonna's house, Nonna tells Josie to eat and asks why she doesn't look tidy. Josie tells Nonna that this look is in style, since she knows it annoys her. Pretty much everything Nonna does bothers Josie, from Nonna's refusal to turn on the air conditioning to her constant requests that Mama and Josie come live with her. Josie locates some junk food and ignores her grandmother's nattering.

Josie explains that Mama was estranged from her family for a long time after Josie was born. They weren't welcome until Josie's grandfather, Nonno, died. As a kid, Josie didn't get what the problem was until a bully, Greg Sims, called her a "bastard" and explained what the word meant. Josie thinks that she hates Nonna because Nonna always tried to lie that Josie's father died. Mama never lied like that. But Josie also knows that Nonna loves her and Mama, even if it's "in a suffocating way."

*The fact that Josie is so curious about how to use a condom reflects her sheltered upbringing. She may be able to put together a fantastic debate speech about sex education—but that doesn't mean she's actually received an education on how to have safe sex. So she's speaking from a purely theoretical place instead of from experience. Jacob's implication that he knows how to use a condom, meanwhile, suggests he is experienced—which seems to pique Josie's interest in him.*



*Josie is clearly intrigued by Jacob, even if she's not willing to admit it to Lee. Josie also seems to realize that it's not cool to be a "snob" and write Jacob off because he attends public school. But this doesn't mean that that's not exactly what Josie is doing. When Josie admits to readers that she wants to be like Ivy in that she wants to be part of the upper class and be accepted, it shows that she'd like to become like the "snobs" at school. This explains why Josie is so caught up in figuring out everyone's social class—she wants to also figure out how to improve her own standing.*



*The way that Josie behaves around Nonna paints Josie as a dramatic, self-absorbed, purposefully obnoxious teen. She does things to annoy Nonna and doesn't seem to consider how Nonna might feel about anything. This shows that Josie has a lot of growing up to do, since part of growing up entails developing empathy and compassion for other people. Josie's at the beginning of her coming-of-age journey.*



*When Josie shares her experience of learning she's illegitimate, it suggests that being illegitimate is a big part of Josie's identity—if only because other people won't let her forget about it. Josie seems to value honesty, since she appreciates that Mama never lied about Josie's father. But because of this, it's also interesting that Josie doesn't express any curiosity about why exactly Mama was estranged from her parents during Josie's early childhood.*



Back in the present, Nonna tries to talk to Josie about an Italian boy she'd like Josie to see. Josie, however, corrects Nonna's English and insists that Nonna doesn't treat Mama well enough. Nonna insists that Josie and Mama don't show her respect. Josie grits her teeth and thinks about Nonna's particular dating ideas. She doesn't think Italians should date Australians because Australians have no culture, which Josie thinks is nonsense.

Nonna pulls Josie out of her reverie by saying that "the youth of today" have no respect, but Josie insists that Nonna is the one with the problem. Old people like Nonna worry too much about what other people think and gossip too much. Nonna retorts that it's Mama's fault that Josie is speaking so rudely right now, since a daughter's behavior is an indicator of how good her mother is. Josie points out that in that case, Nonna did an awful job with Mama. They stare at each other until Nonna tells Josie to go home. Nobody moves. The doorbell rings, and after a minute, Nonna answers and invites someone named Michael in. Josie's heart pounds—she's going to see her father.

Michael is nothing like what Josie expected, though she can see herself in him. When he confirms that Josie is Mama's daughter and notes that he didn't expect Mama to have a child Josie's age, Josie announces that Mama had her young. Michael's face goes pale. Josie flounces out of the house. By the time she gets home, Nonna has already called Mama and demanded that Josie be forced to apologize for speaking so rudely to Nonna. Josie gives herself an hour to hate Nonna for treating her and Mama so poorly. She vows that when she turns 18, she's going to run away from her gossipy family that refuses to change with the times. She hates their insistence that Josie be respectful to people who don't deserve it. She wants to think for herself and become "emancipated."

## CHAPTER 4

Debate season starts up in March. The first competition for St. Martha's is with St. Anthony's, where the love of Josie's life, John Barton, is school captain. He unfortunately doesn't return her feelings. But on Friday night, after St. Anthony's wins the debate, John comes up behind Josie at the picked-over refreshment table and offers her one of the good cookies he took earlier. They discuss what sweets they hoarded at parties as kids as Mama kisses Josie and then goes to speak to Sister Louise. John compliments Josie on her speech at Martin Place.

*Josie probably thinks it's nonsense that Australians don't have any culture because she wants to be like them. (Josie uses "Australians" to refer to white Australians, like Poison Ivy or Jacob Coote). And this desire is in direct opposition to Nonna wanting Josie to date an Italian boy, which would keep Josie totally entrenched in the Italian community.*



*It's humorous that Josie takes such offense to Nonna's worries about gossips—earlier, Josie said that she's certain people are talking about her for being illegitimate. She seems to be just as worried about gossips as Nonna is; she's just worried about different gossips. Josie also shows how loyal she is to Mama when she insults Nonna's parenting. Josie doesn't see any point in being kind to Nonna, since Nonna was so horrible to Mama and now is also annoying Josie.*



*Josie sees Nonna's insistence on "respect" as an imposition. Being respectful enough to please Nonna, she implies, would mean never speaking her mind or getting the truth about anything. And because of how loyal she is to Mama, Josie thinks this is just ridiculous. So the obvious solution, in Josie's mind, is to make a plan to escape her gossipy family as soon as she can. This again reflects Josie's youth and her desire for independence. Right now, it's easier to hurt people (as she did Nonna, and possibly to Michael in this passage) and dream of independence than it is to be levelheaded and kind.*



*The simple fact that John and Josie seem so comfortable with each other and even discuss that they both hoarded sweets at parties suggests that they're not so different from each other, despite their different economic standing. And Josie's unrequited love for John is humorous (especially describing him as the love of her life), but in a basic sense it shows how interested she is in boys.*



John explains that Josie didn't see him at Martin Place because he was with Poison Ivy, talking to the Premier. Josie thinks how alike Poison Ivy and John's families are. Josie knows she can't compete: John and Ivy's parents would talk about politics over dinner together, but John's parents and Josie's family would have nothing to talk about. John grabs more cookies, says Jacob Coote was a surprise at Martin Place, and leads Josie outside. Suddenly, Josie is extremely "aware of the social and cultural differences around [her]"—she can't picture Jacob talking to the Premier.

On the veranda, John and Josie discuss the upcoming regional dance (Josie would love to go to with John; the "snobs" at St. Martha's would be jealous). After a comfortable silence, they discuss what they'll do after they graduate. Josie shares she wants to be a barrister and asks John what he wants to do. He says he has no choice but to go into law and then politics, like his father. His family believes that John could be the prime minister someday; there's no escaping tradition. Josie says it's not hard—her family has worked its way up from humble beginnings, and Josie is going to continue to do so.

John insists that Josie doesn't experience the same kind of pressure he does. He reveals he's only school captain because of his family in a bitter voice that shocks Josie. John goes on to say that "this life is shit." Josie has never seen him in this kind of a mood. She says she thinks life is awful when Mama won't let her go out or because her family isn't higher class, but John insists he has a bigger problem: he doesn't know what he wants out of his life, but he *knows* he doesn't want a life in politics. But because John's father is a minister in Parliament, he has no choice.

Ivy comes up behind John and Josie, insults Josie, and insists it's time for John to go with her to a party. She says she has to go; her father's best friend is the birthday girl's father. John agrees to go, and Ivy walks away. John explains to Josie that he truly has to go, though he's not looking forward to seeing what fancy car the birthday girl will get from her dad. He explains that in his circle, dads try to outdo each other on birthday gifts. It worked out when he was a kid, because if he wanted something he could tell Ivy, her dad would buy whatever it was for her, and then John's dad would get him a better version. As John and Josie head back inside, John invites Josie to go see a film adaptation of [Macbeth](#) with him.

*To Josie, it seems obvious and inarguable that John and Ivy's parents would get along and discuss only things like politics—in Josie's mind, that's just what one does when one is in the upper class. The fact that her family doesn't discuss politics makes it all the more obvious to Josie that her family is different from John's. Bringing Jacob into the mix gives Josie another data point, since he attends public school—so he's working class like Josie, but seemingly without the same aspirations as she has.*



*Josie's aside that she wants to go to the regional dance with John because it'd make the "snobs" jealous shows just how caught up she is in what other people think. She doesn't want to go with him because she's madly in love with him—she just wants to make other people talk. When John mentions that he doesn't have a choice but to go into law and then politics, it confirms Josie's belief that wealthy people have an easier time achieving success.*



*Things take a sinister turn here as John's voice turns bitter—and as he starts to speak about not liking his life. Indeed, this suggests that John may be struggling with some mental health issues. Josie, however, doesn't seem to totally grasp this. She's trying to keep things light while John is trying to tell her how trapped he feels. He's clearly not happy, even if he has all the wealth and prestige Josie wants for herself.*



*Ivy and John's discussion about this birthday party shows Josie that being wealthy isn't actually as fun as she may have thought. They have obligations to people in their social circle, even those they don't like much—similar to how Josie still has to visit Nonna every day after school, whether she likes it or not. In this sense, they're both dealing with similar pressures and expectations, just in slightly different forms. Put simply, Josie's belief that she and John are so different because of their economic statuses may be misguided.*



All weekend, Josie spends a lot of time thinking about John's mood swings. She finds them upsetting, since this depressed version of John isn't the version she knows. Also over the weekend, Josie and Anna get jobs at McDonald's. They'll finally be able to afford designer clothes.

*Josie reads as wildly self-absorbed here, since she seems to resent John for his bad moods rather than feeling concerned for his wellbeing. Her goals are still small and comparatively inconsequential: have a good time and buy designer clothes.*



## CHAPTER 5

Josie fixes her hair in the mirror and wishes her neckline wasn't so high. She'd asked Nonna to make a short, black, velvet dress with a "nice neckline" for this dance. Instead, the dress is green and knee-length, and it seems to choke Josie's neck. Mama moans about Josie's Doc Martens and begs her to put on some flats. Josie whines that boys aren't going to ask her to dance as the doorbell rings. Mama hugs Josie and tells her to be home at midnight. There will students from St. Martha's, St. Anthony's, Cook High, and a coed Presbyterian school at the dance.

*Even as Josie is stepping out on her own as she prepares for the regional dance, she can't escape Mama and Nonna's ideas of how she should dress and act. This is why she ends up in Nonna's idea of a nice dress instead of her own—and why she does go on to change out her boots for some flats. This starts to show that even as Josie tries to assert her identity, she'll still have to contend with her family's rigid expectations.*



As Josie gets in Sera's car, Anna compliments her dress. Sera says the neckline is too high and Lee asks what happened to the Doc Martens. Josie says Mama is "introducing [her] to individuality." When they get to the town hall, Josie takes in everyone's varied outfits and looks for John, begging God for John to ask her to dance. But instead, John is with Poison Ivy. Josie's cousin Robert comes up behind Josie, surprises her, and tells her she looks gorgeous. Boys ask Lee and Sera to dance right as the music starts. Anna and Josie stand nervously until Jacob Coote and a tall boy approach. The tall boy asks Anna to dance, and Jacob asks Josie. Josie looks everywhere but at Jacob as they dance to song after song.

*While Mama seems to conceptualize wearing flats instead of Doc Martens as "individuality," Josie isn't so sure—flats, to her, seem to be akin to giving into the older generations' ideas of how she should dress. But as Josie defends her choices to her friends, it shows that she still respects Mama and her requests—it's telling that she's not groaning about the flats, or sneaking the Doc Martens out the door to change after she left the house.*



Eventually, Josie starts to sneakily study Jacob. He has green eyes and, Josie thinks, Mama would love him—he's "the epitome of individuality." She wonders what he's doing here; he's not the sort to come to dances like this. He catches her eye and says he was forced to come to set a good example. After the song ends, Josie excuses herself and goes to the bathroom. Sera follows and teases Josie about marrying Jacob, while Anna bursts in and says she's in love. Poison Ivy comes in to fix her immaculate blond bob, and another girl asks if she and John are together since they'd be such a good match. Ivy insists they're just friends but gives Josie a dirty look.

*As Josie thinks that Jacob isn't the sort to come to a dance like this, she shows again that she has a tendency to judge people based on superficial, external factors. Indeed, though Josie seems to genuinely enjoy dancing with Jacob and even seems attracted to him, suggesting that he's not the sort to come to the dance reads as a way for Josie to tell herself that she and Jacob don't belong together. As the other girl in the bathroom notes, though, John and Ivy belong together—and by her logic, Josie doesn't belong with John. She's too different.*





Josie and her friends return to the hall and though Josie doesn't dance with Jacob again, she dances with boys the entire rest of the night. When the dance ends at 11:30, everyone else arranges to go for pizza. But Josie grabs Robert and tells him she needs to head home. Sera gripes that Mama is too concerned about gossip as Jacob walks up and offers to take Josie home. To spite Sera, Josie follows Jacob (this will stir up a lot of gossip). Jacob and Josie run into Poison Ivy and John in the parking lot. They politely discuss the dance and the boys seem to size each other up.

As Ivy gets in the car, John takes Josie's hand and says he meant to ask her to dance but didn't have the opportunity. He offers to take Josie for coffee, but Josie refuses and runs after Jacob, who she realizes has walked away. Jacob snarls, asks if Josie likes John, and says John is embarrassingly trendy. When Josie asks if Jacob's mother taught him manners, Jacob reveals that his mother is dead. Josie stops in embarrassment, apologizes, and follows him across the street. He asks Josie for her name, which shocks her—they danced together and he bullied her when they were kids.

Jacob stops in front of a line of cars and asks Josie to guess which one is his. She's cold in her dress and groans that the van is probably his—but Jacob stops next to a motorcycle. Josie shakes her head, suggests they get a taxi, and says that Mama will murder her, but Jacob shoves a helmet onto her head. Josie makes Jacob turn around while she pulls her dress up so she can climb onto the bike. As Jacob starts the motorcycle, Josie screams and doesn't stop for five minutes. She's terrified to be so exposed on the motorcycle, especially when a carful of guys catcall her at a stoplight.

Josie taps Jacob and asks him to stop a street before hers. She stumbles off the motorcycle, adjusts her dress, and allows him to walk her to her door. Jacob shares that his mother died of cancer five years ago. Josie says she'd die if Mama died, but Jacob says you actually don't die. Josie then says she'd run away so she didn't have to think about anything bad. Jacob points out that then she'd be far away from the people she loves—and her problems won't have gone away.

When they stop in front of Josie's house, Jacob says they're the same: they're both middle class; Josie's just a "snob" who goes to a fancy school. Josie notes that she's there on a scholarship, but Jacob points out that without it, she'd be at Cook High like him. Josie says she'd be at a middle-class Catholic school, and she wouldn't be ashamed. Jacob leans in to kiss her, but Josie leans away. Jacob mutters that Josie isn't his type anyway.

*The simple fact that Josie spends the night dancing with various boys suggests she's not as unpopular as she fears she is; her sense of self may be somewhat warped. Choosing to go with Jacob to spite Sera is a way for Josie to assert her independence and insist that she doesn't care about what people say about her. However, the tone Josie uses to describe her choice suggests she actually does care.*



*It's no doubt particularly uncomfortable for Josie when Jacob makes fun of how "trendy" John is because Josie is so in love with John. Getting proof that not everyone sees John as an ideal partner shows Josie just how different her perception of the world compared to Jacob (Jacob makes it seem as though unlike Josie, he has no dreams of becoming like John and Ivy). In this sense, Jacob seems far more self-assured.*



*Assuming that Jacob drives the van shows again how normal it is for Josie to make assumptions. And she makes it very clear here that she cares what other people think—from Mama to random guys Jacob passes in traffic. Getting on a boy's motorcycle doesn't seem like something Josie would normally do—in part because of the gossip this would attract—but in order to spite Sera, Josie feels like she has no choice.*



*Even though Josie and Jacob both express love for their mothers, Jacob seems to have a healthier relationship with his family. There's no telling yet what his relationship with his living family members are like, but he nevertheless implies that his family will be there to support him during hard times—something that Josie hasn't yet expressed or realized yet.*



*Josie doesn't think there's anything wrong with being wealthy. But the way she reacts to being called a "snob" suggests she does see something wrong with aspiring to be wealthy—even though that's indeed her aspiration—and looking down on people who are on the same economic level as her. She still, to some degree, looks down on Jacob and other middle-class people, but she's ashamed of this fact.*



## CHAPTER 6

Over the weekend, Nonna hosts a family barbecue. Josie spends most of the time in the pool wrestling with Robert. Michael Andretti is at the barbecue, too. At one point, Josie sees Mama and Michael go inside. Josie gets out of the pool and sits on the step to listen in. Michael and Mama are arguing—Michael spits that he doesn't want Josie, and he's not going to pretend he does. She's just a "complication." Trembling, Ma tells Michael to get married and have kids and warns him that he won't get another chance to get to know Josie.

