

Are You in the House Alone? Study Guide

Are You in the House Alone? by Richard Peck

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Are You in the House Alone? Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	4
About the Author.....	5
Plot Summary.....	6
Prologue.....	8
Chapter 1.....	9
Chapter 2.....	11
Chapter 3.....	12
Chapter 4.....	14
Chapter 5.....	16
Chapter 6.....	18
Chapter 7.....	20
Chapter 8.....	22
Chapter 9.....	24
Chapter 10.....	25
Chapter 11.....	27
Chapter 12.....	29
Chapter 13.....	31
Chapter 14.....	33
Characters.....	35
Objects/Places.....	42
Setting.....	45
Social Sensitivity.....	46
Literary Qualities.....	47



[Themes..... 48](#)

[Themes/Characters..... 51](#)

[Style..... 52](#)

[Quotes..... 55](#)

[Adaptations..... 57](#)

[Topics for Discussion..... 58](#)

[Essay Topics..... 59](#)

[Ideas for Reports and Papers..... 61](#)

[Further Study..... 62](#)

[Copyright Information..... 63](#)



Overview

Are You in the House Alone? offers a realistic and unsensationalistic account of the horror and loneliness typically endured by rape victims. Gail Osburne narrates her own experience of being targeted for rape, suffering the humiliating violation, and facing the unsympathetic reaction of a misjudging public.

The book demonstrates the faulty perceptions Americans have of rape victims and addresses the sexual, medical, legal, and social aspects of the crime. Gail realizes that others suspect her of bringing the attack upon herself and finds that old friends no longer know how to relate to her. She also makes the mistake of withdrawing from her friends and peers into a tortured state of solitude.

Although the novel depicts the usual procedures of the police, medical professionals, and lawyers who handle reported rape cases, Peck's work is more than a fictional docu-drama. The story engages the reader emotionally, describing interesting characters and portraying a slice of life in which the rape is the central but by no means the only problem. Peck's novel is true to life in that it shows a community of believable people, all living with their own problems that lack neat, comprehensive solutions.

About the Author

Richard Peck was born on April 5, 1934, in Decatur, Illinois. He attended Exeter University in England, graduated from DePauw University in Indiana in 1956, and served in the U.S.

Army as a clerk at a field post near Ansbach, Germany. After his tour of duty, he attended graduate school and taught English at Southern Illinois University, receiving his master's degree in 1959. He taught English in a suburban high school in Northbrook, Illinois, from 1961 to 1963, worked as a textbook editor for Scott, Foresman Company from 1963 to 1965, and then taught English at Hunter College and Hunter College High School in New York City. In 1971 he resigned from teaching to become a full-time writer. Nonetheless, he still sees himself as a teacher, as he writes in an April 1983 article in *Horn Book*: "I resigned, but teaching isn't a job you ever quit. It may be something less than a livelihood, but it's far more than a job. You go to your grave turning life into lesson plans." Peck's popular novels address such subjects as teen-age pregnancy, rape, suicide, and grief. He frequently speaks at workshops and conferences for teachers and librarians, and writes articles for various library and educational journals. He has won several awards, including the Friends of American Writers Award in 1976 for *The Ghost Belonged to Me* and the Edgar Allan Poe Award for *Dreamland Lake* and *Are You in the House Alone?* His novels often appear on "Best Books of the Year" lists by the American Library Association and *School Library Journal*.



Plot Summary

This work of fiction could very easily be a depiction of the life of any young girl. The story chronicles the life of a young girl, who is experimenting with sex with her teenage boyfriend. The conflict in the story arises from a disturbed individual that stalks Gail. After watching her for some time, the stalker begins to write vulgar notes and leaves them for her in her locker at school. Gail's best friend, Alison, tells her to ignore the notes and pretend that it never happened, but the notes frighten Gail. One night at her regular babysitting gig, the doorbell rings, and, without thinking, Gail opens the door to find her friend's boyfriend looking for her. Gail lets him in, but the unthinkable happens. The rest of the story deals with the aftermath of the assault and how the victims and community cope.

The story begins as sixteen-year-old Gail tells about the secret place that she and her boyfriend, Steve, would seek privacy for intimate pleasures. Gail describes the lake house and the rock that juts out high above that provides a beautiful view of the lake below. On the other hand, it also provides a clear view of people and their activities, which Gail realizes in looking back, is probably what happened.

Delivered via a vulgar note, Gail finds out that someone is watching her and has been watching her. The stalker knows of her sexual activities and tells her in his note what he wants to do to her, will do to her, and he will make her do to him. Gail receives two notes that frighten her to the point of paranoia. Instead of seeking help from her parents and the police, Gail turns to the new counselor at school but does not get any assistance. Finally, the stalker reveals his identity and begins to assault Gail. Gail tries to fight him off, but the stalker ends up using the weapon on her after she misses hitting him. Then, he rapes Gail.

When the authorities hear the name of the rapist, they all advise her not to pursue prosecution and to hire an attorney. The stalker's family is high society and very influential in the community with deep roots. This family has hired and appointed many people, so these people fear retribution or their jobs, and are not necessarily interested in doing what is right. As a result, Gail does not press charges.

The crime does not end there, however. Either intended for Gail or not, the rapist strikes again, this time leaving the victim in the ditch but leaving proof at the scene. Tire tracks reveal the type of car and the victim regains consciousness and speaks to authorities. All of a sudden, the rapist disappears from the community and his family retreats into seclusion in their own home. Rumors abound about what happened to the rapist, but the family keeps the truth a secret. One thing is certain--the main character accepts the past and moves forward with her life despite the controversy, pain, and difficulties she encounters.

Class society, rape, and promiscuity are themes running throughout this book. Teens explore sex in a consensual manner at the beginning but the story ends with non-consensual sex taking place. First, the rapist attacks his girlfriend's best friend. Then,



later in the story, he attacks again, just as experts had predicted would happen, once someone rapes. In the first instance, there was no evidence to support a rape charge, especially given the circumstances for the *accused* rapist. However, in the second attack, the attacker's vehicle left tire marks in the soft shoulder, tracing the car back to him. In addition, the second victim was forthright in her conversations with the police and unafraid of the consequences. Questions arise stemming from the first victim's silence wondering if her silence kept the attacker at large. It leaves the reader questioning why Gail did not go public if not for punishment for Phil, for the safety of other girls.



Prologue

Prologue Summary

This work of fiction could very easily be a depiction of the life of any young girl. The story chronicles the life of a young girl, who is experimenting with sex with her teenage boyfriend. The conflict in the story arises from a disturbed individual that stalks Gail. After watching her for some time, the stalker begins to write vulgar notes and leaves them for her in her locker at school. Gail's best friend, Alison, tells her to ignore the notes and pretend that it never happened, but the notes frighten Gail. One night at her regular babysitting gig, the doorbell rings, and, without thinking, Gail opens the door to find her friend's boyfriend looking for her. Gail lets him in, but the unthinkable happens. The rest of the story deals with the aftermath of the assault and how the victims and community cope.

The author begins the story with a recounting of the time between spring and fall when the weather was warm enough to swim in the evenings in Powdermill Lake. One particular evening in October, the lightning was powerful to the north of them in the Connecticut hills and raindrops fell on the lake. Gail swam out to Steve, who was already in the lake. As Gail turns around, she notices the big stand of rock that juts out of the earth. Looking back, she wonders if anyone was up on that watchtower rock watching her and Steve.

Prologue Analysis

This introduction provides some background for the plot and the characters. By including this brief, two-page introduction, the author introduces Gail and Steve. The two are young lovers that seek privacy during the warm months between spring and fall. The author describes the setting around the Pastorini cottage, including the watchtower rock formation just above the cottage. This flashback reveals Gail questioning in her mind if she and Steve were alone that night, or if there was someone watching them from the rock tower.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Preparing for a dinner in the prestigious Lawver residence, Gail is arguing with her mother about her clothing choices. Mrs. Osburne gives in, and Gail wears a casual outfit. When Gail can fuss with her appearance no longer, she walks to the bottom of the stairs and waits for Steve to arrive. It is clear that Gail's parents do not "approve" of Steve, so Gail is ready for him when he knocks on the door. The two walk to the Lawver residence in anticipation. When Steve and Gail arrive, Phil lets them in and greets them with an unusual awkward moment.

After Alison Bremer dated Phil for two years, Mr. and Mrs. Lawver have decided to accept Alison socially. To mark this turning point, the Lawvers have instructed their son, Phil, to invite another couple to celebrate the occasion. With damask dinner napkins and finger bowls all the way to having a cook and serving attendant, an air of sophistication and snobbery fills the Lawver's household. Gail watched as Alison mirrored Mrs. Lawvers' mannerisms and matter of speaking, answering Mrs. Lawver's questions with precision and an air that Gail had not seen before. Gail also noticed that Phil was looking at her across the table through the chrysanthemums. Gail realized then that she did not like Phil.

