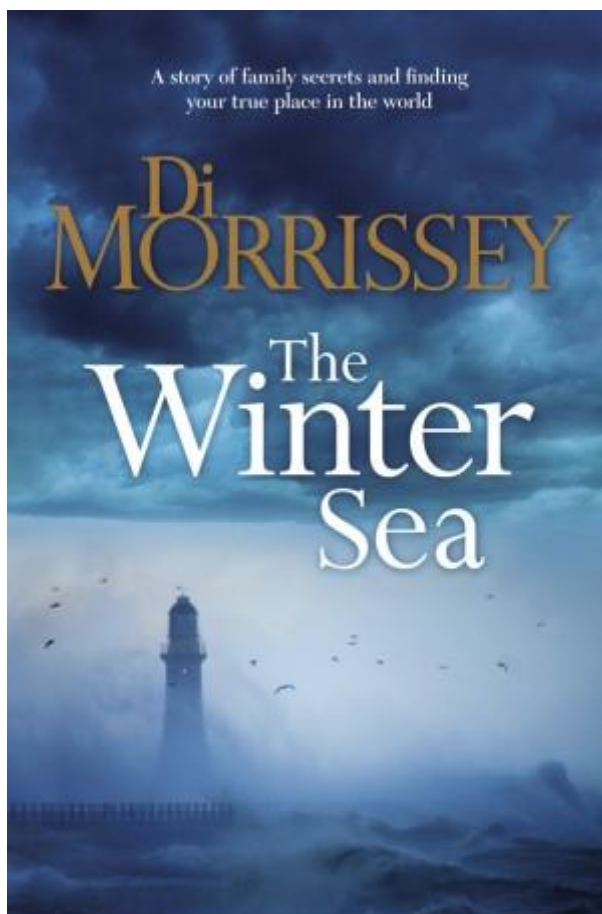


Reading Notes *The Winter Sea*

Blurb

With sales in excess of 2 million worldwide, Australia's favourite author, Di Morrissey, returns with her new bestseller. *The Winter Sea* is a sweeping saga of family, honour and secrets set on the beautiful NSW south coast. Escaping to the country from her unhappy city life, Cassie Holloway moves to the little town of Whitby Point. Here she meets the Aquino family, whose fishing business was founded by their ancestor, Giuseppe, an immigrant Italian, some ninety years before. Life for Cassie on the south coast is sweet as she sets up a successful restaurant and falls in love with Giuseppe's great-grandson Michael. But when the family patriarch dies, a devastating family secret is revealed which threatens to destroy her dreams. Cassie's future happiness now rests on her quest for the truth. A novel about finding your true place in world, *The Winter Sea* is a must read.



Plot Summary

At the turn of the twentieth century, Giuseppe Aquino has been born and bred on the rocky shores of the Aeolian Islands, off the coast of Sicily. From a young age he joins his father and brothers aboard the boats sailing the Mediterranean Sea, hunting the *tunno*. But in this age of war and poverty, Giuseppe sees no future for himself on the hard-bitten island and so he sets off to make his fortune in America. When his journey goes awry, he ends up on a boat to Australia, and there he meets the beautiful and spirited Bridie, an Irish girl, who is headed for Sydney.

In 2011, Cassie Holloway is on the 'right' track with an ambitious husband, a slick inner-city apartment and a high-flying career. When she discovers her husband has been unfaithful, she is thrown into turmoil. Questioning everything, she packs up and, upon her mother's advice, moves to the little town of Whitby Point, on the south coast of New South Wales. Settling into the sleepy seaside town, she is taken in by the friendly locals and adopts a runaway mutt called Bill. Her sense of self returning, she begins to date the local vet, Michael Philips (a descendant of Giuseppe Aquino), and inspired by the bountiful local produce she sets up a restaurant. When Michael's great-uncle dies, dire accusations are cast on Cassie and her late father who, unbeknownst to Cassie, was associated with the Aquino family. Devastated and confused, Cassie searches for the truth that connects her and Michael, back through the generations. *The Winter Sea* is a novel of passion, pain, love, loss and family.

- Cassie's high-flying city life is the epitome of the modern ideal of 'success' and yet it has led her to deep dissatisfaction. How did you relate to her journey? How common do you think her experience is in the wider community today?
- The novel details Giuseppe's captivity during the Second World War. What was your response to reading about how he and other Italian migrants were treated during this time?
- The novel contains many mouth-watering descriptions of local produce and food. Which passages were your favourite?

Themes

Family

At the heart of the novel is the Aquino family.

- Giuseppe's sons aren't all welcoming of Patrick and his mother struggles to accept Bridie. How understandable and justified do you think these responses are?
- Loyalty is a strong theme in the book. Could you understand Frank's reasons for being so upset upon the reading of the will?
- What did you make of Patrick's decisions to leave the Aquino family and never speak to Joe again upon his release from prison? Did you sympathise with Patrick or Joe?

Secrets

Several key strands in the novel revolve around major characters keeping and revealing secrets.

- Patrick finds happiness in his new life with Jenny and Cassie. What did you think of his decision not to tell them of his past?

- Patrick, Joe, Ricardo and Pietro make a snap decision on the boat to protect the family name. Do you think they did the right thing? Why/why not?

Characters

Cassie

- Cassie goes from living a fast-paced city life to the slower rhythms of life on the coast. Compare and contrast her two lives. Do you think she made the right decision to move to Whitby Point?
- Hal says: 'You and your mother. No wonder I never got a look in.' (p. 371) Cassie shares a strong bond with her mother, Jenny, and it's Jenny who suggest the idea for the restaurant. It's also Jenny who approaches cousin Ray to ask for the truth about Patrick. How typical is their mother and daughter relationship? What was your response to their relationship?

Giuseppe/Joe

- Giuseppe sets out to make his fortune in a land where he doesn't speak the language and knows no one. What is your own experience of starting again? How easy or difficult is it to start a new life?
- Giuseppe has several relationships over the course of the book including two marriages. First his marriage to the dependable Evalina who gives him his sons and makes his life comfortable. And then his second marriage to his true love, Bridie, whom his mother struggles to accept. What do you think makes a good marriage? What are the challenges and trade-offs in both situations described in the book?

Setting

The novel is set in the windswept seaside town of Whitby Point in New South Wales, as well as turn-of-the-century Italy and wartime Australia.

- 'She saw now that the apartment had symbolised her relationship with Hal. It was always about him and what he wanted.' (p. 109) How do the different settings influence the characters' decisions and the course of the story?
- 'The sea thrashed angrily onto the empty beach, flinging waves up against the rocky cliffs, and gnawed hungrily at the sloping dunes that protected the small lagoon lying behind the beach. Sea birds huddled at the edge of the lagoon, taking refuge from the howling winter wind.' (p. 105) The author is inspired by environment and natural beauty and the book features many strong passages describing the raw, natural power of the ocean and beach. Which passages did you enjoy most? Why?

Writing Style

- The book moves back and forth from the past to modern time, from Joe to Cassie's story and back again. How did these two narrative threads work, in your opinion?
- The author does a lot of research before writing her books. Did the descriptions of turn-of-the-century Italy bring that time and place alive for you? Which details stayed with you?

Final thoughts

- “Love me, love my dog,” Cassie said, laughing.’ (p. 416) Bill appears in Cassie’s life just as she is at her most vulnerable. What’s your experience of pets and animals providing solace in times of need?
- The book touches on the issue of sustainability and overfishing when Joe tries to convince the NSW government to restrict the size of the fishing mesh. Read through Chapter 10 again and discuss the many sides to this conflict.