Then, Mama shares that Nonna doesn't know Michael is Josie's father. Mama says that she regrets nothing, but she pities Michael for not knowing Josie. Michael asks if Mama needs money, which seems to offend Mama even more. Unwilling to listen anymore, Josie returns to the pool. Later, though, she notices Nonna staring between Mama, Michael, and her. Nonna seems to have put it together that Michael is Josie's father.

When Michael goes back inside a bit later, Josie follows him. She watches him study photos and knickknacks in Nonna's sitting room. When he sits down, Josie notices he has dimples—which enrages her, since she didn't inherit his dimples or Mama's high cheekbones. She surprises Michael and says that Nonna doesn't like it when people sit in the living room during barbecues. When he nods and starts to leave the room, she scornfully tells him to say something.

Michael asks what Josie wants to hear, but Josie doesn't know—she just doesn't want him to ignore her or be polite. She admits that she expected they'd both tap into their "Italian emotion" and scream at each other. Josie continues to angrily berate Michael for ruining Mama's life, while he remains calm. When he finally insists she's gone too far, she asks if he's really going to discipline her like a father. They agree to shake hands and never see each other again—though secretly, Josie wants to see him again.

Back at home in front of the TV later that night, Mama asks Josie about Michael. Josie tries to ignore the question, but then says that she and Michael were very clear that they didn't want to see each other again. Mama insists that it's Michael's loss. Josie asks Mama what she wanted her life to be like when she was 17, before Josie was born. Josie says she wants to fall in love with someone rich and have two kids. Mama says she wanted to marry someone who loved her and have four little girls. She admits that at the time, she wanted to marry Michael.

*Just as Josie makes assumptions about people like John, Jacob, and Ivy, Michael is making assumptions about Josie and how she might affect his life. Mama's love for Josie, though, shines through here. It's offensive to her when Michael calls Josie just a "complication," since to Mama, Josie is her whole world. It's inconceivable to her that he wouldn't want to get to know her—they're family, after all.*



*When Michael offers Mama money, he seems to do so out of a sense of obligation, not because he actually wants to help Josie. Indeed, he seems like he wants to make Josie go away. Nonna finding out that Michael is Josie's father introduces another complication into Josie's family situation.*



*Josie has very clear priorities: she wants to be beautiful and since she doesn't think she's particularly attractive, she resents her parents for not giving her the appropriate DNA. This is humorous, but it also illuminates how young and naïve Josie is. In addition, it also shows how she thinks of Michael at this point: he's just someone who contributed DNA, not an actual person in her life.*



*When Josie mentions expecting to tap into her "Italian emotion" and scream at Michael, it explains why she leans so heavily on drama and yelling in her relationships with Mama and Nonna. To her, being emotionally expressive is part of being Italian. Just as Mama's loyalty to Josie was evident earlier, here Josie makes it clear that her loyalty is to Mama above all else. Michael not giving her dimples might be offensive, but abandoning Mama is unforgivable.*



*Josie is becoming a bit more curious and less self-absorbed here as she asks Mama what her dreams were as a teenager. It's a major step for Josie to recognize that Mama hasn't always been a mother—she was once a young person, with dreams and goals that had nothing to do with Josie. Josie's dreams again show that she prioritizes wealth and status, since she makes no mention of marrying someone who's wealthy but who also loves her.*



## CHAPTER 7

Instead of going on vacation for Easter, Josie and Mama do what they do every year and spend the day with family at Robert's house. The Wednesday after, Josie sits on the veranda and thinks of how all her aunts and cousins want her to get married. Mama interrupts her reverie when she comes outside and says that she has to stay with her cousin overnight—so Josie will have to stay with Nonna. Josie whines in protest; she has to share a bed with Nonna, and Nonna doesn't shave her legs.

Later, at Nonna's house, Josie watches Nonna put her hair in curlers. Nonna's vanity bothers Josie; Nonna is in her 60s, and nobody that old should care what they look like. Then, Nonna asks Josie to look at old photos, since Josie looks just like Mama and Nonna did as young women. Josie knows Nonna will only stop if Josie agrees to listen to Nonna's stories.

Nonna tells Josie about running around her village "like a gypsy" when she was Josie's age. Her parents didn't know what to do with her. She and her cousin would wash clothes by hand and talk about the "stupid old people." Now, Nonna says, she's "a stupid old woman." Josie rolls her eyes and says it's not true, and Nonna continues her story. She tells Josie about her parents agreeing to marry her to Francesco Alibrandi, who was 15 years older than her. She was thrilled. At that time it was a huge deal to immigrate to America. Nonna figured Francesco would take her to America too, but he never talked about immigrating with her, only to his friends.

One day, Nonna says, Francesco told her that they were going to Australia. She had no idea where Australia was. But back then, wives were expected to follow their husbands wherever they went, so Nonna had no choice. They traveled on a ship, and Nonna cried for half the journey. Then, one day, she heard music on deck and went up to dance. The men stared at her. Josie studies the pictures of Nonna at that age and figures they don't do her justice; she must've been the most beautiful woman. Nonna describes Francesco angrily shoving her back into her cabin and forbidding her to dance.

*While the fact that Josie's aunts and cousins want Josie to get married might suggest that Josie is growing up, Josie's tantrum when she learns she has to stay with Nonna shows that she's still a child. Though Josie seems to have many other good reasons for not wanting to spend time with Nonna, citing Nonna not shaving her legs reads as wildly immature.*



*To Josie, elderly people aren't interesting or beautiful—and they shouldn't think of themselves as such. Yet, the fact that Josie looks like young Mama and Nonna makes it clear that Josie might one day look like Nonna now—something that doesn't seem to have crossed Josie's mind.*



*Nonna suggests that it's normal for young people to be critical or disdainful of older people, because young people often feel like they know everything. And as Nonna talks about her parents not knowing what to do with her independent streak, it starts to show how similar Josie and Nonna actually are. Young Nonna and Josie in the present both seem bright-eyed, excited about the future, and certain of how their lives are going to go.*



*Nonna's descriptions of Francesco make it clear that he wasn't a pleasant man to be married to. He forced Nonna into things she didn't want to do—which may have been the way things were at the time, but that clearly didn't make it any easier for Nonna to handle. As Josie studies the photos and realizes how beautiful Nonna must've been, she starts to humanize her grandmother and feel sorry for her for this experience.*



Nonna says that when they arrived in Sydney, she'd never left Sicily or heard anything but Italian. In Sydney, women worked and Australian men catcalled them. After Sydney, they took a boat to Brisbane and a train to Ingham, which was out in the bush. Nonna laments that for six months, she saw only Francesco and snakes. They lived in a shack with a dirt floor. Josie looks around at Nonna's fancy Italian furniture in her carpeted, air-conditioned house. She realizes her grandparents have come a long way from "being penniless immigrants from Sicily."

Nonna continues that the Australians were ignorant. She explains that people her age don't speak English well because when they arrived, nobody would talk to them. The Italians instead created their own communities. As Josie listens, she finds it ironic that people are still just as ignorant now as they were back then. She also finds it hard to believe that Nonna was only 17 when she married and moved across the world. Josie thinks that kids these days would never be able to cope with that kind of stress. She wonders what happened to 17-year-old Nonna to turn her into an old lady Josie doesn't like. Josie also wonders if she'll be just like Nonna when she's 65.

## CHAPTER 8

The first 10 minutes at school are always the most exciting. That's when everyone catches up on gossip; it is, in Josie's opinion, the only reason to come to school. As she listens to the gossip around her one morning, one of the "beautiful people" that nobody likes, Carly Bishop, mentions that the nightclub she went to last night was full of "wogs." Sick of Carly's constant racist remarks, Josie calls Carly out. Embarrassed, Carly says she didn't mean Josie—but Josie insists she's no different than the "wogs" in the club and doesn't appreciate Carly's comments. The argument escalates. Josie calls Carly a "racist pig," and Carly insults Josie for being illegitimate. So Josie hits Carly in the face with her science book.

Josie finds herself in Sister Louise's office, with Carly's father, Mr. Bishop, yelling at her for breaking Carly's nose. He's a talk-show host, but he doesn't look as handsome in person as he does on TV. He grows angrier and angrier and tells Josie to call her lawyer. Josie wants to laugh since she doesn't have one and they're called barristers in Australia, but she stays silent. As Mr. Bishop takes Josie's science book as evidence for court, Josie still doesn't talk. She doesn't feel she can call Carly out for her rude, racist remarks without getting a lecture from Sister Louise about "sticks and stones."

*Nonna's descriptions of being a first-generation Italian immigrant in Australia shows how difficult the experience was for her. It also starts to show why Josie, as a third-generation immigrant, experiences the racism that she does today. Nonna was catcalled then, just as Josie was catcalled the other day on Jacob's motorcycle. In many ways, things haven't changed much.*



*Earlier, Josie corrected Nonna's English just to annoy her. As Nonna explains here why her English isn't the best, Josie learns why Nonna gets so annoyed when Josie corrects her—it's likely a reminder of how integrated Josie is in white, English-speaking Australian society. This also helps Josie develop empathy for Nonna. She starts to see Nonna as a person who was doing some pretty difficult things when she was Josie's age. Indeed, the simple realization that Nonna was once 17 seems to have a profound effect on Josie, showing her that she and Nonna aren't so different.*



*Josie shows how much she relies on the gossip mill here, when she talks about attending school in part because of the gossip. But while Josie implies that she feels at home at school in the mornings, while this gossiping is happening, Carly's use of the racist slur "wog" makes Josie feel again like she doesn't belong. Wherever Josie goes and however comfortable she might feel, Carly's use of the slur suggests that Josie will never fully escape racism against Italian Australians.*



*The aside that Mr. Bishop doesn't look anything like he does on TV is another indicator that Josie might be inappropriately idealizing wealth and prestige—wealth, in this case, doesn't make a person beautiful. The way that Mr. Bishop yells at Josie to call her lawyer drives home how wealthy he is in comparison to her. And it's also telling that Josie doesn't think she can tell the truth about what Carly did. This suggests that she doesn't trust Sister Louise and the school administration to take racist incidences seriously.*



As Mr. Bishop’s shouting gets louder, Josie finally says that she can call her father—he’s a barrister. Carly shouts that Josie doesn’t have a father, but Josie explains he just moved from Adelaide. She looks up Michael Andretti’s law firm in the phone book and tells his secretary that she needs him at school. Josie’s shaking when she hangs up. She’s certain Michael won’t come, but she prays anyway for God to not let her “become the laughingstock of the school.” Carly continues to sob about her broken nose and Josie wonders how well people like Carly actually survive in the real world.

To everyone’s surprise, Michael walks into Sister Louise’s office a half hour later. He glares at Josie and, when Mr. Bishop says Josie broke Carly’s nose with a book, he deems that “interesting.” He asks Josie for the story and Josie asks to speak to him in private. Sister Louise shows Josie and Michael into the secretary’s office. Josie explains that she’s desperate to not be expelled (though she’d love a suspension) and if Michael helps her, she’ll leave him alone forever. But she refuses to tell him what happened. After a few minutes of shouting at each other, Josie tells Michael to leave.

Michael tells Josie she’ll never make it in a courtroom if she’s not honest. Josie pauses and says Carly called her a “wog.” Michael points out that Josie is a “wog” and asks if that offends her. Josie explains that she doesn’t care if other Europeans use the slur—but it makes her furious when Australians use it. Michael asks if Josie provoked Carly. Josie did: she called Carly a “racist pig,” but that’s totally true. With a sigh, Michael stands, tells Josie to not be offended about being a “wog,” and leads her back into Sister Louise’s office. He and Mr. Bishop go back into the secretary’s office to talk.

Josie tries not to look at Sister Louise or Carly as they wait. She’s shocked that Michael came to defend her. Finally, Michael and Mr. Bishop come out of the office; Michael says they’re done and asks Mr. Bishop to give Josie her science book back. After the Bishops leave, Michael smiles at Sister Louise and asks her to not suspend Josie, since Josie wants to be suspended. Sister Louise suspends Josie for the rest of the day and assigns her administrative work as detention. Then, Josie walks out of the school next to Michael. She asks him about court and he tells her about it. Josie knows he sounds impressive to her peers—and for the first time, she knows how awesome it is to walk with one’s dad.

*Calling Michael shows that Josie sees him as a tool she can use to improve her social standing at school—even though she resents him. On the off chance that he does show up, Josie will suddenly be not so different from her peers in that she’ll have a successful father. As Josie wonders how “people like Carly” survive in the real world, it shows that she’s starting to rethink whether wealth will give her what she wants. Clearly, having money doesn’t make Carly a pleasant person.*



*The fact that Michael shows up to help Josie suggests that Josie may have underestimated him. He might be more willing to connect with her than either of them thought, though Josie is still working off of the assumption that he wants nothing to do with her. Josie’s unwillingness to tell Michael what happened suggests that she thinks she’s overreacting. She doesn’t think she should be so upset about being called a slur—but yet, she is upset.*



*Though Josie is called an offensive slur for an Italian person, Michael essentially tells Josie that she shouldn’t be ashamed of being Italian. She is Italian, whether she likes it or not—and Michael implies that Josie should like it. With this pep talk, Michael starts to help Josie come to terms with her identity and how she fits in at school. This offers hope that Michael’s new perspective may help Josie come of age.*



*Though Josie previously scorned Michael for treating her like a father might treat a child, here, Josie has no choice but to accept it when Michael tells Sister Louise to not suspend Josie. Their relationship is already becoming more like one between a father and daughter. The way that Josie manipulates Michael’s presence to make herself look better shows that Josie knows how to use gossip to her advantage. Here, she’s able to make it seem like she has a prestigious father—just like her wealthy classmates.*



## CHAPTER 9

The following Friday, Josie goes to Sister Louise's office with Poison Ivy for their weekly update. Sister Louise is the most "liberated" woman Josie knows, even if she is a nun. Josie admires her. When the meeting is over, Sister Louise dismisses Poison Ivy and says, "Josie, Josie, Josie." Josie wonders what she did and apologizes for riding Jacob's motorcycle. Sister Louise says that she used to have one. Then, she asks how Josie is coping with Michael's reappearance. Josie is ashamed for thinking Sister Louise was going to scold her. Josie says things are fine and says her job at McDonald's is also fine. Sister Louise then says that Josie should "behave in a Christian way" if she goes out with Jacob. Josie grits her teeth; Sister Louise might care, but nuns are all "tyrants."

At home that afternoon, Josie makes meatloaf with Nonna's coaching. Mama appears in the doorway and asks Nonna to look after Josie tonight—she's going out. Nonna, confused, asks where Mama is going. Mama finally says she's going out with a man from work. Nonna accuses Mama of neglecting Josie. Mama is enraged, but Nonna whines that people will talk and she'll suffer for it. Nonna says the rumors will affect Josie too and then says she knows Michael is Josie's father. She asks why Mama "disgraced" her with him and says he'll never be welcome in her house again. Mama accuses Nonna of being jealous since she didn't get out after Nonno died for fear of gossip. With a strange look on her face, Nonna says she *does* understand. She leaves.

Mama turns to Josie and says she's going out with Paul Presilio. Josie hisses that she hates him. She's starting to get scared. Mama has gone out with Paul before, and he seems to want to get married—which Josie can't stand. Josie, suddenly angry, asks Mama if this is a work function, and then accuses her of dating Paul just because Michael is around. Their argument escalates. Mama reminds Josie she's human too, and Josie shouts that Mama must regret her. Josie throws her meatloaf down the sink and plugs her ears; she doesn't want to listen to Mama anymore.