When the dinner was over and Steve and Gail left the Lawvers' mansion, or mausoleum as Steve likes to call it, Steve easily convinced Gail to head over to the lake. Rebelling against her mother, Gail goes with Steve while recalling her mother's question about whether she would find Steve interesting if he were from a similar background.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter puts a group of people together that do not normally run in the same circles. Here the author mixes a family from the prestigious and wealthy aristocrat with their plumber's son, and two "transplanted" families from New York, otherwise known as "outsiders." As Gail and Steve approach the Lawver estate, the two feel the pretentious atmosphere as is apparent by Steve's comment about the "serf and barbarian." Both Steve and Gail know they are not in the same "class" as the Lawvers, but neither wishes that they were either. When Mrs. Lawver greeted Gail, she made a condescending remark about her father's "grueling" commute. At that moment, Gail was extremely glad that she had held her ground with her wardrobe. If Gail had worn what her mother had selected for her, she would be dressed the same as Mrs. Lawver in a black skirt with a dressy blouse.

The teenagers drink tomato juice while the Lawver parents drink sherry. Phil's mother is reluctant to offer the teenagers anything to drink that might actually suggest that they



were older, more mature individuals. This choice of drink is ironic as Gail recalls seeing Phil stumbling drunk from drinking scotch as she watches him pour the tomato juice.

After the dinner ends, Steve and Gail go their separate way. As usual, the two teens seek alone time at his family's cottage on the lake. On their way to borrow a car from Steve's brother, Steve brings up the subject of Gail's birth control pills. This questioning foreshadows what is to happen at the cottage. The other foreshadowing happens at the dinner table when Gail realizes that Phil is watching her through the chrysanthemum. Not only does Gail realize she does not like someone watching her but also that she does not like Phil.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The chapter begins as Gail is trying to find a movie to watch on TV that she has not already seen before. Gail is babysitting at Mrs. Montgomery's house while Mrs. Montgomery enjoys a night out with other "previously married" people. The phone rings as Gail is walking down the hall. When she answers, no one replies, so she hangs up. As Gail enters the living room, the phone rings again. Gail returns to the hall to answer the phone, but again the caller greets her with silence. To calm her nerves, Gail reaches for her green stone while she dials Steve's number. The two teens talk for a while until they cannot think of anything else to say. At 12:30 a.m., Gail senses movement behind her and jumps. Mrs. Montgomery has entered the house and startled Gail. Mrs. Montgomery pays her three dollars extra to repair the necklace that broke when Gail jumped and then drove Gail home saying that her color was not good, and it was too late to call Gail's father for a ride. Just as Gail enters her home, she hears her phone ringing, but it quits ringing as she runs toward the phone in the hall.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The foundation is set early for the beginning of someone watching Gail and her activities. When the phone rings twice late in the night at Mrs. Montgomery's house, Gail gets spooked and gets the feeling that someone is watching her. When Gail returns home, the phone is ringing as she walks in the door. In her mind, Gail tells the caller that has hung up before anyone answered, "Yes...I'm home now, whoever you are" (p. 30).

Steve's quest for knowledge and his educational level are prominent in this chapter. Through Gail, the reader learns that Steve is an accomplished reader and knows the classics. Steve is interested in classical music, as well as classic literature. In fact, when Steve gave the stone heart to Gail for her birthday, he wrote an excerpt from *Othello* on the scroll that he wrapped the gift in. Not knowing anything about *Othello*, Gail found a copy and began reading it. Gail admits that she tries not to "keep up" with Steve and his pursuit of knowledge but at times feels inferior to him because of their intellectual differences.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The morning is cooler than usual indicating the end of the Indian summer. Gail nearly puts on her down jacket but instead chooses to wear just the wool scarf around her neck. As she walks to school, she notices her father's car at the gas station. Gail thinks to herself about how her father should nearly be in the city by now but does not have enough time to go over and visit with him, so she continues on to school. As she walks to school, Gail points out the architecture, landscape, and information about the residents of the area. When Gail arrives at school, she begins to open her locker. This action recalls a memory of when Steve shared his feelings towards her via a poem left in her locker. Gail remembers that she had read the poem, then thinking the sender probably meant to deliver it to Alison's locker, which was next to hers. Alison was always getting boys' attention. As Gail put it, "pride and hope" kept her from putting the poem into Alison's locker. A few weeks later, Gail found some plastic white flowers in the vent of her locker, reminding her of the poem she had received just a few weeks earlier. Feeling someone's presence and attention on her, Gail turned around to find Steve Pastorini watching her. Later that day, the two walked home together learning as much about the other as possible, trying to make up for lost time. Gail describes their relationship, how it started like brother and sister, then lovers, to where it is today, which she is unable to label. Gail also talks about the time she first went to Steve's house and met his parents. Gail remembers that his parents treated him with utmost respect and were very quiet, but publicly proud, of their son and his academic achievements.

As Alison appears at her locker, Gail is jolted into the present time and Drama class but then remembers how she and Alison first met. Gail was eleven and in not happy about the move from New York City to the "boonies." Alison was the first person she met at school and Alison tolerated Gail's nostalgia for the city. It was time to get to Drama class. Both girls hoped to finish their geometry assignment in Drama, but when Alison tried, Madam caught her and told her in her monologue to the class to put the geometry away. More pointedly, Madam told Gail that mathematics was not for her.

Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter defines Madam Malevich's character. While being eccentric, Madam also is very much in tune with the students. During one of her regular monologues to the class, Madam points out her knowledge of what the kids do when they are not in school, and she is very accurate. Despite her age and her refusal to hold any theatrical productions, her tenure at the school seems to be because of her past connection to the late, senior Mrs. Lawver.

Using flashback, Gail describes the Pastorini parents in this chapter. Steve's mother is meek and quiet, while Steve's father is downright proud of his son and is not afraid to



show his pride in front of strangers. In fact, Mr. Pastorini even admits that while his son did not need help from him, he did not understand any of Steven's math once Steve began algebra.

Also using flashback, Gail recounts how she and Steve first met and came together when he delivered a poem to her in her locker. Then, following up on the poem a few weeks later, delivering flowers to her locker and waiting for her, Steve introduced himself. Gail tells about how their relationship grew and changed.

When Gail sees her father standing casually at the gas pump with the attendant, she considers it odd. Normally, he would be halfway to work at this time. Not having enough time to go over and talk to him without being late for school, Gail decides to talk to him tonight when she returns home. The hint about him standing at the pump like "he had all day" alerts readers that his normal schedule is off and something else unexpected may happen.

Also foreshadowed in this chapter is the fact that Gail believes Alison to be her best friend, but there is proof through her comment about "someone you once thought was your best friend" (p. 36) that the two girls' friendship will end.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

At lunch, Steve and Gail are arguing about whether Madam Malevich was somebody or not before she was a teacher at their school. Steve is annoyed that Gail wastes her time with that clown of a teacher. Prepared for this argument, Gail throws out a quote from Voltaire about his take on history, which lessens the tension between the two. Gail then changes the subject to their frequent fights and disagreements. Gail addresses the fact that Steve has incredible drive, and that Gail has much less and perhaps that is causing tension. Steve tells Gail that he does not like to see her "fall in with Alison and the rest of them" (p. 44). Just then, Alison approaches and Steve gets up to let her have his seat. Steve does not say another word to Gail but addresses Alison when she asks him if he is going to watch the squash meet after school. The girls exchange comments about Steve's mood and his sex appeal, which then gets Alison admitting to Phil's New England Puritanism and her thinking about other guys.

Alison and Gail attend the squash meet in which their school beats the private Exeter Academy. Phil and his partner win their match, too. Throughout the entire match and even afterwards, Phil does not look up to see Alison. This lack of attention leads Alison to confide in Gail that Phil has her either on a pedestal or in a closet. Alison questions the point of it but then silently both girls realize the point of it.

As the girls approach their lockers, Gail notices the note sticking out of the vents in her locker. The note clearly has her name written on it in block letters. Unfolded, it was an entire page of words. The first few words started with "I'M WATCHING YOU..." and the words were so graphic, so disgusting, so repulsive, Gail began looking at the perfect margins, the neat lettering, anything but the content. Alison grabbed the note out of her hands, and Gail took off running for home. Gail ran all the way home and decided that she could not just run in the door as she had when she was younger and hurt. Instead, she slowly approached the house and went inside. Gail noticed that everything looked in order. Thinking she was alone in the house, Gail was surprised to see her mother sitting in the unlit living room holding a drink. Gail's mother invites her into the living room. When she sees that her daughter is upset, Mrs. Osburne immediately puts her own problems aside and asks what Steve has done to her.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The plot begins to develop in this chapter. Gail and Steve are having frequent disagreements and fewer happy times. Neither participant can just break off the relationship. Alison also admits in this chapter that things are not so perfect in her romance with Phil either. As is typical, the two girls commiserate and listen to the other's complaints. Perhaps the most exciting event in this chapter takes place near the end when Gail discovers the note in the vent of her locker, targeted specifically for her.



In an ironic statement, the private academy loses its squash match to the public school. It is ironic because the natives of Oldfield Village consider themselves "upper crust" society members, yet their children attend the public school.

Romance is a prominent theme in this chapter. Both young couples are involved in romantic relationships. Both are experiencing disappointments within those relationships. Looking back at it, Gail wishes she had ended the relationship with Steve at the lunchroom.

When Gail returns home from school, upset about receiving the note, she walks in to a house where something is different. When Gail's mother invites her into the living room, it is quite apparent that her mother is going to tell her about the news of her day when she realizes that Gail is upset and tends to her daughter's needs first.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Gail allows the tears to fall and instantly her mother thinks that Steve has caused them. When Gail cannot tell her mother about the note, she tries her best to tell her what is wrong with her has nothing to do with Steve. Instantly, her mother begins to wonder if they are having sex, but she cannot get the words out to ask. Gail asks her mother not to ask her that. Just then, Gail's father honks the Volvo's horn announcing his arrival. Just before he entered, Gail's mother emptied the contents of her glass into the kitchen sink.

