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| Sommario/riassunto | <p>On a sweltering June night in 1959, Betty O'Malley died from lymphatic cancer, leaving behind an alcoholic husband and eight shell-shocked children - seven sons and one daughter, ranging in age from two to fifteen years. The daughter, Carole, was thirteen at the time. In this poignant memoir, she recalls in vivid detail the chaotic course of her family life over the next four years. The setting for the story is Hungry Hill, an Irish-Catholic working-class neighborhood in Springfield, Massachusetts. Grief-stricken over his wife's death, Joe O'Malley, a mid-level executive at an insurance company, spends his nights on the living room sofa listening to the sentimental ballads of Frank Sinatra, a tumbler of whiskey always nearby. At first Carole struggles to pull her father back from his world of teary, booze-soaked memories. Slipping into her mother's role, she "holds the fort" and works at keeping her seven brothers in line, straining to give the shaky household a semblance of normalcy, while also trying to keep her own dreams alive. She is drawn to the high school world of dances, academic honors, and the excitement of her first kiss, but the weight of apprehension for her family sets her apart from that carefree social scene. Fifteen months after his wife's death, Joe takes a new wife - Mary Ford, a bristling and difficult woman. While Joe passes off Mary's outbreaks of rage and physical abuse as "nerves," the short-lived marriage turns into an</p> |

endless merry-go-round of cocktail parties and hotel bars. Before long, Joe's health collapses and he dies, leaving his children orphaned for the second time. Carole O'Malley Gaunt recounts this sad story with remarkable clarity, humor, and insight. The narrative is punctuated by occasional fictional scenes that allow the adult Carole to comment on her teenage experiences and to probe the impact of her mother's death and her father's alcoholism.