*The fact that Josie immediately assumes that Sister Louise is going to scold her shows that Josie sees the adults in her life as totally different from her. Their priorities are different in that they're far more concerned about Josie's conduct than Josie is. But when Josie realizes that Sister Louise is just interested in Josie's life and wellbeing, it suggests that the adults surrounding Josie aren't so different. They care about her and they don't necessarily want to be authoritarians—they want to make sure Josie is happy and healthy.*



*This fight between Mama and Nonna shows that every mother-daughter pair in the novel is struggling to balance independence with family. Nonna believes that Josie and Mama should be loyal to the family first and not prioritize their own romantic happiness, while both Josie and Mama believe they should be able to make choices for themselves. And Nonna makes it clear that she feels the way she does because she fears gossip. Just as Josie used gossip in the last chapter to make herself look better to her classmates, Nonna is trying to use the threat of gossip to police Mama's behavior.*



*Josie may be behaving irrationally, but she's also protective of her relationship with Mama. The possibility of a man coming between them and taking away Mama's attention is too much for Josie to bear. But Mama's also right: she's human, and she deserves to be happy just as much as Josie does. Josie's inability to comprehend this reads as immature; she sees Mama, as an adult, as fundamentally different from her.*



Josie screams that she hopes she dies in the night so Mama will regret going out. Mama says she's not sure what she did to deserve Josie, and Josie starts to mention that Mama had a baby out of wedlock. But Mama tells her not to speak and leaves Josie home alone. Josie hates Mama for leaving her alone. She wants to keep Mama all to herself. When Mama comes home after midnight, she opens the door to Josie's room. She can tell Josie is only pretending to sleep, so she says that she had a great time. Paul is attracted to her for who she is—and Josie can't take that from her. When Mama's gone, Josie sobs. She doesn't want to hurt Mama, but she doesn't want Mama to need a man to make her feel valued.

*Josie might be reacting out of fear, but this fight shows again how normal it is for Josie's family to fight loudly and be mean about it. And Josie's fear reaction also stems from her youth and immaturity: her tantrum reads as childish, and she's unwilling to consider that Mama deserves to be happy and make her own choices. The fact that both Mama and Josie get so upset about what they both say here suggests that while this kind of relationship might be normal for them, that doesn't mean it's particularly healthy or helpful for them.*



## CHAPTER 10

Josie has now been working at McDonald's for a few weeks at a busy, inner-city location. Josie suspects it's not actually the right job for her, but since she and Mama aren't talking after their fight the other night, she can't say anything. She knows she overreacted, but apologizing feels embarrassing. Josie keeps trying, though, since she's starting to realize she's selfish.

*Josie is starting to experience an epiphany: admitting that she's selfish is a sign of maturity. And wanting to apologize, even if she can't bring herself to do it, shows that Josie knows how to improve her relationship with Mama. She's just not quite there yet, since she's still at the beginning of her coming-of-age journey.*



Josie and Anna are working their shift one night when Greg Sims comes in with his group of bullies. Greg terrifies Josie—his family used to live next to Josie and Mama, and the whole family was scary and hostile. Mama and Josie eventually moved out of fear (though Nonna insisted that if Mama married, the Sims wouldn't pose such a threat). Now, though, Josie realizes Greg recognizes her. When he steps up to the counter, Anna immediately runs for the manager and Josie is thrilled that some police officers have just walked in. Greg pays for his food, seemingly only because the police are there, and Josie makes the mistake of smiling victoriously.

*The aside that Nonna wanted Mama to get married years ago shows how much Nonna changes her attitude depending on the circumstances. In the last chapter she accused Mama of neglecting Josie for dating a man who might be interested in marriage. But at this point in the past, Nonna saw Mama marrying as a way to protect Josie. This suggests that no matter what Mama does, she might not be able to win with Nonna.*



Later, as Josie and Anna head for Anna's car, they find Greg and his friends sitting on the car and drinking. One guy grabs Anna's keys and Greg grabs Josie. He suggests they have sex in the backseat—and then his friends could have a turn. He tells her that "It's in [her] blood." Josie spits in his face and he mashes his mouth into hers. Suddenly, Greg lets go of Josie and Jacob Coote is bashing Greg's face into the ground. Anton Valavic is there too; Anna clings to him. Watching Jacob beat Greg is horrifying, and Josie begs Jacob to stop. But as soon as Jacob stands up, Greg yells that Josie is a "slut" like Mama. Josie flies at Greg and hits him until Jacob pulls Josie away.

*Although Greg insults Josie for being illegitimate and insults Mama as well, this is one of the only instances in the novel where something like this happens. Greg shows that Josie may be at risk of sexual assault because of the circumstances surrounding her birth—but the book also uses this moment to cast doubt on Josie's assumption that everyone is talking about her illegitimacy. So far, it seems like only Greg is, so Josie may be overestimating how much people are talking about her.*



Jacob warns Greg that he'll kill him if he tries to touch Josie again, and Greg and his cronies slink away. When Anna's hands are shaking too much to pick up her car keys, Jacob tells Anton to take Anna home and he says he'll take Josie home. Then, Jacob tells Josie she's "stupid," jams the helmet on her head, and ushers her onto his motorcycle. Josie sobs all the way home because "filthy junkies" said terrible things about Mama—and Josie has been treating Mama so poorly.

Jacob stops around the corner from Josie's house and Josie finally admits that she spit at Greg. Jacob is aghast and asks if Mama didn't teach Josie better, but Josie shouts that Mama is a good mother. She continues to sob. Jacob finally offers her a hanky and assures her it's clean—his mother taught him to always carry a clean hanky. Josie sniffles into it and after a minute, Jacob asks her out. Josie is shocked; she didn't think she was Jacob's type. She adds that in addition to spitting at Greg and hitting him, she also broke a girl's nose with a textbook. Jacob grins.

Josie says that Jacob would have to meet Mama first, but Jacob refuses. Josie says that's the condition, and angrily, Jacob puts his helmet on. He asks if Mama will only let Josie date "bores like Barton" and suggests that since Josie is an "ethnic girl," she'll also probably want to get married right away. Josie storms away, but Jacob calls after her that he'll meet Mama. Josie imagines how Mama will react to someone like Jacob, who wears T-shirts with crude language on them and rides a motorcycle. But she tells him she'll ask Mama. Jacob says he'll pick her up on Saturday and doesn't hear as Josie shouts for him to wear a tie.

## CHAPTER 11

As Mama and Josie pull into the drive after a grocery shopping trip, Mama asks Josie if she's okay. Josie has been brooding. Mama assures Josie that she's not going to marry Paul, but Josie asks how Mama manages to put up with such a selfish daughter. Mama is shocked, but Josie says she's done fighting and needs a rest. Mama shares that Nonna recently said the same thing and suggests they all be nicer to each other. Josie takes Mama's hand, says she's growing up, and now she's "seeing the light." Mama assures Josie that Josie isn't as bad as she thinks.

*As horrible as it is to have been threatened with sexual violence, what's the most upsetting for Josie is the fact that she and Mama are at odds. This drives home that Josie's relationship with Mama is one of the most important things in her life. Indeed, she was willing to put herself in danger to defend Mama from Greg.*



*Both Josie and Jacob make it clear that their mothers are and were a major influence on their lives. Her love for Mama is why Josie responded to Greg the way she did, and Jacob clearly hasn't forgotten his own mother's lessons. It's telling when Josie is so shocked that Jacob asks her out. Thinking she's not his type suggests that Josie thinks she and Jacob are somehow very different, though it's not clear what qualities exactly she's referring to.*



*Jacob makes the racist assumption that Josie will want to get married because she's an "ethnic girl." It suggests that because of Josie's background, she's wildly different from Jacob and looks at relationships very differently. The racism of this statement aside, this nevertheless shows that Josie isn't the only teen who's making assumptions about her peers and classmates. The assumptions people make about her, though, just happen to be more loaded because she's Italian.*



*It's a huge shift for Josie to acknowledge that the adults in her life might have a hard time dealing with her because she's so selfish. She's becoming more self-aware, and she also now seems to realize the value in treating Mama like she'd treat anyone else she loves and respects. With this, the novel offers some hope that Josie and Mama's relationship will be less volatile going forward.*





Josie rolls her eyes and then asks if she can go to the movies with Jacob. She assures Mama that Mama can say no and that Jacob is actually nice and “very deep.” Mama is hesitant and notes that Josie hangs out with Sera, so she doesn’t fully trust Josie’s judgment. But she promises to think about it.

As Josie and Mama head upstairs, Josie asks if Paul tried to get Mama to have sex with him. Mama says he did, and Josie stops dead. She reminds Mama that they’re in the midst of an AIDS epidemic, and Mama tells Josie that Jacob will probably try to get her in bed. They argue about whether it’s okay to have premarital sex with condoms; Josie insists that it’s the 1990s and *everyone* is having and talking about sex now. Changing the subject, Josie again apologizes for saying mean things to Mama. Mama says they just need to try to be more understanding of each other.

## CHAPTER 12

The next time Josie is at Nonna’s house, she “succumb[s] to the urge” and asks Nonna to show her old family photos. Nonna pulls out the album and points out her first house (a shack that she says was always dirty and full of snakes). Nonna says she hated Australia for the first year—she had no friends and Nonno worked in another town, so she was on her own a lot. Josie studies photos of Nonno. He never smiles in photos, while Nonna is smiling in every one.

Josie turns the page and asks who the smiling, brown-haired man is in a photo. Nonna gets an odd look on her face and says he’s Marcus Sandford, an Australian and her first friend in this country. They met when Nonna went to the post office and the letter from home included the news that Nonna’s parents died of the flu. Nonna broke down in the middle of the post office, and Marcus picked her up and took her outside to calm down. They spoke to each other though they couldn’t understand each other, and then Marcus took Nonna home. After that he’d bring her things from town, help her in the garden, and teach her English.

But Nonno was jealous, Nonna explains. Nonno trampled the garden that Marcus had helped Nonna start. Josie realizes that Nonna was afraid of Nonno—and still is, even though he’s been dead for more than a decade. Nonna continues that not long after, other Italians moved to Australia and she had a community again. But even then, people gossiped about her because she and Nonno weren’t having babies. People always asked what was wrong with her.

*Mama essentially confirms that Sera isn’t a great influence (something Josie acknowledged when she introduced Sera). But when Mama brings up Sera in this context, it shows that lots of people are aware of Sera’s reputation—and may think less of Josie for associating with her.*



*Josie recognizes that times are changing, and that means that people’s ideas about when it’s appropriate to have sex are changing as well. This offers suggests that as times change and as social norms shift, some things that once attracted gossip and negative attention—like premarital sex, or having a baby out of wedlock—will become more commonplace.*



*The fact that Josie has an urge at all to hear Nonna’s stories about her early years in Australia shows again that she’s evolving—she’s not so self-absorbed now, which is a sign that she’s growing up. As Josie notes how unsmiling Nonno is in all the photos, she develops more empathy for Nonna. Not only was she mostly alone; the one person she had in her life seems cold and unfeeling.*



*Josie doesn’t ask questions or express curiosity about Nonna’s odd look, but this is an indicator that Marcus Sandford might be more important than Nonna initially lets on. The way that Nonna and Marcus interact with each other to begin with suggests that friendship is possible in all sorts of conditions, even when two friends don’t speak the same language. It simply takes showing the other person care and concern. And, as Marcus demonstrates, it means treating immigrants as people, not as invaders who are fundamentally different.*



*Again, Josie continues to develop empathy for Nonna as she discovers how scary and difficult Nonna and Nonno’s marriage was. And as Nonna describes the gossip she suffered even once she was part of an Italian community again, it shows that Nonna’s life in Australia has never been easy. She hasn’t fit in, though she’s made a point to try.*



Nonna says that one day, she came home and found her little sister Patrizia on her doorstep—married to Josie’s Zio Ricardo and six months pregnant. Josie says she’s always admired Zio Ricardo, since men as good and strong as him don’t seem to exist anymore. Nonna warns Josie that the 1930s and 40s weren’t the “good old days.” There was war, women died in childbirth, and doctors were often ineffective or too expensive. Josie doesn’t listen to Nonna’s next story. Instead, she thinks of how lonely Nonna was as a young woman. Josie doesn’t think she could handle living like that—and she hopes she’ll never have to live someplace where she can’t communicate with her neighbors.

*Josie seems to idolize Zio Ricardo, believing that he represents a desirable way of life that doesn’t exist anymore. But Nonna instead makes the case that every time period has its flaws—the 30s and 40s may have produced Zio Ricardo, but that doesn’t mean life wasn’t still difficult. Though it could be considered rude that Josie doesn’t listen to Nonna’s next story, the fact that Josie stops to think about how lonely Nonna was nevertheless shows Josie growing up and developing empathy.*



## CHAPTER 13

Josie admires her reflection in the mirror in preparation for her date with Jacob. But then she puts on her glasses and “reality set[s] in.” As she comes out of the bathroom, she tells Mama again about Jacob’s speech, that he’s school captain of Cook, and that he’s “meaningful.” Mama raises her eyebrow when the doorbell rings and assures Josie that she’s always nice to Josie’s friends. Josie is shocked and disappointed when she sees that Jacob is wearing old jeans and a sweater with holes. He hasn’t shaved, either. Mama looks shocked—and then perplexed that Jacob grunts his hello to her.

*Josie seems to hope that Jacob is going to show up on her doorstep acting like Zio Ricardo: kind, generous, and put together. This is in part because Josie expects this—but more importantly, she also knows that Mama expects this. So when Jacob shows up in ratty clothes and doesn’t greet Mama politely, Josie has to accept that Jacob isn’t going to meet her expectations every time, if at all.*



Embarrassed, Josie runs to her room for her coat. Mama follows and hisses that Jacob looks like someone who rides a motorcycle. Josie assures Mama that Jacob just resents having to meet Mama and is doing this on purpose, but Mama says that Nonna would be aghast. Mama wants to keep Josie home, but relents and says she wants Josie home as soon as the movie is over. Josie assures Mama that she’s not sure she wants to go out with Jacob again after this.

*Nonna might be aghast to see Jacob dressed like this and behaving so rudely, but Josie has also implied that Nonna would be upset no matter how Jacob acted because Jacob is Australian. This is another indicator that times are changing and, for each generation, certain things are going to become less important.*



Josie leads Jacob outside and ignores him until he grabs for her hand. Then, she yells at him for dressing so poorly, speaking poorly, and grunting. They continue to shout at each other as they get on Jacob’s motorcycle and ride downtown. When they get to the theater, Josie suggests they see [Pride and Prejudice](#), but Jacob says he’s not seeing “a pansy movie.” He wants to see a “normal movie” and grouches that he gave up his Saturday for this. Josie accuses him of acting like a jerk because she made him meet Mama, but Jacob says that this is who he is—and he’s never “had to go out with an ethnic girl” before.

*Josie waits to shout at Jacob until she’s away from Mama because she’s embarrassed to let Mama know how upset she is about it. It was hard enough to get Mama to agree to the date in the first place, and Josie isn’t willing to admit that she may have made a mistake. When Jacob is upset with Josie, he tends to fall back on racist language—like “having to go out with an ethnic girl.” He makes it Josie’s fault that things aren’t going well, and blames it on her being Italian, thus absolving himself of any responsibility.*



Josie shouts that she's not "an ethnic," and Jacob retorts that she called him an Australian like it was an insult the other day. He tells Josie to "go back to [her] own country" and they stare at each other in silence. Then, Josie storms outside and walks toward home, thinking that Mama will kill her. She becomes aware that there's a car trailing her and screeches that her father's a cop—but from the car, Michael says that Josie's father is a barrister. Josie gets in, says she doesn't want to talk about why she's out on her own, and asks what Michael is doing. He says he'd like to get to know Josie, since she's clearly not going away.

Josie agrees to get pizza with Michael. They go to a warm pizza place and Josie can't help it—she loves sitting across from her father, and she also can't stop looking outside for Jacob. After a few minutes, Josie tells Michael everything about Jacob. She realizes that when they're not both being hostile, talking to him is fun, and conversation flows easily. When they're finished with their meal, Josie offers to pay since she just got a job. Michael frowns when he hears Josie works at McDonald's at night; he insists it's not safe. He offers Josie a job working for him in the afternoons. Josie is excited—she can tell people she's doing legal work, even though she'll just be photocopying. She can one-up Poison Ivy with this job.