Later in the week, her mother begins a night class at Danbury, which happens to fall on the same night that her father has an architectural meeting. As in the past, they leave Gail home alone, usually a luxury for Gail. Not this night, though. Gail was a mess as soon as they left. Gail imagined her silhouette for whoever was watching her to see as she went from room to room so she went around checking all windows carefully approaching the windows from the side. As if Gail imagined it, the phone began to ring. It rang repeatedly until she finally went to her parents' room to answer it. There was no one there and the caller only said one word before hanging up. It was a word that she had heard before, knew what it meant, and had seen it often on walls. Gail could not sleep. Gail heard her parents come home, unlock the door, and then her mother came into her room and asked her why she had left the phone off the hook. Gail appeared to be sleeping and did not respond.

The next day, Gail tries to talk to Alison about the note, but Alison brushes it off. Feeling alone, Gail begins to think about her fears and does not know which is worst: the next letter or the upcoming babysitting job at Mrs. Montgomery's house.

That Saturday night when she arrives at the Montgomery house, Gail checks on the children and then checks all the windows and doors to make sure they are locked. Gail avoids the room where the curtains are transparent and turns on the TV. Gail watches it awhile before she realizes that the volume is too low to hear it. Subconsciously, Gail had adjusted the TV so that if the phone were to ring, she would hear it. Sure enough, the phone rings, repeatedly. It rang thirty times that she had counted and then it stopped. Shortly thereafter, it rang again and when it did not stop, she finally answered it. Gail heard music in the background and realized that it was Mrs. Montgomery checking in on her. Immediately, Mrs. Montgomery asked if everything was OK. Gail thought she had convinced her that things were OK, but Mrs. Montgomery told her she would be home early that night, before midnight. Gail forgot to ask her if she had tried to call once before.

Coach Foster and Mrs. Montgomery arrive thirty minutes later, and Mrs. Montgomery tries again to find out what is bothering Gail and tells her that Gail can always talk to her if she needs someone. Coach Foster reluctantly takes Gail home. The fact that he



knows where Gail lives bothers her. When she arrives home, Gail hurries to get out of the car and thanks him only after he has shut the door and locked it. Gail watches him leave and waits. Waiting for whomever it is that is watching her to do it and get it over. Gail admits that she hates the feeling of being afraid of everyone. It reminded her of the rooms they have in psychiatric wards for people that are afraid of everyone. At the same time, she longed for the safety of that room.

The chapter ends when Gail announces that a week later she received the second and final note.

Chapter 5 Analysis

When her father arrived home honking, he walked in the back door. Gail realized that her family kept this door unlocked at their home also. After her parents leave her alone one evening, Gail goes around locking all twenty-eight windows in their house. Then, it dawned on her to lock the doors as well.

Just before her father opened the door, Gail's mother ran from the living room to the kitchen just in time to dump the drink she had been sipping in the living room. She obviously, has either a current drinking problem or a past drinking problem.

Alone: this theme reappears in this chapter. Not only is Sonia Stanek alone, but now Gail, despite her boyfriend Steve and best friend, Alison, feels alone. Alison will not acknowledge the letter and will not speak of it. Gail does not feel that she can discuss the letter with her mother and will not even consider telling Steve about it. Gail's mother also feels alone, turning to her friend "the drink."

Fear enters the story as Gail admits her fear of being afraid of everyone. Since Gail does not know the identity of the writer of the note, she fears and suspects all. This fear made her question Coach Foster when he gave her a ride home after babysitting, and it is the fear that makes her go around checking windows and doors.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

In school, Gail is so distraught and distracted that she can hardly focus. In geometry class, the teacher calls Gail to the board to do an easy problem and Gail fails. In the hall, Gail noticed Buddy McEvoy and stood there drinking at the fountain trying to eavesdrop on his conversation. In English class, Mr. Baumann read a poem aloud. As the teacher read the second stanza, Gail thought about the girl in the poem and told her to bar the door, protect herself, and get help. Then, Gail realized she must have said these things aloud as the entire class were looking at her (except for Alison), and Mr. Baumann had asked her if she had something to say. Without looking up, Gail shakes her head and Mr. Baumann continues reading the poem.

At her locker, Steve approaches Gail from behind and unintentionally frightens her. When Steve asks her what is wrong, Gail tells him everything. That is, until Alison approaches. Steve and Gail agree to meet the next day after school.

Instead of heading to school, Gail gets on the train to the city. Gail decides she needs to confide in a parent and absolutely does not want her mother to know, although by telling her father, her mother will learn about it. Gail, nearly a stranger to the city now, finally locates her father's office. When she musters the strength to ask the receptionist for Mr. Osburne, the receptionist, Connie, tells her that he no longer works at the firm and has not for nearly a month. After a friendly discussion, Connie tells Gail where she might be able to find her father. Gail walks to the nearby park and sees her father sitting on a bench with a newspaper in his lap. Gail notices that he is not reading the paper and remembers what Connie had told her about men not being able to fail and decides to continue walking by, keeping her father's secret. On her walk back to Grand Central Station, Gail is approached by a man who makes a vulgar gesture. Filled with hatred, Gail is not afraid and continues walking.

When she arrives at the station, Gail expects to find her mother, but she also encounters Valerie Cathcart. Valerie starts immediately asking where Gail was all day and about the school calling her mother alerting them that she was not in school. Instead of being polite, Gail vents her frustration and other pent-up emotions onto Valerie, knowing that she would have to apologize later.

Gail and her mother return home and her mother follows her into her room. When Gail tells her mother that she went to New York City to talk to her father, her mother realizes that Gail knows her father is unemployed. The two discuss the need to let her father continue to think that Gail does not know about his job loss. Gail takes this opportunity to tell her mother that she plans to go out with Steve the following night because she does not want to stay home alone. The conversation then switches to birth control. Gail's mother insists on learning the details on how, when, and why Gail chose to do



such a thing. Just then, the phone rang. Gail's mother went to her bedroom to answer the phone and repeatedly said "hello."

Chapter 6 Analysis

When is lying right? Is it right to lie to a child about a job loss? Is it right to lie to parents about sexual activity? These questions arise in this chapter. Mr. and Mrs. Osborne decide to hide the truth about Mr. Osborne's job loss from their sixteen-year-old daughter. When Gail discovers the truth, she puts her needs behind her father's need to protect his ego. Her mother says the reason is to protect Gail from unnecessary worry.

Teen sex is also prevalent in this chapter. As is common in most households where a teenage daughter is new to sexual activity, the mother is upset when she learns about it. In this case, Mrs. Osborne needs to know all the painful details: when she started the pill, how she got them, and who prescribed them. As is common for mothers, they want the best for their girls and do not want them to be hurt. This is true with Mrs. Osborne. The topic is uncomfortable for both, but Gail handles it more easily than her mother does.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Steve and Gail go to the library and find it closed. The two teens decide to go to Friendly's for ice cream. On the ride there, tension filled the air. Steve tried to touch Gail, but she naturally recoiled due to her heightened sense of fear and discomfort. The sweatog gang arrived, brought the level of energy and volume up quite high and threw insults at the studious couple. Steve and Gail left shortly thereafter and drove the country roads. Gail announced that a car was following them and had been for several turns. Steve does not believe it but then suddenly turns the car sharply into a country lane and turns the lights off. The car that had been following them stopped and waited. Steve appeared as nervous as Gail. Finally, the other car accelerated and went roaring past them just as they reached the end of the lane.

The next day at school, Gail approaches her locker just as Alison was removing a note from her locker. Gail tells Alison to hand it over and Alison reluctantly does. Gail puts it between two of her books in her backpack. Gail held back her emotions until she nearly gagged but was able to control herself. Sonia walked by in an outfit that was "over the top," but Alison hardly even looked at her so focused she was on Gail.

That afternoon the Arts Assembly gathered in the auditorium. Instead of showing a live performance, they showed a silent film. After the film ends, Sonia walks onto the stage and explains to the students and teachers about the silent film age and how acting was different then to accommodate for the silence. Sonia tells the audience that their school is honored to have that very actress, who appeared in the film they just saw, as one of their own teachers: Dovima Malevich. The audience begins to applaud, but Madam does not get up to speak. Finally, first with help and then proudly upright alone, Madam Malevich reaches the stage and briefly acknowledges her past and the recognition of the day before weeping and leaving the stage. Madam moved the audience, most of them anyway, to tears.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Gail gets close to telling her family and Steve about the note but again she holds back. Then, she gets the second note. As cool and collected as she can, Gail reads the note and puts it in her backpack trying to let on that it does not bother her when, in fact, she is almost violently sick. The second note contains much of the same language and graphic detail that was in the first note. Gail does not share with anyone her plans on how to handle this situation.

The silent movie that the school shows for the Arts Assembly is a 1920s silent film showing a beautiful girl trying to escape from a masked man. The man chases her and she runs but can never escape him. The parallel between the subject of the movie and



Gail's current situation is unnerving. Finally, the girl's terror turns to passion, Cupid shoots his arrow at the moon, and the movie ends. When the man was chasing the girl, Gail was completely uncomfortable and afraid. Gail knows that no matter where the girl goes, she cannot escape the man. Gail feels the same way with the writer of the note. Gail does not know who the writer is and never knows where he is, or if she can ever get away from him.

Madam Malevich's dignity returns with the showing of the silent film that she starred in during her younger days. When Sonia Slanek speaks on stage and finally introduces the star of the film as their teacher, the entire student body claps in support and recognition for her work. By addressing the student body on stage, Madam Malevich accepts their praise and honor, thereby redeeming her dignity and validity at the school.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Finally, Gail seeks help from an adult, even a professional, about her problem. Unfortunately, Gail does not get the help she needs. At first, the counselor thought it was a set up, a practical joke on the counselor. When the counselor realized that it was a real problem and that Gail was visibly upset, Miss Venable leaves her alone while she takes the problem to her senior counselor, Mr. Sampson. Neither of the counselors provides any practical ideas on how to handle the situation or help resolve it. Alison leaves Gail with Miss Venable and goes to her study hall period. Fortunately, the stalker does not make any calls the rest of the week. By Saturday night, the storm hit hard.

Gail is again babysitting Mrs. Montgomery's children. Shortly after Mrs. Montgomery and Coach Foster left, Gail was apprehensive about being alone so long. Gail realized that though it seemed an hour had passed, only ten minutes really had. Afraid the phone would ring Gail decides to call Steve. When his mother tells her that Steve is helping his father with a delivery and will be home late, Gail tells her to have him call no matter what time. Then Gail adds that she wants him to come over to Mrs. Montgomery's house, no matter what time he gets home. Almost immediately after she hung up the phone with Steve's mother, the phone rang again. Gail answered, receiving the phone call she dreaded. "ARE YOU IN THE HOUSE ALONE?" Gail was silent, and then in the background, she could hear a sick laugh. Gail went upstairs to check on the children and stayed with them awhile before realizing she did not have the strength to last the entire night. Just as she was trying to dial the number for the Previously Married Club, the doorbell rang. Instantly, she thought it was Steve and ran to the door and unchained the lock without first checking to see who was there. Gail opened the door, but it was not Steve.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Gail looks back at the incident and realizes that every decision she made was a poor one. The person she entrusted to help her provided no help at all. The Dean of Boys offered an idea but it was not logical. The reader questions why Gail has chosen not to tell her family and her boyfriend. When Gail makes the comment about the flashback, she does not mention how she would do it differently and leads the reader to question what she might have done. Perhaps one of the things she would have done differently is to realize that her thinking was illogical. Steve could not possibly be at the door, since he was out of town with his father and not returning until late. Had she thought about this, surely Gail would have checked to see who was at the door before she flung it wide open.

Both Mr. Sampson and Miss Venable provide no real help to Gail with her dilemma. Miss Venable acknowledges the seriousness of the problem and acknowledges the



disturbing note but cannot provide any comfort or solutions to resolve the problem. Counselor asks whether her parents know about what is going on and neither one considers or mentions reporting this to the police. Clearly, this is a case of harassment but they do not treat it as such.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Phil Lawver is at the front door at Mrs. Montgomery's house. Only mildly surprised to see him, she greets him as a friend. Phil asks for Alison, but when Gail tells him Alison is not with her and asks why he thinks she should be there, Phil shows some concern and asks to use the phone. Not feeling threatened, Gail walks over to the fireplace and watches the clock. Just as she had heard it before, Gail hears the same voice ask her the same question "ARE YOU IN THE HOUSE ALONE?" Gail turns to see Phil standing casually with his hands in his back pockets. Gail is astounded to realize that it was Phil all along. Phil then admits that he has been watching Gail for a long time, even when she and Steve were at the lake, even their most intimate moments. Gail tries to talk to Phil and he gets upset. Phil moves closer to her and with a swift move with his foot, he flips Gail to the floor and is on top of her before she can try to get off. Phil begins ripping at her clothing, tearing her shirt off and ripping off her necklace. Then, Phil pulls her jeans down. Phil's sweaty body is on top of her. Gail fears screaming will wake the children and frighten them but then looks over her shoulder to see the fireplace toolset. Gail grabs the poker unbeknownst to Phil. Gail knows she has just one chance to hit him. Instead of hitting his head, Gail hits his shoulder. Phil takes the poker from her and hits her in the temple with it.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Gail does not fear Phil even when he appears at Mrs. Montgomery's house uninvited and unexpected. Gail does not fear him when he asks to come in and use the phone. Gail begins to fear him when she hears him repeat the question about being alone in the house. As the situation grows more tense, Gail fears not only Phil but for her safety.

Phil, growing up in a family lineage focused on power, exerts his power over Gail. Up to this point, Phil used his power anonymously. In this chapter, when he unveils himself to her, Phil exerts his power over Gail physically. Phil takes Gail to the floor and then begins to undress her in his rage. When Gail's attempt to hit Phil in the head with the poker fails, Phil once again exerts his power over her when he takes the poker from her hand and brings it down against her head.

Foreshadowing is only a hint in this chapter. When Gail looks at the clock on the mantel while she waits for Phil to make his phone call, she notices the time is nearly midnight. Steve is expected to come home around midnight and Gail has asked him to come to Mrs. Montgomery's house. If Steve gets home and gets the message, he may be arriving shortly. In addition, there is hope that Mrs. Montgomery and Coach Foster will arrive home soon, too.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Gail wakes in the Oldfield Hospital. Gail thinks she hears a man crying but can only see a doctor that introduces himself as the emergency room doctor. When Gail admits that she is fully awake, Dr. Reynolds talks to her and examines her. Gail realizes that although she does not remember the incident, she knows that Phil raped her after he hit her in the head. Dr. Reynolds performs a pelvic exam on Gail while the nurse standing by tries to console and comfort her. Dr. Reynolds also gives Gail some Valium so she can rest. Before she fell asleep, Gail overheard the doctor mention to the nurse something about sperm and calling the police. Gail thinks to herself that it is about time that someone brings the police into this matter and then drifts into sleep. When she woke up again, Gail realized the man crying earlier was her father. Her father came into focus, and Gail tries to exchange small talk with him, but he wants to know if she is up to talking to people yet, including the police. When Gail realized that her mother had been up with her all night, she began to cry.

When Gail woke up again from another Valium-induced sleep, she overheard people talking in the room again. This time, the discussion was about venereal disease and the cultures that the doctors were requiring. Gail musters up the strength to sit propped up on her elbows and announces to the room that she does not need the cultures. When Gail tries to explain that she does not believe that he has a disease, she names Phil Lawver. The entire room starts questioning her, but Gail holds her ground. Mrs. Osburne tells everyone in the room not to tell anyone until "they're sure" (p. 118). Wanting them to believe her and her lucidity, Gail explained to them that before the rape, Phil had followed her, watched her, called her, and written filthy anonymous notes to her. That was the point when Dr. Reynolds encouraged her family to hire a lawyer. Everyone in the room left, and Gail was alone. Gail looked at the plaque at the foot of her bed and read it, realizing that the bed and all the furniture in her room had been a generous donation from the Lawver family.

The next morning, Gail realizes that her body is sore and without even needing to look, knows that she has bruises all over. Gail looks over to see Steve slumped in a chair across the room. Gail watches him before Steve realizes she is awake. Steve tries to tell her that he is sorry that he was not the hero and rescued her before anyone could harm her. Steve also tells her that he feels useless. Gail is glad to have him there with her but encourages him to go to school but to try to keep the incident quiet for now. As he leaves, Steve asks Gail what he should tell Alison. His comment brings on uncontrollable, hysterical laughter. Later, Gail wonders what and how she will tell Alison.

The police chief enters Gail's hospital room, but the day nurse practically throws him out. When the day nurse slips out, the chief and his deputy return and insist on talking to Gail, even without her parents there. Gail begins to tell the men about how the rape happened, but they were not taking her seriously. In fact, the police officers were quite



insulting. That is when Gail reaches for the nurse button. Just as Gail is about to reach it, the chief decides to start over and take her seriously. Throughout her telling of the crime, the deputy does not write anything down on the paper. When Gail is finished, the police chief asks her to give up the name of the boy. Gail tells them the name of the boy and the deputy writes it down. The police chief instructs the deputy to strike it, then leans over to Gail and questions her intentions to accuse Otis Lawver's son. Again, Gail tells him that Phil raped her. Afraid of what is sure to come, the chief advises Gail that she is "just asking for trouble" (p. 127).

Chapter 10 Analysis

Crisis can either bring a family together or tear it apart. In this case, Gail realizes that she wants not just her father with her but her mother as well. In fact, in the hospital room when she sees them both and sees how much they care and are suffering, Gail wants to be with them all the time and never leave their sight. Gail has not shared why she has so much resistance towards her mother but whatever the reason, it no longer seems to be important.