Michael drives Josie home and suggests she date John instead of Jacob. When they get to Josie's house, Josie shyly asks if Michael ever wondered if Mama went through with her pregnancy. Michael says he wants to be honest: he's not sure he can love Josie, but he does want to get to know her. When pressed to answer Josie's question, he admits that he and Mama discussed abortion. Michael didn't think Mama would stand up to Nonno, who was a "bastard." He adds that he can't promise Josie he would've come back if he'd known Mama had continued her pregnancy. Josie says he would have and walks away.

When Josie gets inside, she nervously tells Mama about her night. Rather than being angry, though, Mama hugs Josie. Later, Josie asks Mama about her relationship with Michael. Mama says she loved Michael as much as she could at age 16. After a minute, Josie says that Mama looked nice the day she went out with Paul—and Mama is more beautiful than other women. Mama sends Josie to bed and, before Josie goes, notes that anything could've happened to Josie out on the streets. Josie says she understands. As she lies in bed later, she wishes Jacob would call and apologize and even checks the phone three times. He doesn't call.

*Because Jacob is white and part of the more powerful and populous social group in Australia, calling him "Australian" as though it's an insult doesn't land the same way that calling Josie "an ethnic" does. Josie's choice to end the date with Jacob because of his racism suggests that she's not willing to put up with this kind of abuse from a romantic partner, no matter how badly she'd like to date.*



*As Josie realizes how much fun it is to talk to Michael, she starts to see that it might not be such a bad thing to let him into her life. Their shared penchant for sarcasm makes it so they're not willing to say anything outright, but they both seem to be enjoying their meal and the other's company. Josie's reaction to being offered a job at its law firm reminds readers that Josie still cares deeply about impressing her classmates. She wants to control how they talk about her, and this job offers her a fantastic opportunity in that regard.*



*This discussion about Mama and Michael's decision-making process gives Josie important insight into the kind of person her mother was at 17. Mama has already made it clear that she loved Michael, but Michael suggests here that Mama was terrified of Nonno and how he might treat her. This starts to show how Mama, like Nonna, struggled as a young person because of how controlling and cruel Nonno was.*



*Josie expects Mama to be angry that she spent time with Michael, seemingly assuming that Mama doesn't want Josie to have anything to do with her father. But Mama, to her credit, treats Josie like a young adult capable of making her own decisions. And as Mama tells Josie about her teenage relationship with Michael, she also makes the choice to trust Josie with the truth. This is one way that Mama begins to treat Josie more like an adult—and it happens as Josie shows more empathy for Mama.*



## CHAPTER 14

After a few weeks, Josie settles in at Michael's law firm. She's thrilled to be done with McDonald's. She's seen Jacob a few times in passing, but her biggest worry now is John. Josie runs into him outside the library one afternoon and invites him to have coffee. He seems unsettled, skinny, and possibly on drugs. As they sit at the café in silence, Josie realizes she's not as attracted to John as she once was. Finally, he blurts out that he hates "this shit life." John explains that his father opened his mail and found out that John didn't win a math competition and now, his father is so disappointed. Josie assures John that John's father loves him, but John says his father only loves him when John is winning.

John admits that he doesn't want to study law—but his father would kill him for that. Josie assures John that he can be anything he wants, but John says he doesn't know what he wants to do. He does think, though, that he doesn't want to live anymore. Josie is confused at first but then, her eyes go wide. She wonders for a moment if John is right and life is useless. But Josie realizes she likes her "useless existence." Josie notes that according to Father Stephen, "peace is a state of mind." John explains he's an atheist, and Josie doesn't know what to say—she's never talked to an atheist before. She tries to make jokes and wishes she were hanging out with uncomplicated Jacob instead.

Josie realizes her horrible date with Jacob was her fault as much as Jacob's. She turns back to John and says that at her school, HSC students are supposed to write down how they feel and give their writing to a trusted person. After the HSC tests, that person is supposed to ask if you still feel how you did when you wrote the letter. Josie asks if she can give John her paper, and John agrees to write something for Josie. They spend the afternoon writing and then seal their papers with tape. Josie is nervous; she feels like she's letting John see her soul. When she gets home, she puts John's papers in her jewelry box. She feels guilty: compared to John, Josie's lucky.

The next Friday, it's confession at school. This happens once per term. Josie's sins are always the same (she's lazy, selfish, and rude to Mama and Nonna), and Father Stephen even recognizes Josie by her sins. Josie admires Father Stephen. He surfs, has arranged AIDS talks, and has earned the love of St. Martha's students. As Josie waits for Sera to finish confession, she wonders if Sera is telling Father Stephen about all the sex she's having. Sera likes to pester Josie by noting that people will talk if Josie has sex and ends up like Mama, but Josie's getting better at ignoring her and taking pride in her Italian community.

*While John's first mention of feeling like life is awful could've been an isolated incident, the fact that he's still talking about life being miserable suggests that he's struggling with some serious mental health issues. Josie, though, doesn't seem to take John seriously; instead, she's thinking about how unattractive he is to her now and takes note of his flaws. This makes it clear that Josie is still a self-absorbed teen, but it also shows that it's hard for Josie to comprehend the kind of relationship that John has with his father. Parents, in Josie's experience, are loving no matter what—and it's hard to imagine what John must be dealing with.*



*John makes it clear that he's under a lot of pressure to do exactly what his father wants him to do. There's no room for him to deviate and figure out what he wants to do—indeed, it's sinister that John suggests the only way to not study law is to kill himself. With this out in the open, Josie finds herself totally out of her depth. Realizing that one of her best friends is having suicidal thoughts is uncomfortable and difficult to navigate—and so rather than take it totally seriously, Josie instead wishes she were with someone else.*



*The letter exercise seems designed to impress upon stressed students that their stress is temporary—after the HSC tests, Josie implies, they probably won't feel so stressed anymore. While Josie might be right about this, though, it's also possible that she's still underestimating just how much John is struggling. Indeed, John seems to be struggling with the pressure to be a certain kind of adult, not just pass the HSC with flying colors. His issues, in other words, seem likely to continue long after the test is over.*



*Participating in confession allows Josie to connect with her Catholic faith. It also allows her to reflect on how she's changing and maturing as time goes on. Though Josie makes it clear that her sins haven't changed much since last term, she's nevertheless finally able to ignore Sera's ribbing. And as Josie takes Sera's teasing less seriously, she's able to feel prouder of being Italian. This suggests that Josie might find more happiness if she can care less about gossips like Sera.*



But still, the community is nosy. Josie realizes she wants to be “rich and influential” so that she can show the Italians that she can make something of herself, no matter where she came from. Mama is silly for telling Josie to try to earn people’s respect—as Josie sees it, she always has to respect “the wrong people for the wrong reasons.”

*Josie may feel more secure now that she cares less what Sera thinks, but she still finds the Italian community’s gossip stifling. Her desire to be influential shows that she still thinks having wealth and power is more important than being liked—indeed, if she’s rich enough, Josie won’t have to care if people like her or not.*



## CHAPTER 15

School lets out early on Wednesday afternoon, so Josie and her friends go to a café to talk about what they want to do after they graduate. Sera is going to be a fashion designer. Josie says that if she wasn’t going into law, she’d be a translator for the Italian consulate (it seems exciting). Anna insists she’ll be a teacher, and then, leaning forward so everyone else leans in, she says that Anton Valavic likes her. Sera howls with laughter, but Lee urges Anna to tell them more. Sera insists that Anna is too much of a little girl to interest Anton, but Anna admits that Anton is always waiting for her outside of McDonald’s to make sure she gets in her car safely.

*Josie’s dream of translating for the Italian consulate reveals that she’s bilingual (something she confirms later in the novel). The simple fact that being bilingual could get her a job if she wanted it suggests that Josie doesn’t need to be ashamed of being Italian—being Italian could get her a job and help her pay the bills one day. Sera makes it clear that she habitually makes assumptions about people. In her mind, it’s ridiculous that anyone would like shy, quiet Anna—when Anna suggests that Sera is very off-base for thinking that.*



Seeing Jacob and Anton come into the café, Sera suggests they ask Anton how he feels. Josie hisses to Sera to stay quiet as Anton, Jacob, and four others squeeze into the next booth. One girl traps Anna’s braid between her back and the booth on accident. When the others at Jacob and Anton’s table realize this, one boy pulls out the silk scarf that Anna has tied in her braid—and it falls in ketchup. Josie and her friends pack up and leave the café to browse the stalls and shops. Eventually, Sera and Anna head home.

*While Josie, Anna, and probably Lee want to look unremarkable to Jacob and Anton’s group, Sera shows here that she thrives on creating embarrassing situations that will attract a lot of gossip. And even though Sera doesn’t do anything to make this situation worse, this interaction with Jacob and Anton nevertheless doesn’t go as planned.*



Josie and Lee find a bench and watch the water. Lee laments that she doesn’t know what she wants to do with her life. She wanted to do advertising, but she says her dad used to do advertising when he was sober. (He’s verbally abusive when he drinks, which happens frequently these days.) Lee says she feels awful for her parents, since they won’t get a divorce or work on their marriage.

*Josie doesn’t share much about her friends throughout the novel, but here she reveals that Lee is going through a difficult time at home—and may even have more struggles than Josie does. Letting readers in on this shows that Josie is starting to care more about the people around her, and focus less on herself.*



Lee also insists that it’s not true that people have control over their destinies—rich people, she says, introduce their kids to other rich people and then those kids get married, like John and Poison Ivy will one day. Poor people marry poor people, Italians marry Italians, and they’ll never do any better than their parents. When Josie argues, Lee insists that Josie is going to be a barrister because of Michael. Josie announces that this is depressing. They head for the main road, and Josie suggests more career options for Lee. Lee shoots them all down.

*In Lee’s understanding, climbing the ladder to reach a higher economic class is impossible. For Josie, this is difficult to hear—she wants to be a barrister, but she wants this job in part because she sees it as her ticket to an upper-class lifestyle. The fact that Lee thinks this way makes it clear that different people can look at the same situation and see something totally different, a fact Josie will become more comfortable with as she comes of age.*



Lee says she'd like to be a fortune-teller and then theatrically tells Josie her fortune: she'll travel the world and find happiness with Jacob and their 10 children. Josie rolls her eyes, but Lee says Jacob was staring at her in the café. Lee heads home and Josie sits at the bus stop, talking to Robert's best friend. When the friend gets on his bus, Jacob sits down next to Josie, angry that she was talking to another guy. Josie calls him out for not standing up for Anna, and Jacob suggests they start over. Jacob kisses Josie, and Josie says Jacob will have to re-introduce himself to Mama. Josie agrees to cut school on Friday so they can go out. The bus pulls up and as Josie gets on, Jacob says he'll take her to see [Pride and Prejudice](#).

*Lee might have caught Jacob staring at Josie in the café, but Josie makes it clear that Jacob must respect her friends, family, and culture if he wants to have a relationship with her. Though this seems like a bit of a hard thing for Jacob to understand, it's a sign of progress when he offers to take her to see [Pride and Prejudice](#). Agreeing to see what he formerly called a "pansy movie" suggests that he's willing to adapt to make a relationship work with Josie.*



## CHAPTER 16

On Friday, Josie skips school and takes the ferry with Jacob to Manly. It's a beautiful day—and "the most beautiful day of [Josie's] life." Josie can barely describe Jacob. One minute he sounds unintelligent, seems ready to beat someone, and smokes; the next, he sounds ridiculously intelligent and helps old ladies cross the street. His smile, though, is always sincere.

*When Josie describes this day as the most beautiful day of her life, it drives home how interested she is in love and relationships. The time she's spent with her friends or family doesn't compare to this time spent with Jacob in a romantic setting.*



Josie and Jacob eat fish and chips on the beach for lunch. Jacob reminisces about coming to the beach with his mother when he was little. Josie laughs that she was always a part of those big Italian families having picnics on the beach. Jacob tells Josie about his family: he has an older sister who's married with a baby, and Jacob lives with his dad. His dad has a girlfriend, but he's aghast when Josie asks if they're engaged. Josie shrugs that it's a cultural difference; Italians don't live together before marriage unless they're "rebel Italians."

*Josie and Jacob may have grown up in very different cultural situations, but they learn here that they both have fond memories of spending time on the beach as kids. They're not so different, if only because they've grown up in the same country with the same outdoor activities on offer. But the cultural differences are still unavoidable, as when Jacob is so surprised that Josie only expects couples to live together if they're married.*



Josie explains that Mama wasn't a rebel; she was naïve. Jacob asks if Mama or a woman like her would enter another relationship or get married if her husband died. Josie admits that only older Italian men remarry because "Men can't do without." But if a widow tries to date or stops wearing black, people will talk about her and call her a "sex maniac." Josie says she'd like to be a "rebel Italian" and wear bright colors to funerals. She explains that she can't act out, though, because she doesn't have a father. People expect her to mess up because of what Mama did.

*This passage reveals a double standard when it comes to older Italians remarrying: it's normal for the men to remarry, but the women they marry are considered "sex maniacs." With this, it seems likely that Josie is so concerned about the Italian gossip mill because, as a young woman, she's more likely to have rumors spread about her. However, things might not be as dire as she expects: she's clearly an accepted part of the community, even if she was born out of wedlock.*



Jacob doesn't see a problem since lots of people have babies out of wedlock or live together before marriage these days, but Josie explains it's different for Italians. Doing something "wrong" is an invitation for gossip, and the gossip is guaranteed to hurt someone you care about. Jacob says he'd hate to be Italian, but Josie says it's not so bad. She resents her Italian culture sometimes and used to wish her father was Australian—but she'll always be Italian. She tells Jacob a bit about Michael and says she thinks it'd be stupid to hate him for leaving Mama 18 years ago.

Jacob kisses Josie, surprising her. He says he loves how passionate she is. Josie says she's angry a lot, especially because of how much people gossip about her being illegitimate. Jacob admits that he and his friends used to make fun of her, but now he knows better. They playfully insult each other and then kiss passionately—Josie's first passionate kiss. It's different from the romance novels and after 15 minutes, Josie feels like a kissing expert. Then Josie realizes she's on a public beach and feels shy. When they part ways later, Josie knows she's in love.

## CHAPTER 17

Josie gets to know Michael over the June vacation, when Michael takes her to Adelaide. He insists on driving instead of flying, which annoys Josie. The scenery is brown and Michael's car doesn't have a tape deck. Josie eats candy to keep herself from getting carsick and complains until Michael asks about Jacob. Jacob is now on Mama's good side, since he came for dinner and washed dishes last week. Michael says that he and Jacob have chatted about cars when Jacob has tried to call Josie at work.

Michael tells Josie she looks like Mama did at her age, though Mama wasn't as rude. He tells Josie how they met: Michael lived next door and they both hated each other, but things changed when Michael got tall and handsome and Mama decided to "become a lady." Michael says that when they were 16, he heard Mama crying and asked her to come over and talk. They soon became best friends, and Mama told him all about how Nonno wouldn't talk to her for some reason. He says that over the next few months, they got closer and had sex. Michael says that he can't regret Josie, but he doesn't think kids should have sex. It's not just the possibility of having a baby; teenage boys don't know how to make girls feel good emotionally and physically. Mama was very ashamed.