Bucking powerful people is fearful and controversial. When Gail names Phil Lawver as the rapist, the entire room is silent. Then, Dr. Reynolds encourages the family to hire an attorney, knowing that the road from here on will be bumpy and difficult. When Gail tells the police the name of the rapist, the police chief questions her and warns her as well. Gail stands strong in her belief she will not avoid naming Phil because of his family's position within the community. It is ironic, though, that Gail is in the hospital room furnished by the Lawver family. Gail would not be in that room had it not been for Phil Lawver himself.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Gail begins screaming hysterically to "get them out of here" (p. 128). The room comes alive with doctors and nurses and the police leave. Gail tells the doctor that she does not want Valium again and that she will calm down on her own. Ted tells Gail that the police will not pursue arrest against Phil Lawver because he is a Lawver. Then, Ted continues to explain to Gail the odds stacked against her including her medical records of being on birth control, of not being a virgin, that she opened the door and let Phil into the house, and, mostly, if it were not Phil Lawver as the accused. Ted also explains that if the charges went to trial, then the opposing counsel will seek to ask her about her sexual activity. If opposing counsel finds that she has had sex with anyone prior to the alleged rape, then the trial would be over, and she will lose. If the opposing counsel portrays Gail as "provocative" or "immoral," she will undoubtedly lose.

Mr. Naylor then tells Gail that the situation gets worse before it gets better, and she needs to consider why she did not seek help aside from Mr. Sampson. Gail realizes then that not only did others close her out but she also sealed herself away from them. Ted finally tells Gail that the decision to press charges against Phil Lawver is entirely her decision. and he will do whatever she wants.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Ironically, after Phil rapes Gail and she is recovering in the hospital, Gail is the one that ends up reassuring those close to her. For example, when she heard her father crying, Gail tried to use humor to reassure him that she was OK. When Steve arrived, he felt guilty for not protecting or rescuing Gail from the bad guy. Gail had to reassure him that it was not his fault. Mrs. Montgomery feels guilty because she knew that something was not right with Gail leading up to the night of the crime. Mrs. Montgomery also felt badly because the rape happened in her home while she was out enjoying herself. Like the others, Gail reassures Mrs. Montgomery that it would have happened anyway, anywhere and that it was not her fault.

There is more irony in this chapter. First, the police do not believe that it was a rape at all. When they start to believe Gail, as soon as she mentions Phil Lawver's name, the police chief immediately tells her she is just asking for trouble. The police are afraid to press charges fearing the power of the Lawver family. Phil Lawver has assaulted Gail physically and sexually and the police are not helping her to bring him to punishment. The class system is interfering with the rights of an individual. As the attorney explains it, the Lawver's win either way, so there is not much hope for Gail to get the justice she deserves.

Interestingly, the laws at the time of the writing of this story are different than they are today. Today, if there is a sexual assault, the hospital automatically calls in the police and questioning takes place as soon as possible. Some states have even enacted rape shield laws that prevent the sexual conduct or activity of a woman from discussion at trial to protect the victim and to focus on the crime.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

With the cat out of the bag about Mr. Osburne's unemployment, he no longer goes into the city every day. The chapter opens to a conversation Gail and her father are having while he puts the storm windows on the house. Gail's father mentions that Gail cannot go out anywhere looking like she does when she points out to him that the doctors would not have released her had she not been well enough to go home and resume life. Gail's point is, if she was to stay in bed, the doctors would either have kept her at the hospital or told her so at discharge. Gail understands that her father is trying to protect her, though. Gail mentions that neither the rape nor Gail's future are mentioned, but she hears her parents speaking downstairs late into the night. Gail then tells her mother that if she does become pregnant from the rape, she would have an abortion. This thought is so appalling to her mother that her mother simply dismisses the thought and tells Gail not to think like that. Just then, as saved by the bell, the florist arrived with a beautiful and expensive floral arrangement for Gail. While Mrs. Osburne is distracted at the door, Gail opens the card to see Phil Lawver's signature. Immediately, Gail hides the card just as her mother brings in a guest.

Madam Malevich arrives to check on Gail. Madam tells Gail and her mother about all the different rumors floating around at school, especially the one that Valerie Cathcart is circulating. While Mrs. Osburne fetches tea, Madam and Gail have an intimate discussion. Gail shares with her the truth, and Madam admits it was what she feared. That is when Madam shares with her that she was raped many times, most of them on film or for a film. Then, Gail tells her the name of the rapist. Madam does not flinch, only tells Gail that she is not surprised. When Gail tells her that the law will not punish Phil for this crime, Madam sagely advises Gail to stop seeking justice. Madam also tells Gail and her mother that it is important to talk and listen and not to bury it under the rug. Madam advises the two that they cannot run from this "thing," especially Gail. Before Madam leaves, she tells Gail that she will send someone that cannot run from this "thing" either. Gail leads Mrs. Osburne to believe that Madam gave her the beautiful flowers from the most expensive florist in town.

Steve came to Gail's house every day to drop off her books and assignments, but Gail's mother did not allow him in. The only other visitor was Alison, and Mrs. Osburne allowed her in on Friday afternoon. When Alison enters Gail's room, Gail is in bed resting and the room is dark. The two make small talk until, finally, Alison asks what happened. Gail makes a passing comment including the fact that she was raped, Alison only responds to ask if that was supposed to be funny. Gail then tells Alison that she already knows what happened and asks her what he has told her. Alison tells Gail that Alison is not talking about Steve, but Phil telling Alison. Then, Gail accuses Alison of knowing all the time who was stalking her, even when the first note appeared. When Gail tells her the truth, Alison denies that it is true, calls Gail a liar, accuses Gail of being jealous, and using Phil to get out "trouble" that she has gotten into with Steve. Gail hears someone



outside her bedroom door but does not mind that her mother is eavesdropping because Gail is learning how important and critical witnesses are to her defense. Gail tries to tell Alison that she is worried about what Phil might try to do to Alison, but this only infuriates Alison. When Alison claims that Phil does not even know Gail exists, Gail tells her about the expensive flowers he hired the florist to deliver and showed her the card. Alison threatens Gail that if she attends school or tries to "spoil" anything between her and Phil, Alison will tell Mrs. Lawver about her accusations, and the Lawvers will run her and her family out of town. When Gail replies to Alison, mostly to herself, that she already wishes they were gone, Alison yells, "So do I!" Alison storms out of the room, stepping out of the way of Mr. Osburne, who had been the one outside of the room listening.

Chapter 12 Analysis

It is quite different how times have changed. Again in this chapter, Gail's parents keep her "hidden" away from everyone - her friends, her school, and even her teachers (except Madam Malevich). Instead of getting her out and thinking about other things, Gail's family keeps her almost barricaded in the house. This attempt at protection prevents Gail from healing and moving forward. It is customary in the era in which this book takes place to sweep things under the rug. Just as Alison told Gail earlier, "it never happened." Now, Gail's family is taking this attitude about the rape.

The issue of teen pregnancy is always one filled with controversy. At the time, teen pregnancy had an especially negative image, always more so for the girl than the boy. When Gail mentions to her mother that she would have an abortion if she became pregnant because of the rape, it gets the reader thinking about a new issue. While abortion is still a hotly debated issue; at the time, it was not only immoral, but also extremely unacceptable in the eyes of most citizens. The right to a *legal* abortion only came in 1973. This story was published in 1976, just three years after the Supreme Court decided in favor of making abortions legal because of due process and the Fourteenth Amendment in *Roe v. Wade*.

Friendships often have their difficulties, and this particular friendship between Alison and Gail suffers greatly. Gail thought that Alison was her best friend, but Alison recognized Phil's handwriting on the notes, but did not tell Gail. A good friend would also be there right after an accident or tragedy. Alison did not come to visit until after Madam Malevich sent her. When Gail tells Alison what happened, a true friend would be sorry and empathetic, not defiant and belligerent. The friendship was really over when Gail realized the moment it had been Phil all along tormenting her with the vulgar notes and Alison kept that information to herself. The friendship was officially over when Alison reacted the way she did in Gail's bedroom.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Gail's mother enters Gail's room and tells her that she has written a letter to Aunt Viola. Aunt Viola is Mrs. Osburne's wealthy aunt. Gail's mother has been trying to devise a plan for the future for Gail with her best interests at heart. Unknowingly, Gail has also been contemplating her own plans for the future. Gail listens while her mother explains her idea about seeking charity from her aunt for a boarding school. Gail refuses the idea and tells her mother not to send the letter.

Gail decided at that moment that the future begins immediately. Gail went downstairs to eat dinner with her family. Gail was not going to allow them to bring her dinner up to her on trays any more. When Gail entered the kitchen, her father appeared to be leaving, but her mother was hanging on to his arm. Gail's father was intent on paying a visit to the Lawver residence, but both Gail and her mother persuaded him to stay home. The three of them stayed in all night and watched TV to occupy their time. The next morning, Gail goes to school. Gail's mother tries to prevent Gail from going but loses the argument. Gail's father drives her to school, and, after the first bell rings and kids start into the school, Gail kisses her father and then heads into the school.

Gail walks down the hall feeling like the students made way for her. Alison sees her from afar but ignores her. At lunch, Steve is by her side and sits with her, only to tell her that Phil and Alison are directly behind her. Gail knows that Steve still does not know anything about the rapist's identity or Alison's involvement. Gail only tells him that the argument with Alison was terminal. Slowly, Gail started to fit back into the groove of school. Not wanting to use Steve, Gail intentionally ignored him during Tuesday and Wednesday lunches, but was getting very lonely by the end of school on Wednesday. Things started to unravel further when Gail decides to drop by Mrs. Montgomery's house to resume her babysitting job on Saturdays.

While it was difficult to look at the living room, Gail knows that this is something she has to do in order to move on. Mrs. Montgomery leads her into the kitchen, and when Gail volunteers her services for her job, Mrs. Montgomery refuses. Mrs. Montgomery tells Gail that she just cannot stop thinking about what happened, does not want a "reminder" of it, and tells Gail not to take it personally. As Gail leaves, Mrs. Montgomery goes back to the living room and fetches something. When Mrs. Montgomery returns, she hands Gail the green heart and broken chain. Gail walks away, clutching the necklace, oblivious to the external world, until she realizes too late that the car pulling up next to her is Phil Lawver's MG.



Chapter 13 Analysis

Recovering emotionally from a rape takes time and patience. Now, the most often expressed advice to victims of rape is to find a trustworthy friend, person, or seek a rape crisis group for help. Talking and listening are two requirements in order to heal. Forgetting about it only exacerbates the problem. Neither Gail's family nor Mrs. Montgomery want to discuss the rape. When Mrs. Montgomery does discuss it with Gail, she chooses to exclude Gail from her life, stating that she cannot think of it and needs to forget about it. Stunned by the rejection, Gail walks away not paying attention to her surroundings, despite her claim that she has learned to be careful.

Knowing she needs to attempt to return to normalcy, Gail returns to school. Alison sees her but keeps her distance, except during lunch when she and Phil sit directly behind Gail. Gail would not know they were there if it were not for Steve asking her what happened between her and Alison. Gail is still wondering how to treat her relationship with Steve, so she alienates herself from him during lunch because she does not want to "use" him, when really, she should depend on him and lean on him - if not as a boyfriend, then just as a friend. Ironically, when Gail needs the strength and support of friends, the one girl friend she had is no longer a friend and she is taking herself away from Steve.

Gail finds herself even more alone when she seeks to reinstate her Saturday evening job. When Mrs. Montgomery refuses her offer to return, Gail finds herself feeling even lonelier. Unfortunately, the person that approaches her at this low point is the last person she wants to see: Phil Lawver.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Casually, as if there was no violent history between them, Phil asks Gail if she wants a ride home. Gail walks faster as if she might outpace the sports car. Gail tells Phil to keep away from her, but he does not heed her advice. As Gail walks by Mr.

Wertheimer's house, she picks up one of the many rocks in his yard. This rock was baseball size and without consciously thinking about it, Gail brought it down hard onto the hood of the MG. Then Gail took her arm sideways and forced the rock onto the windshield. Instantly, with his damaged vehicle, Phil Lawver sped away not even stopping for the corner. Gail continued walking. Gail felt better knowing that she could do something to hurt him.

Saturday night was the special film festival in honor of Madam Malevich. Gail attends the event with her parents, arriving after they have dimmed the lights. The Osburne family finds three seats available and sit down. As the event ends, Gail spies Sonia Slanek at the front row putting on her yellow slicker and red scarf, just like hers.

The next day, a touring couple found Sonia in the ditch outside of town, presumed dead. The newspaper even reported the incident and described that under her slicker, the girl's attacker had torn off her clothes. An expert cited that the tire tracks on the side of the road were tires of an MG. Someone reported that Sonia was speaking to officials. It was after all this information was public that Steve approached Gail at her locker, grabbing hold of her arm. Steve asks her if she knew who hurt her and if she had identified him. Gail tells Steve that she did inform the police but they chose to ignore her. When Steve asks Gail if she believes that the same person that hurt her did the same thing to Sonia, Gail turns to Alison and asks her for her opinion. At that, Alison took off running, leaving her locker ajar. Then, Steve asked if it was Phil. Gail tells him that it was Phil, and she did not tell him because she did not want him to do something "silly" (p. 168). Steve then reminds Gail that he realizes she is protecting herself pretty well now, but her action did not prevent Sonia or other girls from harm.

Gail thinks of Alison and decides to confront her. Gail's timing is perfect as she confronts her in the corner of the locker room. The two girls exchange jabs until finally Gail hits one close to home for Alison. Gail tells Alison to have a talk with Mrs. Lawver about Phil because of her closeness to the family. When Gail starts talking about waving a magic wand, Alison admits that she does not want Sonia to die or Gail to leave town, rather she wants everything to return to the way it was before. As Gail walks away from her, Alison calls her name and motions for her to return. Gail goes back to Alison to hear what she has to say. Alison tells her everything she knows, including the events that transpired that fateful Saturday night. Alison continues that she did not want to know what Phil did, and when she learned that something was wrong with Gail, she did not want to believe that Phil had anything to do with it. When Gail prompts Alison to think of



the future girls, Alison tells her that there cannot be any more girls hurt. Then, Alison asks Gail what she thinks she should do. Gail could not give her advice.

Many rumors went around about what people saw and heard about Phil and the Lawvers. One thing that was certain, though; this was the first year that the Lawver family did not host their usual Thanksgiving party--that and Phil was not in Oldfield Village any longer. Many rumors about his absence were circulating. Sonia recovers, but the family moves away and no one knows where they went.

Later that winter, Mrs. Osburne tells Gail that things could have been worse. Gail agrees but not by much, then proceeds to tell her mother that they should have done something, and that it is not too late to do something. Gail's mother simply asks what they could do before returning to her real estate work.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Ironically, at the end of the story, Gail remains in Oldfield Village, but Phil Lawver is gone. Gail's family is not "run out of town," rather the Lawver's retreat from public eye. Gail, the victim of sexual assault, is the one that appears to be accepting the changes more so than the other characters. Alison just wants everything to be the way it was and not accept the changes. Mrs. Montgomery cannot cope with the "reminder" of the incident and ends their relationship. Mrs. Osburne refers to the incident only infrequently and then chooses to bury it under the rug once again.

Alison finally breaks when Gail corners her in the locker room. As Madam Malevich told Gail, "unspoken truths only fester." Alison finally blurts out what she has known all along but has been reluctant to share. Shielding herself from the reality of that knowledge, Alison chose to ignore the situation, as if ignoring it might make it go away. However, as the attorney advised Gail, one must accept the past before being able to proceed with the future. While Gail does just that, Alison does not know what to do. Instead of the girls joining in solidarity and helping each other through it, their friendship is damaged beyond repair because of Alison's refusal to accept and believe that Phil had caused so much pain and damage. Perhaps if Alison would have come forward immediately, the two girls may have been able to salvage their relationship.



Characters

Gail Osburne

Gail is a sixteen-year-old, sexually active girl. Gail is not promiscuous in the sense that she "gets around" but in the sense that she and her boyfriend are in a monogamous, albeit teen, relationship. The two escape to a cabin at the lake where they presume they are alone when in fact, their every move was being monitored by someone that stalks Gail. Both Gail and her boyfriend take the role of their sexual relationship seriously and take preventive measures against pregnancy. Slowly, their relationship begins to end long before either one of them admits it or allows it. However, their bond connects them as friends as the story climaxes with the rape.

Gail lived in New York City prior to the move to Oldfield Village. Like most parents that want the best for their children, Gail's parents decided living in the suburbs would be a better and safer environment for their daughter to grow up in. Oldfield Village was not welcoming to newcomers, especially those from the City. Gail's father continued to work in New York City and commuted daily until he lost his job, and Gail found out. With Mr. Osburne's dependence on New York City, the community of Oldfield Village still considered them "outsiders."

Gail's best friend is another junior in high school named Alison Bremer. Alison moved out of the city into the suburbs when she was in elementary school. Her family had made roots locally, and the townspeople had accepted them into the community because her father quit his job in Manhattan and started a business locally, unlike Gail's father. Alison dates Phil Lawver, the son of the most influential family in the town. Not only is he good looking, but powerful as well.

Gail's boyfriend causes some controversy in the story also. Steve Pastorini is the son of a plumber. Unlike his father and older brothers, Steve is incredibly bright and the kids at school tout him as the upcoming valedictorian of their class. Steve works helping his dad out in his business, but he also studies every chance he gets. The kids at school call Steve a "bustass" because his studies are so important to him. Steve is good to Gail but slowly things start to deteriorate in their relationship but neither one of them is willing to address it until after Phil rapes Gail. Gail keeps the identity of her attacker from Steve in an effort to protect him and make things easier for him. When Steve suspects Phil and confronts Gail, he is upset with her because her silence did not help their other classmate, Sonia Slanek. Throughout their courtship, Gail's family does not approve of Steve because they did not like him coming from a blue-collar family. When Mrs. Osburne finds out that they have had sex, she is extremely upset about the relationship.

The relationship Gail has with her parents is tense. Gail prefers her father to her mother for confiding in and talking to about her troubles. It is never mentioned in the story why the tension exists, but it appears that Gail has always been "daddy's little girl" even though it is not specifically mentioned. When Gail tries to find her father in the city to



turn to him for help about the notes, she discovers that he has lost his job but pretends that he has not. Unselfishly, Gail decides that she will not burden him with her troubles because he is already burdened with unemployment and feeling like a failure. In the hospital room after Gail wakes from the valium-induced sleep, Gail realizes how glad she is to have both of her parents with her. From this point forward, Gail eases up on the tension she feels with her mother.