*Jacob makes the case that as times change, something like having a baby out of wedlock is going to become less shocking and thus less likely to be gossiped about. But Josie counters that the Italian community moves more slowly than Australian culture at large. This is annoying for her because Josie exists in an in-between state, where she's very Italian at home and tries hard to be Australian when she's at school.*



*Jacob shows here that he understands the importance of apologizing for past slights and showing the person he hurt that he's changed. Apologizing for insulting Josie for being illegitimate shows that Jacob is growing and changing—and he's learning that people aren't better or worse just because of their parents' marital status. For Josie, this is a transformative moment as kissing Jacob like this makes her feel more like an adult.*



*It's important that Michael notes that he and Jacob have been talking about cars. This suggests that Jacob has now abandoned his earlier assertion that it's silly to have to meet a partner's parents—he's now voluntarily talking to Josie's dad. Relationships, this shows, can teach people things they didn't even know they needed to learn.*



*The way Michael describes his and Mama's trajectory mirrors how Josie and Jacob's relationship has evolved. Jacob once taunted Josie and their dislike was mutual; now, they're in love. From the way that Michael describes young Mama, he makes it seem like Mama was very upset and lonely because of how Nonno neglected her. In turn, this suggests that Mama and Michael's relationship was borne out of Mama's desire to connect with a man in some way, since she couldn't connect with her own father.*



Josie quips that boys hit their sexual peak at age 17, so Michael is over the hill. She stares out the window in boredom for a while and then asks if Michael has a girlfriend. Michael says he does, but Josie won't get to meet her. To pester him, Josie says that Mama is going out with an Italian doctor and lies she likes Paul. But she says she likes Michael better. Then, Josie says again that it's ugly here; she'd never want to live here. Michael says that someday, if Josie meets a guy from out here, they'd compromise and maybe live out here. Josie is disgusted. He opens the sunroof and Josie stands up in it, reciting poetry.

The drive takes three days, and Josie immediately loves Adelaide. It's odd meeting her paternal grandparents, but she loves getting to know Michael. She loves that he snores—at night, Josie knows that Michael's alive. She meets Michael's sister and during one visit with Josie's grandparents, Josie's grandmother points out a picture of Mama in a photo album. After the three weeks, Josie returns home and is thrilled to be back with Mama. Mama now lets Josie go out with Jacob, but she has an early curfew. Josie adores Jacob.

## CHAPTER 18

Josie now knows that she and Poison Ivy are never going to be friends. On Friday, they both read the same newspaper while they wait for their meeting with Sister Louise. Seeing a story about a murdered Italian businessman, Poison Ivy remarks that “new Australians” sure wear a lot of black. Josie is offended to have been called a “new Australian” and points out that since she's older than Ivy, Ivy is actually the newer Australian. Ivy insists that regardless, Josie is “an ethnic.” Furious, Josie snaps that the correct term is “European” and her ancestors came to Australia free, while Ivy's came in chains. Ivy retorts that Josie's ancestors fought with the Germans in World War II and probably killed her and John's grandfathers. The girls insult each other's grandparents until Sister Louise interrupts.

Josie realizes that no matter how much she achieves, she's always going to be “a little ethnic from Glebe” to some Australians. It's so frustrating. Josie feels at home in Australia, even though she both loves and hates her country. It's a relief, then, when Jacob picks Josie up after work that evening and kisses her in the elevator. When they get outside, he tells Josie he has a surprise and shows her an old Holden car. Josie screams with glee and a moment later, Michael comes down concerned that something happened to her. When he realizes what's going on, he says Josie was conceived in a Holden and walks away.

*Josie is still a selfish teen and doesn't see the point in being in a relationship with someone if she has to compromise. But by insisting she'll never compromise, Josie ignores the fact that she's already compromising in her relationship with Jacob. Jacob isn't John Barton, Josie's ideal—and nor is he Italian, so he won't please Nonna. Josie isn't yet in a place where she can see that her set ideas about this sort of thing aren't as true or useful as they could be.*



*As Josie gets to know Michael and his parents and sisters, her family expands. Now, Josie has even more people to call on when and if she needs help. Meeting them also gives Josie the opportunity to learn more about who she is, and who she wants to be. Seeing the picture of Mama in the photo album impresses upon Josie that Mama and Michael's families have been intertwined for years—and they'll always be connected now because of Josie.*



*Josie has felt somewhat out of place at St. Martha's from the beginning, mostly because of her Italian heritage. Ivy shows how the way she talks about Josie and Italian immigrants more broadly contributes to this: referring to Josie as a “new Australian” makes it seem as though Josie isn't as integral to Australian culture, as she's new. But Josie tries to get Ivy to see that immigrants aren't people to be feared. Indeed, they're no different in many ways than Ivy and her family—the story of how they came to Australia is just a bit different.*



*Ivy's racism makes it clear to Josie that she'll always be Italian, and people like Ivy will always resent her and treat her differently for this. This is especially difficult for Josie, given how much she wants to be a part of Ivy's world. So it's comforting when Jacob doesn't treat Josie differently because she's Italian. She now knows that she has someplace to go where her ethnicity doesn't matter.*





Josie is embarrassed, but Jacob thinks it's erotic. Josie wonders if her life would've been different if she'd been conceived in a Mercedes. Jacob helps her into the car and Josie calls him a genius for fixing up the car. She says they could go into a partnership, since he's good with his hands and she's smart. They could start a company. Jacob starts to talk about them as husband and wife but embarrassed, he stops. Josie says Jacob would make a great husband, and Jacob says Josie would be great with kids. Josie scoots closer to Jacob and imagines herself marrying him.

*This is another major turning point for Josie. While prior to meeting Jacob, Josie looked down on working-class people like him, she now sees that he's just as driven and competent as she is—his goals are just different. As they talk about what life might be like if they got married, Josie also starts to feel more secure in her future. Knowing she'll have Jacob there with her makes the future much easier to face.*



## CHAPTER 19

It's "tomato day." Josie sits with her whole family in Nonna's backyard, processing tomatoes to make **spaghetti sauce**. She and Robert call it "Wog Day." Zia Patrizia reminds Josie that they've been doing this for more than 40 years. She sits next to Nonna, and Josie wishes Mama would sit over here and rescue her from the old ladies' gossip. But then, Zia Patrizia asks Nonna if she remembers the year Marcus Sandford helped on tomato day. Both Josie and Robert perk up. Zia Patrizia explains that Marcus was an Australian policeman who helped them when Nonno and Zio Ricardo were imprisoned in a camp for Italian men during World War II.

*The fact that Josie and Robert call this day after the slur for Italians illuminates how embarrassed they feel about certain aspects of their Italian culture. And not only is it shameful (in Josie's opinion) that the family makes their own tomato sauce, Josie also has to listen to the old ladies gossip on this day. This historically hasn't interested Josie at all—but when Zia Patrizia brings up Marcus Sandford, Josie realizes she might be able to learn more about him, since Nonna hasn't told her much.*



Nonna and Zia Patrizia theatrically tell the story of Nonna going to speak to the army to ask them to give their husbands back. The army refused, and on her way home, Nonna ran into Marcus. She hadn't seen him in two years by this point. He tried to get Nonno and Zio Ricardo released, but he couldn't. So Marcus helped the women garden, process tomatoes, and even delivered one of Robert's uncles.

*Australia interned Italians during World War II because of a misguided fear that they'd conspire with Japanese invaders. And Nonna and Zia Patrizia show what the consequences of Australia's racist policies were: Nonna and Zia Patrizia were on their own to survive. It's only because of luck that they had Marcus to help.*



Zia Patrizia says that Marcus loved her "little Roberto," and Robert asks if that's the one who died. The old ladies cross themselves and Nonna says that one day, they couldn't find Roberto. Finally, late in the night, Marcus came back with Roberto's body in his arms—the boy had drowned in the creek. Nonna says that she blamed Australia for Roberto's death, since it was the country's policy of imprisoning Italian men that meant Zia Patrizia was too busy to keep track of the boy. Zia Patrizia says that after that, they never saw Marcus again. Josie notices Nonna's expression and thinks that *Nonna* saw Marcus again, but she takes another tub of tomatoes and goes to sit with Mama. The family has spaghetti that night. It's a tradition that Josie knows she'll never stop observing.

*Even worse than taking away their husbands, Australia's policy of interning Italian men meant that Zia Patrizia wasn't able to properly care for her family. Racism, this shows, can kill—even indirectly. But as Josie watches Zia Patrizia and Nonna tell this story, she starts to suspect that there's more to it than Nonna is letting on. Clearly, there are things about Nonna's relationship with Marcus that the extended family doesn't know about. When Josie talks about always observing spaghetti after Tomato Day, it's with pride—she may find some parts of being Italian shameful, while others are fulfilling.*



## CHAPTER 20

On July 29, St. Martha's celebrates their namesake saint with a walkathon. Josie hates the event. But regardless, she spends the weekend before collecting donations for Amnesty International and then on Monday, she joins everyone in the gym. Before Josie can follow the rest of the school out the doors, Sera comes up behind her and says that the pop star Trey Hancock is staying in a nearby hotel. Lee says that she's going with Sera to see him. Josie tries to say that she has a responsibility to stay behind the younger kids to protect them. But before Josie can really protest, her friends shove her onto a bus.

Josie starts to enjoy herself on the bus. When they get to the hotel, the girls rush into an elevator so nobody sees them. They wander the halls for a little bit and then take the elevator back down. Sera teaches Anna to vogue on the way down, but Josie feels uneasy. What if Mama finds out, or if a nun takes roll at a stop? But Sera suggests they try to get into the bar—and Anna notes that this is better than a walkathon. When the elevator gets to the ground floor, though, the lobby is filled with people and cameras. Josie hisses that the Premier is here for a press conference. Anna and Sera are excited to be on TV, but Josie is annoyed.

The girls go back to Lee's house to watch a Trey Hancock concert video, but Josie can't relax. Later that night, she finally finds out what she looks like on TV. As the Premier shakes hands with someone from China, Josie and her friends are in the background, waving and vogueing. Josie prays that nobody will see them but, on Tuesday morning, Sister Louise calls Josie, Lee, Sera, and Anna to her office. She tells the girls to give back their collected donations and to tell each donor what they did. Sister Louise says she trusted the girls—and now they're on TV making fools of themselves. Josie feels ready to die.

Sister Louise sends Anna, Lee, and Sera back to class, but she asks Josie to stay. Josie apologizes and says she knew it was wrong. Sister Louise accuses Josie of being a "sheep," says that Josie won't become anything if she's so easily influenced, and asks if skipping the walkathon was Sera's idea. Josie's blood is boiling, especially when Sister Louise says that Ivy is responsible all the time. Then, Sister Louise reveals that last year, Josie was voted school captain—but she gave Ivy the job, since she knew Ivy would be better at it. What happened yesterday is proof that Sister Louise made the right decision.

*Josie shows in this passage that she knows she has responsibilities—but she's also willing to skip out on them if there's something more fun to do instead. And in particular, she's not willing to stand up to Sera. This may explain why Mama brought up Sera while saying that Josie might not have the best taste in boys; Sera seems to make poor, rash decisions and have the ability to pressure her friends into going along with her.*



*Sera clearly doesn't have a well thought out plan; the purpose of this expedition is to get out of the walkathon, not necessarily to see Trey Hancock. This may make skipping the walkathon seem even less worth it to Josie, since it doesn't seem like she's even going to get to see the popstar she came to see. And throughout, Josie also can't escape the fact that she knows what she's supposed to be doing. She knows how to make people proud of her—and she knows she's behaving in the exact opposite way.*



*Though Josie implied that she'd like to see herself on TV earlier in the novel (when Ivy speaking to the Premier made it on the evening news), she learns here that being on TV for making bad decisions is a lot less satisfying. It's also a major blow for Josie to have Sister Louise scold her. (Recall that Josie admires Sister Louise and thinks of her as "liberated," which is what Josie wants to be when she grows up.)*



*Josie doesn't think she's popular—she thinks that everyone at school hates her and talks about her because she's Italian, illegitimate, and attends on a scholarship. Learning that she was actually voted school captain calls this into question—Josie might be more popular than she thought. And though Josie might resent being called a "sheep," she also knows full well that she gave into Sera's peer pressure. In this sense, Josie is a follower, even if that's uncomfortable for her to accept.*



Josie is enraged, but Sister Louise insists that Josie would've behaved the same way even if she'd been school captain. Her friends are "trendsetters," and Josie will be congratulated by her classmates for skipping. Josie insists that everyone looks down on them as Sister Louise threatens to choose another vice captain. She says she's seen Josie walk like an Egyptian to communion (a dare from Sera) and reminds Josie how, in front of the bishop, Josie said that the Catholic church's rules on IVF "sucked." Sister Louise says that being a leader isn't about doing the right thing because you have a title. It's about doing the right thing anyway.

Sobbing, Josie walks out. But she stops at the end of the hallway and realizes that Sister Louise is right. *Everyone* loves Anna and Lee, and Sera is wildly popular. Josie was voted school captain. Josie walks back to Sister Louise's office and tells her that she's sorry. Sister Louise notes that nuns don't have the authority to forgive like priests do, so Josie will have to live with her guilt until she means it. Josie has potential, but Josie also has to use it. As Josie walks to class, people praise her for skipping the walkathon. Josie quietly tells them skipping was wrong. In retrospect, Josie believes that her "emancipation" begins in this moment.

## CHAPTER 21

On Monday night, John calls and invites Josie to see [Macbeth](#) with him. Josie meets him at the theater on Tuesday and is relieved that he doesn't seem depressed. John assures her that he was just stressed about exams. They laugh and talk in the lobby, and Josie discovers that they have the same interests. Josie isn't compatible with Jacob this way, so it's a relief to talk to someone who's familiar with the same books. They discuss one boy in John's class who had a nervous breakdown about the HSC and dropped out, but John suggests they don't talk about school.

As Josie and John head for concessions, Josie's heart stops when she sees Jacob across the lobby. Josie goes to him. He's furious that Josie is seeing a movie with John, though Josie assures Jacob that John is just a friend. Josie is mortified as Jacob asks if she's been messing with him the entire time. John walks over and suggests that Josie and Jacob talk about this later. The boys start to shove each other, so Josie firmly tells John to go wait for her by the doors.

*Sister Louise essentially accuses Josie of caring more about what her friends think of her than about being a leader. Sister Louise seems aware that Josie dreams of prestige and wealth, so she tries to make the case here that acting out for attention isn't going to get Josie the kind of prestige she wants. Not all attention is good attention, in other words, and Sister Louise tries to impress upon Josie that it's important to cultivate the right kind of attention—whether anyone recognizes her for her good behavior or not.*



*Josie makes it seem like she only returns to apologize to Sister Louise because she realizes she doesn't need to be as worried about her social standing as she initially thought, not because she means it. This shows again how important social standing is to Josie. But it's also telling that Josie insists her "emancipation" begins in this passage. Becoming free, she suggests, entails learning to make her own decisions and not give in to peer pressure.*



*Josie might be closer to living in John's world than she thought—the fact that they share many of the same interests and can talk about the same books suggests that they have a lot in common. And though Josie and Jacob might be from the same economic class, Josie sees that they're very different in this regard. Though John insists that his mental health now is fine, it's also potentially concerning that he doesn't want to talk about school at all—he still seems stressed about exams.*



*Just as Josie had set ideas about Jacob needing to meet Mama and not use racist language around her, Jacob has strong feelings that it's not okay for Josie to see a movie with another guy. To Josie, being accused of cheating is also offensive, as she knows that she no longer harbors romantic feelings for John.*



Jacob says that he's embarrassed. He points to a tall girl who looks like a model; her name is Arianne. He says he's friends with her, but asks Josie what Josie would've thought if he'd taken Arianne to the movie. Quietly, Josie says she'd be angry and agrees that she'd be concerned that Jacob was cheating on her. But then, Josie says she didn't think Jacob would want to see [Macbeth](#) with her. Jacob spits that he's studying [Macbeth](#) in school and is here to see it. He stalks off. Josie heads back to John, who insists that Jacob isn't Josie's type—barristers don't marry mechanics.

Josie is too miserable to concentrate on [Macbeth](#). She feels like she's constantly making mistakes and she resents John for looking down on “future tradesmen” like Jacob. Josie realizes that no matter what other people think, she'd happily date a person of any profession if they're like Jacob. After the movie, John tells Josie he loves spending time with her and leaves. Josie waits to approach Jacob until his friends all leave. She apologizes, but he doesn't accept it. She asks why no one accepts her apologies, and Jacob insists she's not sincere. He accuses her of whining about how people treat her, while never acknowledging that other people can get hurt, too.

Josie walks to the bus stop alone and cries. A lady gives her a “Jesus Loves You” sticker, but Josie sobs that Jesus doesn't love her. After a few minutes, Jacob comes up behind her and gives her his hanky. As she sobs that she'd never hurt him on purpose, Jacob leads her to his motorcycle and straps her helmet on. Josie assures Jacob that John is just a friend. She's liked him forever, but she appreciates his passion and his openness.