Gail is a fighter. While the notes frightened Gail, when the attack happened she tried to protect herself. First, she tried to talk Phil out of raping her once she realized he was the stalker and writer of the notes. After Phil tripped her and was on top of her in the living room, Gail saw that hope was not lost. Gail carefully grabbed the fireplace poker to hit him in the head and knock him out or kill him. Knowing she only had one chance to do it right, Gail raised the poker up and brought it down on Phil. Unfortunately, she only glazed his shoulder. Phil took the poker from Gail and then used it to hit her in the head, knocking her unconscious and cutting her head open. Then, he proceeded to rape her while she was unconscious.

At the hospital, Gail realized what ensued despite not remembering it. The doctor did a pelvic exam and took some swabs finding sperm, confirming the rape. Not caring that Phil was a Lawyer, she came forward and told everyone in the room he was the rapist. Despite the stunned reactions, Gail continued to tell them that it was Phil and nothing could change the truth. Gail met with an attorney privately, who advised her it was an uphill battle to charge Phil when there was little proof, she admitted to letting him in the house, and there were no witnesses to the crime. Not wanting a public grilling but wanting Phil punished, Gail was torn. Ultimately, Gail decided to accept the lawyer's advice and move on with her life, keeping silent about the rapist's identity except to a select few.

Gail survived the frightening notes, the attack, the second encounter with Phil, and the rumors. Gail survived the loss of a relationship with a special boy and the loss of a relationship with someone she thought was her best friend. As Gail's attorney advised her, she needed to accept the past before she could move ahead with her life. That is exactly the route Gail took.

Steve Pastorini

Steve Pastorini is the son of a plumber. Unlike his father and older brothers, Steve is incredibly bright and the kids at school tout him as the upcoming valedictorian of their class. Steve works helping his dad out in his business but he also studies every chance he gets. The kids at school call Steve a "bustass" because his studies are so important to him. Steve will undoubtedly get into any Ivy League school he wants because of his grades and academic level.

Not only is Steve smart, but he is in touch with his emotional side. When Steve realizes that he has strong feelings for Gail Osburne, he writes her an anonymous poem. A short while later, Steve places white plastic flowers in Gail's locker and then waits for her to



come by. When Gail feels someone watching her, she turns to find Steve smiling at her. That day marked the beginning of their relationship.

Alison Bremer

Alison moved to Oldfield Village in the first grade. In order to "fit in" the new community, Alison's father quit his New York career on Wall Street and opened a decorative hardware store. This act converted them from transplants to natives and marked the beginning of their acceptance into the smug community. Alison is also sixteen years old and a junior in high school.

Alison has been dating Phil Lawver for two years. Finally, Phil's parents decide to "accept" her into the family, so they invite her and another couple over for a fancy dinner to mark the occasion. During the evening, Gail witnesses her friend aging instantly. Alison takes on the finishing-school tone of voice and manner of speaking, reflecting that of Mrs. Lawver. Not only does she emulate Mrs. Lawver's manner of speaking, Alison also mirrors Mrs. Lawver's mannerisms.

Confident of what she wants for her future, rather whose future she wants to be a part of, Alison focuses on her needs only. Alison thinks highly of Phil, but perhaps more than wanting Phil, she wants to be a Lawver. This drive prevents Alison from seeing that Phil is flawed and causes harm to other girls. At one point, Alison admits to Gail that Phil is hot and cold. One minute Phil is "adoring" her while the next ignoring her as if she were not even there. This selfish need causes problems for her, her friendship with Gail, and her future.

When Alison finally accepts that Phil attacked not only Gail but Sonia, too, she admits to Gail everything she knows. Once Alison has confessed her knowledge openly, she is at a loss as to what to do next. Alison's entire world at that moment came upside down because she has always known that her future included Phil. With Phil in trouble and not "present" in Oldfield Village, her own future was a blur, and visions of what she thought her future would be vanished.

Phil Lawver

Alison's boyfriend, 16-year-old Phil and his family are very "well to do" and live in a stately mansion screened from the street by trees and shrubbery. Phil's parents decide to "accept" Alison Bremer into their family by inviting her to a special dinner. Phil's parents allow him to invite one other couple. Choosing his girlfriend's best friend, Phil invites Gail and her boyfriend, Steve Pastorini.

Very preppy and Ivy-league dressed, Phil is tall with blonde hair and ice-blue eyes. Accustomed to being special, Phil knows only of getting what he wants. Phil's parents have never made him suffer the consequences of his actions, thereby creating a sick monster. A part of him is not human, detached of emotion. This defect is what causes him to seek to use his power against girls.



First, he starts out stalking Gail and spying on her with her boyfriend, Steve. Then, Phil writes vulgar notes and delivers them to Gail's locker addressed specifically to her. After Phil delivers the second note, he makes his appearance and reveals himself to Gail at Mrs. Montgomery's house. This is when he attacks her emotionally, physically, and sexually and leaves her alone in the house for Mrs. Montgomery to find.

The character flaw in Phil leads him to believe that he has not done anything wrong to Gail. In fact, Phil sends her flowers from his mother's regular florist, stiff chrysanthemums - the same flowers that were at the table the night the two couples dined with his family for the "receiving" of Alison ceremony. The card that Phil signed accompanying the flowers is the proof that Gail uses during her first confrontation with Alison.

Phil's quest for more leads him to attack again. This time, he follows a girl wearing a yellow slicker with a red scarf just outside of town. It is dark and raining. Unlike the first attack, this time Phil leaves behind visual evidence. It is unclear at the end of the story what exactly happens to Phil, but one thing is clear: he no longer lives in Oldfield Village, and his parents seek solace in the privacy of their own home.

Mr. Otis Lawver

Otis is Phil's father. The only presence he has in the story is in the beginning where he and his wife host the special dinner for Phil and Alison with Gail and Steve. Described as a shorter and rounder version of Phil, this man speaks very little, allowing his wife to do most of the talking and entertaining, except when it comes to the future. Otis does ask Steve if he plans to follow in the family business. When Steve politely tells him that he will not, Phil is the one that tells his father that Steve is a straight "A" student and will be the valedictorian. Mr. Lawver then switches the conversation from plumbing to Yale, speculating that perhaps Steve and Phil will be attending there together.

Mrs. Lawver

Mrs. Lawver is as high as high society comes. Even Mrs. Osburne tells Gail and her husband that she is "absurdly lofty" (p. 13). Mrs. Lawver tends to her socialite and elitist attitude through her volunteerism, her annual Thanksgiving reception, and her manner of speaking. Each year, Mrs. Lawver heads up the Women's Exchange Benefit, a local fundraiser. Also on an annual basis, the Lawvers host an extravagant Thanksgiving reception, opening their home to nearly everyone in Oldfield Village. Mrs. Lawver consistently presents herself as better than everyone else in the community through her demeanor and choice of words.

Mrs. Montgomery

Mrs. Montgomery is divorced and raising two young daughters. Mrs. Montgomery joins the "Previously Marrieds Club" and spends every Saturday night at the club's parties,



while Gail watches her two young children that are always asleep when Gail arrives. Mrs. Montgomery senses that something is different with Gail but does not press hard to get any information from Gail. When Mrs. Montgomery comes home one Saturday night to find Gail unconscious, bleeding, with evidence of having been raped, she calls the ambulance. Instantly, Mrs. Montgomery takes the blame and feels that it is her fault, since she sensed something was wrong. Despite Gail's attempts to free Mrs. Montgomery from blame, Mrs. Montgomery still cannot heal or move forward. Instead of reinstating Gail as the regular babysitter, Mrs. Montgomery ends the relationship and sends Gail out empty handed and rejected. Mrs. Montgomery cannot think past the incident and desires to proceed as if it never happened. This cannot take place with Gail in her life as a "reminder" that the rape really did happen.

Dovima Malevich (also known as Madam Malevich)

Unusual and outspoken, Dovima Malevich teaches the drama classes at the high school. Dovima is elderly yet still teaching despite her age estimated to be around mid-seventies. The kids at school, while considering Madam Malevich *crazy*, all vie for a spot in one of her classes. Claiming she is Russian, her Russian dialect and accent come and go during her speech. Believing that Oldfield Village is nothing for the drama world, Madam encourages the students to go to New York City for auditions and refuses to put on any theatrical productions herself.

Madam's teaching position is believed to have been obtained solely through a connection with the late, senior Mrs. Lawver, who formerly ran the school. Madam Malevich still teaches, defying the Connecticut state laws regarding retirement. Madam claims that the new principal, young enough to be her son, has frequent visits with her about retirement. As in the past, Madam tells the students that she again refused to retire.

What Gail appreciated most about Madam Malevich was her keen sense of understanding the students' needs and lifestyles. Madam always seemed to know about the students' activities, interests, skills, and hobbies. This is evident when Madam Malevich appears at the Osburne residence shortly after Phil raped Gail. Madam cuts to the chase and tells Gail all the rumors she is hearing at school. While Gail's mother is down getting tea, Gail confides in Madam Malevich. Malevich tells Gail that is what she suspected and gives her sage advice.

During the story, the Slanek family discovers films in which Madam starred. The attention of a local actor elevated the interest in her previous work, and people in the community organized a film festival in her honor. Ironically, Sonia's interest in Madam Malevich's past unknowingly sets her up for an attack.

Sonia Slanek

Sonia is a loner at the high school, but all the kids notice her. Each day her hair and make-up were different and she had a different taste in clothing. One day, she wore a



burnished brown-monkey fur jacket with long, black gloves and a plain ivory bracelet around one wrist. Sonia's pants were velvet, art-deco bell-bottoms and were paired with yellow three-inch platform shoes.