Jacob sighs that Josie just wants to be “one of the beautiful people,” like John. But Josie says that Jacob's life is different. He's happy with his lot in life, and so he thinks everyone who's looking for something more is pretentious. With a sigh, Jacob gets on the bike and tells Josie they have a lot to teach each other. Then, he asks her to see [Macbeth](#) with him on Saturday night.

*Though Josie takes a step in the right direction here by acknowledging Jacob's feelings and the fact that she'd be concerned if he saw a movie with Arianne, she unwittingly offends Jacob by suggesting he wouldn't want to see [Macbeth](#) with her. This assumption shows that Josie doesn't think Jacob will ever be interested in something highbrow like [Macbeth](#).*



*Especially since this debacle with Jacob happens right after the walkathon, Josie can't help but realize that she's consistently misreading situations. She had no idea she was so popular, and it never occurred to her that Jacob would want to see [Macbeth](#). This reflects Josie's habit of making assumptions about people—including herself. And when Jacob won't accept her apology, it shows that her habit of making assumptions has real consequences. She can seriously hurt the people she loves by assuming things about them.*



*Remember that Josie characterized the lessons she learned as a result of the walkathon debacle as the moment in which her “emancipation” begins. This offers hope that for as emotional and difficult as this experience with Jacob is, Josie will also be able to learn from it, and it will help her continue to mature.*



*Josie shows here that she expects Jacob to look down on her because she's trying to elevate her economic class—and she's still making assumptions about how Jacob feels. But when Jacob only sighs at her, it indicates that Josie is probably wrong about these assumptions.*



## CHAPTER 22

On the first Sunday of September, Mama and Josie have a fancy lunch at a harborside restaurant to celebrate the start of spring. Josie announces that Sydney is the most beautiful city, though Adelaide was also lovely. She tells Mama that Michael isn't talking to her now after the walkathon debacle. Laughing, Mama says to remind him about the time he skipped school to see the Rolling Stones. Mama says she's thrilled that Josie and Michael are getting to know each other. Josie admits that she's surprised Mama isn't more possessive of her, but Mama says Josie is old enough to make her own decisions—though she threatens to shoot Josie if she wants to move to Adelaide.

When the food comes, Mama sighs that she wishes she could've given Josie a better life. Josie laughs that she complains because she's selfish, not because Mama's a single parent—and she thinks their family is perfect. Then, Josie shares that Michael said Mama was sexy when they were young. Mama laughs that this is because Michael loved girls, but she becomes sad. She says she was a problem for him. She was terrified to face her father. Mama doesn't know why Nonno treated her so poorly—or, for that matter, why he didn't seem to love Nonna either. He always treated Nonna like he owed her something.

Josie asks why Mama never talks about Nonno. Mama admits that she used to pray that Zia Patrizia and Zio Ricardo were her parents, even though she's always known that Nonna loves her. She says that Nonno forbade Zio Ricardo from taking Mama in when she got pregnant. Nonno called her names, hit her, and hit Nonna—and he never even met baby Josie. Mama can't believe he thought other people's opinions were more important than family. Josie says she'll try harder to appreciate Mama's sacrifices for her, but Mama assures Josie that Josie's the only person who has loved her "properly." She's disrespectful like all kids are.

After lunch, Mama and Josie get ice cream and eat it on the pier. Josie tells Mama about Michael's girlfriend and says that Michael didn't sleep with her when Josie was visiting. This, she believes, means he doesn't really love her. Mama suggests Josie leave Michael alone about his love life. Then, Josie says that Michael truly loved Mama. But Mama tells Josie that life isn't a romance novel and people fall out of love all the time. Josie, however, wishes life was a romance novel. She thinks of her parents together and is glad that she'll always be able to keep them connected, just because she's their daughter.

*Mama seems to take a relaxed view of the walkathon debacle; she implies that it's not odd for teens to skip something important if something more fun comes up. This may explain why Mama and Josie have such a strong relationship: Mama recognizes that Josie is doing normal teen things, even if they're obnoxious. Mama also wants to make sure that Josie knows she can make her own choices. By making sure Josie knows this, Mama seems to be trying to do for Josie what Nonna wasn't able to do for teenage Mama.*



*Mama doesn't define what she means by a "better life," but she could, like Josie, aspire to be wealthier and more influential. As Mama discusses her relationship with Michael and with her parents, it's clear that Mama has no idea why her parents treated each other the way they did. Again, secrets seem to be part of how the Alibrandi family functions, and Mama's confusion and the fact that she never had a relationship with her parents illustrates the consequences.*



*Mama backs up Nonna's assertion that Nonno was controlling, particularly when it came to the women in his family. The fact that he hit Nonna when Mama got pregnant suggests that for some reason, Nonno blamed her—or, perhaps, simply couldn't control his anger. But Mama also makes it clear that to her, what Nonno did was unforgivable. It's ridiculous, in her opinion, to be upset to the point of refusing to meet one's grandchild.*



*Josie may accept that she's selfish and disrespectful at times, but this doesn't mean she's going to stop—she purposefully needles Mama here about her relationship with Michael. Josie is still young and naïve; to her, it'd be great if her parents got back together after all these years and if Mama and Nonna could just make up.*



## CHAPTER 23

Josie is sitting with Nonna, looking at photo albums. She wonders if when she's old, she'll be as obsessed with the past as Nonna is. As Josie studies Marcus Sandford's picture again, Nonna quietly says that he loved her. When Josie asks if Nonna loved him, Nonna says she was married. Josie remarks that in her mind, Marcus exists more than Nonno does. Nonna admits that she did see Marcus again after Roberto died. After Zia Patrizia and Zio Ricardo moved to Sydney, Nonno took a faraway job so they could afford to move to Sydney, too. Nonna says she was alone for four months, including over Christmas.

Josie says that at least Nonna had Marcus as a friend, but Nonna says that back then, you couldn't be friends with men—whether they were Australian or Italian. In a whisper, Nonna says that one woman killed herself because of all the gossip. Josie is incredulous. But Nonna continues that Marcus still came to see her and even wanted her to stay with him. Nonna tells Josie about the “proxy brides,” who came to Australia to marry men they'd only seen in pictures. Some discovered that their future husbands were old. Others would have sex on the ship. Josie soaks up Nonna's stories and wonders who Nonna actually is. She also realizes that she's changing—she's no longer bored by Nonna's stories, and she thinks she and Nonna now have a good relationship.

Josie listens to Nonna talk about moving to Sydney to be near Zia Patrizia, and then moving to Leichhardt. In the 1950s, Australia was changing with all its new immigrants—and Josie thinks it's still trying to adapt to those changes today. She thinks of how far her family has come. But, Josie realizes, lots of people *haven't* changed. Some don't want to leave their insular worlds, while others can't. Josie vows to the reader that she's going to remember these stories from Mama and Nonna. She'll tell her children and her granddaughter one day. Her granddaughter can try to understand her, just like Josie is trying to understand Nonna now.

## CHAPTER 24

When Josie sees Jacob, dressed in activewear and waiting for her to get off the bus, she wonders if they'll ever fit together (she's still in her conservative school uniform). Jacob kisses her and asks after Michael. Josie says that Michael is convinced Jacob is thinking about sex, and Jacob says it's true. They discuss Michael's girlfriend and Josie admits that she's worried. She's sad he's going back to Adelaide, and she also thinks her parents should get back together. But that'd be weird, too; Josie has never had to share Mama before. Jacob notes that Josie should expect Mama to get married, since Mama is so beautiful.

*As the year progresses, Josie is changing. Now, Nonna isn't some unknowable, annoying old lady—she had a life before Josie was alive, and it was interesting and dramatic. By confiding in Josie, Nonna shows her granddaughter that she trusts her with this secret. It doesn't seem like anyone else in the family knows that Nonna continued to see Marcus after Roberto died; Josie is the only one who sees this side of Nonna.*



*Nonna makes it seem like she was one of a number of Italian women who were displeased with their husbands. It wasn't uncommon, she shows, for men to misrepresent themselves, and for women to find themselves in situations where they couldn't stand up for what they wanted. But what remains the same then and in the novel's present is the gossip. Nonna makes it clear that cruel gossip could even kill, depending on the circumstances—something that Josie can certainly understand, given how much stock she used to put into her classmates' gossip.*



*Nonna's stories help Josie figure out why Australia today is the way it is. Josie is struggling with many of the same things now that Nonna struggled with in the 1940s and 50s—just a slightly more modern version. Josie also sees now that listening about Nonna's stories gives her important insight into who Nonna is, and how her family got to the point where it is now. Storytelling, the novel shows, has the power to bring generations together.*



*Josie may be less concerned with keeping up appearances, but she hasn't totally given up on caring about them. This is why she wonders if she and Jacob will ever fit together. But because Josie has this thought while noticing the difference between her clothes and Jacob's, it suggests that she's still making assumptions based on superficial information. The fact that Jacob is wearing activewear doesn't necessarily preclude him from dressing up at other times, for instance.*



When they get to Josie’s house, Josie curses—Nonna is visiting. Jacob is glad to finally get to meet her, but Josie refuses to introduce him. She explains that she hasn’t told Nonna about him—Nonna will be angry, and Josie doesn’t want to jeopardize her relationship with Nonna now that it’s finally improving. Jacob is offended that Josie hasn’t told Nonna about him and points out that Josie is 17—and he insists that this wouldn’t be a problem if he were John. But Josie explains that no matter how old she is, Nonna will still care about who’s she dating. And she doesn’t want Nonna to stop talking to her.

Jacob is incensed. He shouts that Josie is just complicating his life. Josie shouts back that it’ll never work between them—Jacob can do what he wants because he lives “without religion and culture.” Jacob says that he wants to meet Nonna because then, he’ll know Josie isn’t ashamed of him. But Josie shakes her head. Jacob walks away. Josie doesn’t fully understand why she’s hesitating, though she does realize that Nonna won’t be impressed by Jacob. But she doesn’t want to lose Nonna—or Jacob.

So the next afternoon, Josie goes to Jacob’s house. She’s never been in his neighborhood before and is nervous, but she feels better when four girls in school uniforms smile at her. When Josie knocks, Jacob answers the door looking angry. He mocks her by saying he’s not ready to introduce Josie to his dad, who would be offended that he’s dating a non-Australian. They argue in the doorway until Jacob’s dad comes to the door and asks what’s going on. When Jacob introduces Josie, Mr. Coote drags Josie inside and says he’s ready to meet the girl Jacob keeps talking about. Josie realizes she’s not ashamed of Jacob. She realizes Jacob is a lot like Marcus Sandford, and she believes Nonna will see the resemblance.

Mr. Coote makes Josie a cup of tea and asks Josie what she’s going to do after school. Josie says she doesn’t know, but Jacob snaps that she’s going into law. Mr. Coote laughs that Josie’s awfully smart to be with Jacob. Jacob storms away to his room, so Josie has tea with Mr. Coote. Mr. Coote treats Josie “like a queen” and says that Jacob’s just upset because he’s so aware of his place in the world.

*While Josie might still be caught up in keeping up appearances, Jacob shows here that he’s changed a lot from the beginning of the novel. While he once resented having to meet Mama, he’s now eager to meet Nonna. But this presents a major dilemma for Josie, since she knows that Jacob isn’t the kind of boy Nonna wants her to date. So now, Josie has to choose between pleasing Jacob and pleasing Nonna.*



*To Josie, the fact that Jacob won’t respect her hesitation is a sign that he doesn’t respect or understand her Italian culture. And while this may have some truth to it—Jacob clearly doesn’t understand the reasons why Josie feels unable to introduce him—Jacob’s arguments are also valid: he doesn’t want to date someone who isn’t proud to be dating him.*



*Working up the courage to go to Jacob’s house shows that Josie now understands the necessity of swallowing her pride and apologizing. And her nervousness about being in a new neighborhood suggests that she still feels wildly out of place and as though the people who live here are fundamentally different from her. But the smiling girls show her this isn’t the case. Mr. Coote’s non-sense demeanor gives Josie insight into the kind of parenting Jacob gets. Seeing him on his own turf shows her again that he’s not so different from her.*



*When Mr. Coote says that Jacob is very aware of his place in the world, he seems to mean that Jacob is hyper aware of his economic status and his social class, just like Josie is.*



Josie excuses herself from the kitchen and finds Jacob in his room. She compliments a picture of Jacob's mother and then sits down and tells him he's good enough. After a while, Josie climbs onto the bed and kisses him. He's thrilled that she made the first move. They continue to kiss as Jacob puts his hands under Josie's shirt. They kiss and touch each other until Josie realizes she's going to lose her virginity with Mr. Coote in the next room. She asks Jacob to stop, even though he says he has a condom. Jacob says they'll eventually sleep together and it might as well be now, but Josie refuses. She insists she could get pregnant or "catch AIDS," and says she might stay a virgin until she's 20.

Jacob shakes his head and says that modern women don't have to be virgins, but Josie says that modern women also don't have to allow themselves to be bullied into sex. She refuses to have sex for the first time now, in her school uniform, just because Jacob says that everyone else is having sex. Josie also insists that she's not sure she and Jacob love each other. After a minute of silence, Jacob awkwardly says that he loves Josie a bit. Josie says she loves him a bit, too. Josie says they can still kiss. A while later, Jacob drives Josie home, and Mama seems to know what they've been up to.

## CHAPTER 25

Josie is confused, angry, and disoriented after what happened today at Mama's birthday party. She tells the story of what happened: Josie is at Nonna's with about 10 other family members. Josie's cousins and Zia Patrizia argue and joke about when Nonna and Nonno must've conceived Mama. Nonna would've gotten pregnant around Christmastime, and Zia Patrizia says that's proof that Nonno was a secret romantic—he was working up north at the time, so he would've had to come home a few weekends to see Nonna. Josie laughs with everyone else and then suddenly stops. Everyone else is still laughing and joking, but Josie notices that Nonna isn't.

Josie stays after the party and watches Mama leave. Mama is gorgeous and seems to glow—Josie believes that Mama deserves everything. After she's gone, though, Josie turns on Nonna and calls her a liar. Josie says that Nonna has policed the family's conduct for years and even kicked Mama out when Mama got pregnant—and yet, Nonna slept with Marcus Sandford. Nonna goes white, but Josie says she knows it's true. Nonna told Josie herself that she was alone for four months in the summer, over Christmas. Mama couldn't have been conceived on New Year's Day with Nonno away.

*But rather than go through with having sex and acquiesce to Jacob's pressure, Josie stands up for herself and what she wants. In this way, Josie seems to finally embody what Sister Louise wanted her to at the walkathon. Now, Josie is a person who's able to stand up for what she wants and believes is right, no matter how much her loved ones pressure her otherwise.*



*Changing times, Josie suggests, means that she has a choice as to when or if she has sex. And as she becomes more and more "emancipated," Josie suggests that she'll also become more comfortable advocating for herself. Finally, it's telling when Mama seems aware that Josie and Jacob almost had sex—but doesn't say anything. This implies that Mama trusts Josie to make good choices, and doesn't feel the need to make Josie feel bad for experimenting with her sexuality.*



*The fact that Zia Patrizia believes that Nonno must've been a "secret romantic" suggests that few people in the family were really aware of how abusive and cruel he was to Nonna. The way that Nonna has described her marriage to him, there wasn't much romantic about it. Though Josie has held up marriage as a goal at various points throughout the novel, Nonna and Nonno's marriage make it clear that being married doesn't mean a relationship is going to be happy or fulfilling.*



*Nonna seems to confirm that she slept with Marcus Sandford when she goes pale at Josie's accusation. With this confirmed, Josie realizes that Nonna has essentially lived her life as a lie. Even though Nonna did something totally outside the realm of what was socially acceptable, Nonna nevertheless has made it her business to make sure everyone else in the family follows the rules. In Josie's opinion, this is ridiculous and highlights how out of touch Nonna is.*





Nonna sobs that Mama was premature, but Josie notes that Mama was nine and a half pounds at birth. Josie shouts that Nonna had nerve to kick Mama out when Nonna slept with Marcus as a married woman. And Nonna always goes on about how Australians don't understand Italians and warns Josie not to get involved with them. By this point, Nonna is crying. Josie desperately wants her to say that Nonno *did* come home to conceive Mama, but Nonna says nothing. Josie shouts that she hates Nonna for what she did to Mama and from this point forward, she's never visiting unless Mama comes too. And Josie threatens to tell Mama the truth if Nonna complains. Nonna begs Josie not to tell.

Josie pushes past Nonna and runs outside. She's not totally sure why she hates Nonna and Marcus, especially since she once thought their story was romantic. But she realizes now that while their romance seems like a myth, Mama's life was real. She grew up with Nonno hating her for Nonna's transgression. Josie wonders what her life would've been like had Nonna married Marcus. Would Mama have not slept with Michael out of loneliness?

Suddenly, Josie's illegitimacy seems insignificant compared to Nonna and Marcus's affair. She knows if people were to find out, the family would be ruined. Josie suddenly doesn't want to be rich and famous. She wants to be normal. But this is impossible: Nonna, Mama, and Josie are all living lies.

## CHAPTER 26

After a week, Josie realizes she's not angry at Nonna anymore. She thinks it's funny, because she's spent all of high school concerned about what people are saying about her. But now, she's starting to doubt that anyone actually cares much about what she does. Mama and Michael don't seem to care what other people think, and Nonna has no right to care. Jacob loves Josie for who she is, as does John, and Lee and Anna are good friends. Josie figures that all the important people love her no matter what, so it's not worth caring about the gossips.

*Though Josie is upset about everything connected to this revelation, what really angers her is how Nonna's affair with Marcus affected Mama. This is because Josie is still so loyal to her mother and wants Mama to be happy. But because of the secrecy and shame surrounding Mama's conception, Josie realizes that Mama has missed out on a lifetime of happiness with her parents. When Josie threatens Nonna with spilling the secret, it shows how aware she is of how this could affect her family: she could ruin Nonna forever with this.*



*Nonna and Marcus's romance might have been real and have gotten Nonna through a tough time, but Josie still can't get over the fact that their romance doomed Mama to a miserable life. And because she was so miserable at home, Josie believes Mama chose to sleep with Michael—which doomed Mama even further when she got pregnant with Josie. In Josie's opinion, this is all Nonna's fault.*



*Again, Josie realizes how much power the gossip mill has. This secret could totally destroy her family's reputation, and simply having money or being famous won't dilute this secret's power. In this moment, then, Josie realizes that having money isn't going to solve all her problems.*



*Somehow, knowing that Nonna had an affair and conceived a baby through that affair makes Josie realize that what other people say about her isn't the most important thing. Instead, it's far more important to pay attention to how she comes across to her friends and family—and they all love and support her. By making this connection, Josie frees herself from having to care so much about what other people think.*



However, Josie is still a *bit* angry with Nonna. She's angry that Nonna lived a lie and couldn't have a relationship with Mama because of that. Nonna's made herself out to be the victim her whole life—but really, *Mama* is the victim. Josie realizes how she really feels suddenly one afternoon, as she, Anna, Lee, and Sera wait for a bus. Sera quips that Michael's job is "respectable"; people would talk if he was "just a laborer." Josie says her community wouldn't care and tells her friends to go on without her. She walks toward the city, crying—but she cries because she's starting to feel free.

Josie takes a bus to Nonna's place. On the ride, she realizes it's silly to think that old people aren't passionate and sexual—one day, Josie's grandkids will be disgusted that she had sex as a young person. When she gets to Nonna's house and Nonna answers, Josie hugs her. In the living room, Josie asks Nonna why she slept with Marcus Sandford. Nonna explains that she was young and beautiful, but Nonno treated her like a farm animal. Marcus made her feel special.

Josie sobs again and, when she regains her composure, asks what happened. Nonna says that Marcus visited and brought a letter. She'd already asked him not to visit, but Marcus touched her face and offered to take Nonna away from her horrible life. Josie notices how anguished Nonna looks recounting this story. Nonna says she pushed Marcus away, but then she stopped fighting. She realized that she wasn't fighting him—she was fighting *herself*. It didn't seem worth it to keep fighting her desires when Nonno was never going to make her happy.

Nonna looks away. With tears in her eyes, she says that Marcus treated her carefully and gently. He loved her—and Nonna says she was enraged because after the first time, she realized how poorly Nonno treated her in bed. They spent two months together, and Marcus begged her to leave Nonno. But Nonna says she couldn't. She was Italian and couldn't disgrace her family—and people were already talking. So she stayed with Nonno. Josie doesn't understand why Nonna didn't leave Nonno. Nonna says it was different back then. Today, you can get a divorce for anything. Back then, though, marriage was for life, no matter what happened.

*Josie's anger stems from the fact that she sees how Nonna's affair has affected everyone in the family, Mama most of all. Though Nonna has made everything about her for years, Josie doesn't think Nonna has any right to do so when her actions made life so miserable for Mama. Then, Josie's decision to abandon her friends shows her becoming more independent and more of a leader, as Sister Louise encouraged her to be after the walkathon—something Josie associates with growing up.*



*It's another mark of Josie's growing maturity that she can understand that Nonna was once a young, beautiful, sexual woman. It makes Nonna more relatable to Josie, especially since it makes it clear that Josie isn't the only one in her family who has made the "wrong" decision before.*



*Nonna tries to convey to Josie that when she chose to sleep with Marcus, she was choosing to let herself be happy. This in and of itself offers damning insight into how unhappy Nonna was in her marriage with Nonno—and how powerless she felt to change anything about her marriage. Her choice to sleep with him also suggests that Nonna wasn't as concerned about attracting gossip as a young woman as she is in her old age.*



*The threat of gossip might not have been as frightening when Nonna embarked on her affair with Marcus, but by the end of their two months, Nonna seems to have decided the gossip was something she needed to pay attention to. The simple fact that Nonna nevertheless chose to sleep with Marcus, though, suggests that the gossip mill might not be as good at policing people's conduct as Josie thinks—it didn't change Nonna's behavior. Rather, it just reminded her that as an Italian woman, she had responsibilities and couldn't run from them forever.*



Nonna says she knew she was pregnant before she got to Sydney and decided to say the baby was premature. She told Nonno she was pregnant, expecting him to be thrilled after 10 years of trying. Instead, he hit her, and Nonna was afraid for her life. She learned then that Nonno had had mumps as a child and knew he couldn't have children. He'd lied to her when they got married, knowing that she wanted to have babies. Nonna was furious and hit him in return. Josie, confused, asks why Nonna didn't leave. Nonna sighs that people are cruel, and Mama would've suffered most of all had Nonna married Marcus. Mama wouldn't have fit in with Italians or Australians.

Nonna explains that Nonno agreed to raise Mama as his own, provided that Nonna didn't embarrass him anymore. Josie says that both Nonna and Mama paid for it. She would've left. Nonna says that one day, when Josie has children, she'll understand what sacrifice is, but Josie asks how Nonna could stand never seeing Marcus again. Nonna says that she sees Marcus every time she looks at Mama.

Josie says she wishes Nonna would tell Mama the truth. Nonna explains that when Mama got pregnant, she saw the same hateful look in Nonno's eyes. She knew helping Mama would backfire, so she allowed Nonno to kick Mama out. She consistently backed Nonno up when he mistreated Mama, waiting for God to punish her. Nonna says her years without Mama and Josie were her punishment—and now, things will never be okay. Josie sobs that Mama loves Nonna, but Mama just doesn't understand why Nonna treats her the way she does.

Josie stays the night with Nonna. She realizes now that she barely knows Nonna—Nonna didn't follow the rules, didn't worry about the gossips, and took chances. This is why Mama is alive in the first place. It's a scary thought that Mama wouldn't be here if Nonna had followed the rules. Josie promises to keep Nonna's secret, and she asks Nonna to let Michael into her home again. That night, Josie cries and prays. She knows that two of the strongest women in the world love her.

*The revelation that Nonno knew he was infertile shows again how secrets are baked into Alibrandi family history. Nearly everyone in Josie's family has kept some deep, dark secret—and those secrets have, across the board, hurt people. As Nonna explains why she didn't leave, she essentially cites anti-Italian racism as her reasoning. Mama, she suggests, was able to grow up in a close-knit Italian community with Nonno as her father, but she wouldn't have had any such support if she'd been born a Sandford.*



*Nonna makes the case here that when a person becomes a parent, their priorities change: supporting their child becomes far more important than what they want for their own life. Josie isn't a parent yet, so this isn't something she can grasp. In her mind, a loving relationship is more important.*



*Josie now realizes that Nonna doesn't dislike Mama and didn't mistreat her on purpose. Rather, Nonna was constrained by Nonno and feared that showing Mama any affection or help was going to make things worse for both of them. Nonna seems to imply that she feared Nonno would've been more violent towards Mama than he was, given how he beat her when she revealed she was pregnant with Mama.*



*After learning Nonna's secret, Josie realizes that her assumptions about Nonna are all wrong. Nonna isn't a mean old lady who's vain and nosy—she's been trying to support and protect her family for years and, when possible, do things that also happen to make her happy. Josie becomes more mature as she realizes how relatable Nonna is, and she starts to feel more at peace in her Italian family.*



## CHAPTER 27

On the Sunday before exams, Josie finds herself watching Robert's rugby match. She tries to study, but every time someone scores, a hysterical fan knocks her book away. Suddenly, John appears and joins Josie. Josie explains that Robert promised to take her to the St. Anthony's graduation if she went to the match; John laughs and says that he and Ivy have been planning to go together since they were little. John says he wishes Josie and Ivy would be friends, and he wants them to be there for each other. Josie is confused and says she and Ivy are different, but John laughs and says that today, they're going to be "gay and lighthearted."

John and Josie are loud and excited for the rest of the match and afterward, John walks Josie home. As they walk, John asks if Josie is still dating Jacob. Then, John asks to tell Josie a secret: he had a big crush on her a few years ago, but was too afraid to ask her out. Josie laughs and says she had a crush on John then, too. They hold hands and Josie says that she hopes she and John will always be friends. Maybe, she suggests, she, Jacob, John, and Ivy should go out together if "[they] survive the HSC." John looks at Josie with concern and asks if she's planning to die.

Josie says she's just ready for this year to be over, even though she's terrified of what comes next. John tells Josie to just make her own decisions, like him. He proudly says he has a future planned for himself and he's not going to follow in his father's footsteps. John hugs Josie and swings her around; Josie says he's being ridiculous. She asks what John is going to do now that he's "emancipated," and he says he's going to do whatever he wants.

Josie thinks that everything seems to be working out well. By the time she gets home, she feels optimistic. She hugs John goodbye and feels better about studying law, since he'll be in the same law courses with her. That night, Josie spends two hours on the phone with Jacob and then thinks about her upcoming six years at university. She sleeps well, knowing she has a community to support her through it all.

*Though Josie's presence at Robert's rugby match may suggest familial loyalty, Josie also makes it seem like the St. Anthony's graduation is where all the wealthy, influential people are going to be—and this is backed up when John notes that he and Ivy are going to go together. It's perplexing when John wishes Josie and Ivy could be friends and support each other. It's unclear where this is coming from, since the animosity between Josie and Ivy seems to be common knowledge amongst their peers.*



*Especially after John said that he wants Josie and Ivy to be friends, admitting he had a crush on Josie here reads as somewhat concerning. Though John seems happy and lighthearted, the book frames him as being oddly lighthearted. Josie doesn't seem to pick up on this, though, in part because she's so focused on getting through her HSC exams.*



*Here, Josie confirms that she equates "emancipation" with growing up and being able to make one's own decisions. So she sees that John has become emancipated because he now understands that he doesn't have to do everything his father wants him to do; he can take control of his future.*



*Recall that earlier in the novel, John shared that he didn't want to study law—so it's somewhat odd that Josie still expects to be studying law with John next year, since he's decided he's going to make his own choices now. This suggests that Josie might be missing important information about John and what his plans for the future are.*



## CHAPTER 28

The next day, as Josie heads for her homeroom class, she finds Ivy crying. Josie thinks it makes sense that Poison Ivy is so upset over the first HSC exam—but instead, Ivy says that John is dead. Josie whispers that it's not true; she saw John yesterday—and people she knows don't die. Ivy says that John killed himself. Josie shouts that it's not true, but Ivy shouts back that her father wrote the autopsy report. Josie feels like she's in a trance as Anna steps up and tries to comfort Josie. Josie runs for the bathroom and vomits. She can't cry. She's terrified; she doesn't remember what John looks like. All she can think of is saying that they'd go out for dinner if they survived the HSC.

Josie takes her economics HSC and then calls Michael to pick her up. When she slides into his car a bit later, he assures her it's just an exam. Josie realizes that she's angry as she says that John killed himself. Michael is at a loss and seems desperate to get Josie home. When they get to Mama's house, Michael waits for Josie to get out. But instead, Josie says that John is a "bastard."

Josie says she used to hate being illegitimate. Kids used to tease her and she sometimes wanted to kill herself. Her friends' mothers wouldn't let their kids play at Josie's house. Australian girls would taunt Josie, telling her one day that she was Italian and the next day that she was Australian. Josie wanted to kill herself because she was so confused. In high school, kids would say that illegitimate students who can't afford school fees shouldn't be allowed in—and again, Josie wanted to kill herself. But John killed himself, and he didn't have any worries. He was rich and John's father is famous. How could he have done that?

Michael points out that wealth and social standing can't always make someone happy and then walks her to the door. When they're both inside, Michael calls for Mama and Josie falls into Mama's arms, sobbing. Michael tells Mama about John and Mama helps Josie to bed. Josie sobs that she should've seen how much John was struggling. Michael comes into the bedroom and tells Josie that John had to help himself, but Josie won't be consoled. She says she wants to know John in 10 years—not go to his funeral. Michael says all they can do is keep living. Josie asks Michael to stay and drifts off to sleep. Her dreams are horrible.

*Ivy reveals why John was so oddly lighthearted yesterday: he decided to escape the pressures his father put on him by killing himself. John, then, shows a possible consequence of growing up in an unsupportive family—it can feel impossible to make one's own life choices. For Josie, hearing that John is dead is traumatic. This is in part because she saw him yesterday and thought nothing of his behavior, but it also has to do with losing a person who made her feel secure. Her own social safety net is crumbling.*



*Handling the news that someone died is difficult for all sorts of people, but it's especially difficult for Michael in this situation because he's never had to parent Josie through a traumatizing event like this. They may be family, but they haven't been through thick and thin together yet.*



*Josie essentially makes the case that because of the racism, prejudice, and bigotry she's experienced, she'd have every right to fold under the pressure. Her life has been difficult, and she thinks it'd make sense to want to stop living it because of all she's suffered. John, on the other hand, couldn't have had any good reason to kill himself because he has everything Josie has ever wanted: wealth, prestige, and a father. This is Josie's first real indicator that wealth doesn't guarantee happiness.*



*John's suicide wasn't Josie's fault, but it's hard for Josie to accept that right now. Because he'd expressed suicidal thoughts to her before, she feels a sense of responsibility to him—and now feels like she failed him. But for as lost and upset as Josie is, she nevertheless has both Mama and Michael with her to help get her through this. They might not be able to make her feel better right now, but they can show her through their actions that they care for her.*



Josie wakes up in the middle of the night with a start. Then, she leaps out of bed and finds the paper that John wrote for her months ago. She tears it open and reads a poem he wrote. The poem is about nothingness, and the narrator says that he's "somewhere else now," "surrounded by people and the sky." Josie tries to think of what she wrote to John, but she can't remember—it must've been unimportant. She tears up John's poem and throws it out the window.

Jacob takes John's death very hard. One afternoon, as Josie and Jacob sit at the park, Jacob wonders why John killed himself. Josie has been having nightmares that Jacob died instead of John, so she clings to Jacob. She says she'd hate to be as smart as John was—it seemed like John knew everything, so he couldn't dream. Jacob says people need to have dreams and goals; maybe John died because he didn't have any goals anymore. Jacob says he wants to own a garage, and Josie wants to be a barrister. He asks Josie to promise to never stop dreaming.

At the funeral a few days later, Josie wants to scream at John—the church is packed with people who loved him. In the days after, Josie finds herself going several hours at a time without thinking of John. She knows that his mother, though, will never *not* think of him. Josie's teachers are beside themselves, since they think the pressure of the HSC killed John. But Josie thinks that John had known for years that he was going to die. It would make sense that he didn't choose to date either Josie or Ivy, out of fear of bringing them down with him.

As these thoughts swirl through Josie's head, she feels like she's flying one moment and then slamming into the ground the next. She remembers talking with John about their "emancipation." It's horrific that John had to die to become emancipated—but Josie thinks it's beautiful that she's living to be emancipated.

*John's poem is especially disturbing now that he's committed suicide—it seems possible that he's been seriously considering killing himself for months now. This shows Josie just how alone and lost John felt. As Josie thinks about what she wrote to John, she realizes that in comparison, her worries are unimportant. Josie essentially realizes that perhaps she's been worrying about the wrong things.*



*Even though Jacob resented John for his relationship with Josie, it nevertheless seems like Jacob thought John had it made and didn't have any reason to kill himself. In this way, he's much like Josie. When they decide that it's essential to have goals to keep living, by extension they decide that Michael was right: a person doesn't need wealth to be happy. Instead, they need hope.*



*As Josie thinks about John over the next few days, she realizes just how much pressure John was under at home. Again, while it's impossible to blame any one person for John's suicide, Josie sees that a major contributing factor to John's choice was the fact that he lacked support at home, and his wider community wasn't enough to fill in where his family fell short.*



*Saying that it's beautiful that she's living to become emancipated shows that Josie is rethinking her priorities. Now, staying alive and enjoying her life is her biggest goal—not becoming wealthy and influential.*



## CHAPTER 29

Speech night is very emotional. Josie receives three awards, and Ivy is made valedictorian. Josie and Ivy run into each other in the restroom and suddenly, Josie realizes that Ivy isn't Poison Ivy anymore. They smile at each other and Ivy says she only got valedictorian because she didn't want Josie to get it. She admits she's terrified; her father wants her to be a doctor. Josie realizes she has lots of things to say to Ivy, but Ivy speaks first and says that she feels lost without John. Josie admits that she's terrified to study law without John there. Suddenly, she remembers how John said that she and Ivy are similar. Josie says that they should get coffee sometime. They hug and cry for John.

Michael takes Josie for pizza afterwards. He tells Josie how proud he is and notes that Mama was ready to stand up and cheer for Josie. Josie says that doesn't count since Michael and Mama are her parents. Michael admits that when Josie gave her speech, she was "poetic"—just like Mama once was. He tells Josie that Mama wanted to study English literature at a university and be a poet. Josie insists it's not true, but Michael suggests that Mama never said anything because she didn't want Josie to feel bad. Mama didn't go to college because she had Josie, after all.

Exasperated, Josie asks why nobody does what they want to do. She vows to never let anyone stop her from doing something. Michael notes that Josie's young and people change; he wanted to be a pilot until he moved to Adelaide and became depressed.

Michael puts down his pizza and seems nervous. He says that he and Mama have discussed something, and Josie interjects happily that they're going to get married. Michael rolls his eyes and says that he'd like Josie to be an Andretti—he'd like to adopt Josie and have her take his last name. Josie slyly suggests he marry Mama so she can change her last name too, but Michael shakes his head. Then, in a serious tone, Josie says she needs time to think—and she calls Michael "Dad." She tries to decide if she cares about the Alibrandi name, aside from its connections to Mama and Nonna.

*When Josie realizes that Ivy isn't Poison Ivy anymore, it shows how much she's come of age over the course of the novel. Now, Josie realizes that Ivy might have money and influence, but she's just a 17-year-old girl like Josie. And the girls are even more alike than they may have thought, since they're both still grieving John's death and are struggling to figure out how to move forward without him. The coffee invitation, though, suggests that they'll be able to follow through on John's dying wish and get to know each other as adults.*



*Josie's response to learning that Mama didn't attend college on her account mirrors how Josie told Nonna earlier that Nonna should've left Nonno for Marcus Sandford. But while Josie, as a single young person, might be able to easily make that choice, both Mama and Nonna had their babies to think about—and as Nonna reminded Josie before, becoming a parent changes how a person makes choices.*



*Michael makes it clear here that while Josie has grown up and changed a lot over the course of the novel, she still has a long way to go. Her coming-of-age journey is ongoing—she'll continue changing well into adulthood.*



*By asking Josie to take his last name and allow him to adopt her, Michael demonstrates how he defines family. He and Josie won't truly be family, he suggests, unless they share a last name as dictated by tradition, and unless Michael is listed on Josie's birth certificate. Giving Josie the choice, though, is a way for Michael to acknowledge that Josie is becoming an adult and needs to be able to make her own decisions about her identity and who she accepts into her family.*



Then, Michael reveals that he's also bought a house nearby in Balmain. Josie is ecstatic and asks if Mama knows. Then, she asks about Michael's accountant girlfriend. Michael admits that they broke up, and Josie sarcastically says she's devastated. She asks if this has anything to do with Michael's "passion" for Mama. They eat the rest of their dinner and then, Michael drives Josie past his new house. It's small, but it has a second room for Josie. When Michael drops Josie off, Josie tells him she loves him.

When Josie walks in, Mama is watching TV. Josie sits quietly and wonders how to bring up the adoption and possible name change. Mama doesn't know about Marcus Sandford, she doesn't have any idea how meaningless the Alibrandi last name is. Finally, Mama asks if Josie's made a decision. Josie admits that she feels like she'd be rejecting Mama and Nonna if she became an Andretti. Mama assures Josie that it wouldn't be a rejection, but she'd still cry. Josie says that she thinks she'd like to change her name to make Michael feel better; he seems very guilty now about abandoning Mama. But, Josie says she doesn't want to be adopted—she doesn't need that to have Michael in her life. She and Mama agree that they're lucky to have Michael.

## CHAPTER 30

Jacob and Josie are broken up now; they have been for 10 hours and 30 minutes. It's official this time because Jacob actually came to tell Josie they were through. Josie goes back to tell readers how it happened: Jacob comes to see Josie, hugs her, and says it's not her fault—but they should take a break. Josie knows this means they'll never get back together. Shouting, she asks what she did, but he insists again that it's not her fault. Jacob says they're too different, since Josie is an "intellectual" and he's an "idiot." Josie got three awards at Speech Night, while he's not even sure he passed his HSC.

Then, Jacob admits that he's gone through life not caring about his grades—but Josie makes him feel like a failure for not doing well. He says again he doesn't want Josie to blame herself. Enraged, Josie insists that he's not proud of her; Jacob reminds Josie he still hasn't met Nonna, so she's clearly not proud of him. He suggests she's waiting for "a reincarnation of John Barton." Josie is shocked and reminds him that she's in mourning, but Jacob quips that he's not Italian and doesn't have to follow the cultural rules.

*Once again, Josie might be maturing—but she nevertheless still knows how to get on Michael's nerves and annoy him, like a child might. But the fact that Michael bought a house in Sydney also makes it clear that he's here to stay, both in town and in Josie's life. And he's willing to make space for her and make her feel welcome, which is why his new house has a room for her.*



*Though Josie might think the Alibrandi name isn't particularly meaningful because it doesn't accurately describe her family lineage, it's nevertheless meaningful in other ways. It connects her to the most important women in her life—and while Josie appreciates Michael's presence in her life now, Mama and Nonna have been there for Josie for much longer. Compromising with the name change but not the adoption suggests that Josie is learning that relationships don't need to be formalized (as through marriage or adoption) to be supportive.*



*Josie may have demonstrated her maturity in the last several chapters, but her intense reaction to Jacob breaking up with her shows that she's not finished growing up yet. When confronted with emotionally challenging situations, Josie's first instinct is to lash out angrily. It's interesting that Jacob breaks up with Josie because of what he sees as a huge difference in their abilities and ambitions. Josie has recently decided this sort of thing doesn't matter as much, which begs the question of why Jacob is suddenly so concerned.*



*Though Jacob struggles to actually make Josie believe him, he seems to be saying that Josie has shown him that grades are important and can be an indicator of a person's worth—and he wants to be worthy of Josie. Perhaps unwittingly, Josie helped Jacob come to a new way of evaluating himself and measuring value.*





Josie bellows that she's "too foreign" for him, but Jacob resents the implication that he's racist. He insists that he likes her culture and likes that she's different. He realizes now that he doesn't want to become a mechanic and marry someone just like him. Josie has shown him that there's more to life, and he doesn't want people to see him as a stereotype anymore. He wants to experience new things, but he needs to do it alone. Sobbing, Josie asks if things would be different if they'd had sex. Jacob says he does love Josie, but she was right to refuse sex—she'd probably then expect them to get married. Josie has to be sure of herself before she has sex.

Josie cries. She's embarrassed and notices that Jacob is crying too. He tries to hug her, but she tells him to go away. After he leaves, Josie spends the day crying. She cries with Mama and later, with Michael when he comes over. Mama and Michael assure her that it's okay to be emotional—and that someday, she'll get over it. Josie knows she's never getting over it. She'll never be in love again.

## CHAPTER 31

For five days, Josie resents that the sun is shining. She takes two naps per day and sits in front of the fan in her underwear. Finally, she agrees to go get pizza with Lee, Anna, and Sera to celebrate the end of exams. To console Josie, Sera says that she and Angelo aren't really together. Josie whispers that she doesn't want to talk about it. Anna reassures Josie that she and Jacob might still get back together someday, but Lee disagrees. Josie shakes her head and asks Anna how things are going with Anton. Anna says they're going to each other's formals, and her mother adores him. Josie sobs that Mama loved Jacob and apologizes for crying.

Sera pesters Anna for more details. Blushing, Anna says that she and Anton have only kissed, and he's told her she doesn't need makeup. Sera says that all men say that—and then they all puke at the sight of a woman without makeup. After an awkward silence, Lee says she slept with a guy last night. It didn't hurt, but it didn't feel good either. Lee explains that because of that, she can't see why sex is a sin since it wasn't pleasurable. Josie suggests that *guilt* is a sin, not pleasure. But Sera snaps that Lee shouldn't feel guilty—and maybe if Josie had slept with Jacob, they'd still be together.

*Jacob might not have been able to express himself very well in the previous passage, but here, he articulates far more clearly that Josie has showed him the value of looking at his life through someone else's eyes. As an Italian immigrant, Josie was able to help Jacob look at his life differently—and now, Jacob wants to continue doing that. He, like Josie, is looking for his "emancipation" so that he can continue to make his own choices and define his identity for himself.*



*Just as when John died, Josie is able to get through this emotional period thanks to her parents' support. They might not be able to get through to her that her pain will pass, but they can sit with her, comfort her, and show her that they care through their presence.*



*The breakup with Jacob is clearly changing Josie's life in every conceivable way. Losing her first great love shows Josie that relationships don't always last forever—even if they seem great and make her happy while they last. Though Josie isn't really in a place to consider it yet, this starts to suggest that relationships don't have to last forever to be meaningful. Indeed, Mama and Michael's relationship didn't last forever—but it was still a major defining relationship in their lives.*



*The vast differences in how Anna, Sera, Josie, and Lee are conducting their romantic relationships is another clue that relationships don't have to look a certain way to be valuable. Anna seems perfectly happy kissing Anton, while Sera seems to enjoy her more freewheeling relationships. But Sera also suggests that she sees sex as a tool women can use to keep men in relationships. Mama and Michael's—and Nonna and Marcus Sandford's—relationships all ending suggests this isn't actually true.*



Lee shrugs that sex probably wouldn't have changed things between Josie and Jacob, if only because Josie would be too guilty now to enjoy *anything*. Josie sighs that she might still be with Jacob if they'd had sex—but she'd also probably need a therapist. Everyone laughs and Sera insists that sex gets better. Anna worries that she'll get married and find out she's terrible in bed, but Sera says that's exactly why she thinks people need to have sex before marriage.

When the girls finish their pizza, Sera and Anna walk ahead and Lee hangs back with Josie. Lee insists that Josie did the right thing by not having sex with Jacob. She says Josie's different; she could make being a virgin look "trendy." They laugh about Anna's nervousness and then, seriously, Josie asks if Lee really thinks sex wouldn't have made a difference for her and Jacob. Lee sighs that losing your virginity is just a reason to go confession every year; it's not a big deal. But she acknowledges that it's a loss of innocence, and she wishes she was a little girl again.

## CHAPTER 32

Josie's "emancipation" didn't happen as she expected it would. She thought she'd wake up one morning feeling fantastic. Instead, though, Josie receives a birthday card from Jacob, throws it in the trash, and sobs. As she cries, she realizes she became emancipated a while ago. It happened gradually. She remembers how ostracized she felt at St. Martha's, until she learned at the walkathon how popular she was. And after learning about Nonna and Marcus Sandford, Josie also realizes that she doesn't have to make herself feel bad for her parents' choices.

As for the culture clash between Italians and Australians, Josie isn't sure when people will really understand multiculturalism. Multiculturalism, she believes, is just as Australian as rugby is. Now, she knows that she's Australian, with Italian blood.

Things have changed a lot at home, maybe because Josie has changed. She spends a lot of time with Michael—and sometimes, Mama joins them for dinner. Josie watches Mama and Michael talk easily to each other and wonders why they don't get closer. Michael and Josie fight a lot over silly things, but Josie loves him more every day.

*It is, of course, impossible to know if Josie and Jacob would still be together had they had sex. But again, Josie has seen it play out twice that sex doesn't guarantee a couple will stay together—and not staying together doesn't make a relationship less meaningful. Indeed, Josie's mourning a relationship that's over and didn't include sex; this on its own illustrates how important her relationship with Jacob was to her.*



*When Lee commends Josie for not having sex with Jacob, it's essentially one more person telling her that she's doing the right thing by standing up for her beliefs and not caving to unwanted pressure. This also shows that coming of age can look very different for different people. While Lee characterizes losing her virginity as the thing that catapults her into adulthood, Josie feels like standing up for her own choices makes her an adult.*



*At the beginning of the novel, Josie implied that her "emancipation" would happen when she was finally able to leave her restrictive family and Italian culture behind. But now, Josie realizes that being free and grown-up doesn't mean running from her family. Rather, it means accepting what she can't change, while also coming to a more truthful understanding of how she fits into a social situation.*



*Josie leaves readers with the hope that Australia will continue to move toward embracing its immigrant communities in the years to come—after all, accepting immigrants is part of Australia's identity as a country.*



*Part of Josie's emancipation entails feeling more at home with her family members. At this point, that means getting to know Michael—and it also means respecting that she doesn't know everything about Mama and Michael's relationship. They may have more secrets that prevent them getting closer to each other that Josie doesn't know about.*



When it comes to Jacob, Josie doesn't think it's her being Italian that's keeping them apart. They're just different and don't know what they want yet. She believes that Jacob has gotten more ambitious and she's gotten less ambitious—Josie isn't even sure she still wants to be a barrister. But still believes she's going to be with Jacob someday, so she pulls his card out of the garbage to save.

It's Josie's birthday today and she's no longer 17. She expected to learn "the truth" at 17—but Josie now knows that a person doesn't stop learning once they're no longer 17. She'll know who she is for her entire life. She believes in God, she believes in her world, and she believes in equality. There are a lot of bad things in the world, but she's not ready to give up on it. Josie looks forward to sitting with Nonna and Mama tonight. They're the biggest influences on her life.

Josie vows to do everything in her power to keep her family together. She knows people will keep gossiping about her, no matter what she does. Now, Josie knows that it doesn't matter who she calls herself—she's Josephine Andretti, she was never really an Alibrandi, she should've been a Sandford, and she might never become a Coote. But she knows she's Mama and Michael's daughter, Nonna's granddaughter, and a friend to Sera, Anna, and Lee. Josie realizes that the future she spent the last year longing for has arrived.

*After some time to grieve the end of her relationship with Jacob, Josie now sees that breaking up doesn't totally invalidate their relationship. They loved each other and taught each other important things—about life and about themselves. And this, the novel suggests, is what makes their relationship meaningful, not how long it lasted.*



*Now that Josie's 18th birthday has arrived, it's clear to her that her beliefs on her 17th birthday were somewhat misguided. She's not done growing up just because she's past the age of 17, though Josie does have a better sense now of who she is. With that better sense of identity, it'll be easier for her to move forward and make choices that align with her values.*



*More than anything, Josie has learned over the course of this last year that her family is more important to her than anything. And the specifics of everyone's last names don't matter as much as the support they show each other. Because of this, Josie lists the people who support her—her friends, her parents, and Nonna—showing that she prioritizes them most of all. They make Josie who they are through their support.*





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