Sonia's eccentricity stands out in the small town, especially at school. Sonia's shining moment arrives when she discovers that Madam Malevich really was famous in her day. Sonia's father discovers a film marked incorrectly in the archives, and Sonia does some research to discover that the star of the film is Madam Malevich. Sonia presents her information to the school and for the upcoming Arts Assembly; she shows the newly-found movie. After the movie ends, Sonia stands up on stage, makes an announcement about the star and unveils her identity. This discovery leads to a film festival in honor of Malevich, which proves to be disastrous for Sonia.

The night of the film festival, it is raining. Gail notices Sonia in the front row after the movies end and sees her with a yellow slicker just like Gail owns. Then, Gail watches Sonia put on a red scarf similar to Gail's but notices Sonia is much more adept at putting on the scarf. Whether or not the attack was targeted at Gail, who also wore a yellow slicker and red scarf, Sonia Slanek was the victim. The rapist had torn Sonia's clothes under her slicker, assaulted her, and left her for dead in the ditch. When Sonia recovered, she apparently talked to the police. Tire marks at the scene of the crime linked Phil Lawver to the rape, and he subsequently disappeared from the area, while his family simultaneously retreated to their own home. Unlike Gail, Sonia's family left Oldfield Village. Also unlike Gail, Sonia spoke out for what was right, despite the consequences.

Valerie Cathcart

Valerie is a know-it-all and gossip spreader. Unfortunately, Valerie is in a position to learn of things that happen: her father is a local doctor, and Valerie volunteers in the school office. First, Gail learns the lesson of how gossip spreads when she ditches school one day in search her father to confide in him. Of course, Gail realizes that the source of the gossip is Valerie herself. The next time Gail learns of the gossip, Gail realizes Valerie is at the root of one of the stories because her unprofessional doctor father has discussed personal patient information with the family. Valerie also is influential in the dissemination of information after Sonia's attack.

Connie

Connie is the receptionist at the architecture firm in which Gail's father had been a junior partner. When Gail arrives at his former employer and asks for him, Connie takes Gail aside and explains to her the situation and the current economic status of the building industry. Connie also explains to Gail that a man finds it difficult to accept failure and most pretend they are still at work or going through the motions of going to work.



Police Chief

The police chief sneaks into Gail's room after the nurse kicked him out. The chief interviews Gail but does not take her seriously until she reaches for the nurse call button. When he listens a second time, the police chief tells the deputy to "scratch" the name he wrote down on his tablet. Not only does this symbolize that he does not believe Gail, but that he refuses to go after anyone in the Lawver family.

Ted Naylor

Ted is a young attorney that is representing and counseling Gail and her family. Ted advises Gail of the things against her and the things going for Phil should there be a trial. Ted also advises Gail about the emotional difficulties that lie ahead for her.

Buddy McEvoy

Buddy is Phil Lawver's squash partner and is short and wiry. Gail considers him "creepy." The author leads the reader to believe he might be the suspect writing the vulgar notes to Gail.

Coach (Bob) Foster

Coach Foster is the boys squash coach during the workweek, but on Saturday nights, he is Mrs. Montgomery's companion. One night, Mrs. Montgomery volunteers Bob to drive Gail home. The timing is so that Gail is afraid of Coach Foster and suspects that he might be the author of her notes.

Edna

The Lawver's cook is Edna, who is a cousin of Steve's mother. Edna served the dinner the night that Steve and Gail dined at the Lawver residence. After the assaults, rumors abound that the Lawver's dismiss Edna.

Angie

Angie is one of Mrs. Montgomery's daughters. Angie is asleep in her room the night that Phil raped Gail in her family living room.

Missy

Missy is one of Mrs. Montgomery's daughters. Missy is asleep in her room the night that Phil raped Gail in her family living room.



Objects/Places

Pastorini's Cottage

This cottage is an empty shack that has been in the family for years. The cottage is located on Powdermill Lake, and Steve's father uses the shack when he fishes at the lake in the summertime. Steve and Gail use this cottage as a rendezvous point, a place where they thought they were alone.

Powdermill Lake

The Pastorini cottage was located on the edge of Powdermill Lake, which was outside of Oldfield Village.

Big Stand of Rock

Located just above the Pastorini cottage, a big stand of rock stood. The top of it was "as flat as a table" (p. 10) and smooth from the weather's effects. On clear nights, Steve and Gail would walk up to this spot to sit quietly together and watch the stars.

The "Pill"

In the first chapter, Steve tries to ask Gail if she is still taking birth control pills, but he cannot seem to put it in one sentence.

The Small Green Stone

Steve gave Gail a small green stone shaped in a heart for her sixteenth birthday in the spring. Gail found a gold necklace for it, and she was never without it. When Gail was upset about something, she simply rubbed or held the stone to calm her nerves. Gail stroked the stone as she dialed Steve's phone number after the recurring phone calls at Mrs. Montgomery's house. Phil ripped this stone off her neck during the attack. Mrs. Montgomery found it on the floor after the rape and gave it back to Gail.

The Telephone

The stalker watches Gail and calls her on the telephone at Mrs. Montgomery's house and at her family's house.



Gail's Locker

Steve initiated the relationship with Gail when he placed a poem for her into her locker. Later, Gail arrives at her locker and finds a note labeled specifically for her. The contents of this note were not romantic at all. In fact, they were quite the contrary.

The "Note"

After watching Phil's squash match with Alison, the two girls return to their lockers to get their books. As they approach, Gail notices a note sticking out of her locker, clearly labeled for her with her first and last name. The note details perverted intentions of the writer.

Oldfield Hospital

Gail woke up in this hospital after Phil Lawver raped her at Mrs. Montgomery's house.

The Hospital Bed Plaque

The hospital bed that Gail was lying in had a plaque at the end of it. The plaque stated that the Lawver family donated the bed and other things in this room.

The Poker

When Phil is attempting to rape Gail, she grabs the fireplace poker and attempts to hit Phil hard on the head. Unfortunately, she only grazes his shoulder and Phil turns around and uses the weapon to hit her on the head, knocking her unconscious.

The Deputy's Notebook

At the hospital, the deputy is standing by listening to Gail recount the rape but he does not take any notes until Gail names the rapist. The deputy writes Phil Lawver's name down but nothing else.

The Newspaper

The newspaper reported the crime against Sonia Slanek and some of the details, including that tire tracks that the MG left on the soft shoulder.



Chrysanthemums

Chrysanthemums are the Lawver family's favorite flowers; it seems. They were the centerpiece the night of the "receiving Alison" dinner and they were the flowers that Phil Lawver sent to Gail after he raped her.

Yellow Slicker

Gail wore her yellow slicker during one of the night excursions at the lake. Gail also wore it the night Phil attacked Sonia Slanek. Sonia was also wearing a yellow slicker.

Setting

Are You in the House Alone? takes place during the 1970s in a middle-class suburb in Connecticut. Neither the setting nor the characters are extraordinary in any way. The familiar environment emphasizes the potential for rape to occur anywhere, as Peck tries to dispel the common misconception that rape only happens in the inner city among the poor.

Social Sensitivity

Rape, the novel's central topic, is a controversial subject. Many people, particularly young adults, feel uncomfortable about addressing the subject. But *Are You in the House Alone?* treats the crime with sensitivity and without sensationalism. Lawver knocks Gail unconscious during the attack, and Peck does not depict graphic details. The medical examination following Gail's admittance to the hospital is described in clinical terms. Most rape victims do not seek medical treatment, and Peck tries to show readers why such an examination is important and what is involved.

Gail has been sexually active with her boyfriend before the rape and has obtained a prescription for birth control pills from a Planned Parenthood Center, but the novel does not include any explicit lovemaking scenes. Although the lawyer contends that Gail's sexual activity makes it impossible to convict the rapist, Peck views Gail's behavior as her own responsibility. Her mother dislikes the idea, and the rapist regards it as proof that she desires his attack, but the author remains neutral on the subject.

Peck emphasizes society's attitude toward rape without making value judgments about the victim's sexual behavior.

Literary Qualities

Richard Peck's literary reputation sometimes suffers because critics identify his works as "problem novels." In *Only Connect* (see For Further Reference section below), Sheila Egoff contends that adolescent problem novels are too narrow and external because they grow from a specific social problem rather than from a writer's personal vision of the human condition. Egoff delineates the formula followed by problem novels: the protagonist is alienated from, and hostile to, the adult world; an unconventional adult is the only person who understands the protagonist; and the first-person narration features short sentences and paragraphs written in a flat, prosaic, and cliché-ridden style.

At first glance, Peck's novels seem to fit this formula. *Are You in the House Alone?* resulted from his research on rape and its effects on adolescents. The main character feels alienated from adults, except for the eccentric Madame Malevich, and the story is told in the first person. But Peck's rich style far surpasses the formulaic approach Egoff berates. The narrative flows from one significant event to the next while capturing the complexities of real life. Small details contribute significantly to the characterizations, and realistic dialogue gives each character a distinctive voice.

Are You in the House Alone? won the Edgar Allan Poe Award given by the Mystery Writers of America for the best juvenile mystery published in 1976. Not a mystery in the usual sense, the book received the award based on the author's skill in building suspense and vividly portraying the protagonist's increasing loneliness and terror.



Themes

Fear

The emotion of fear plays a crucial role in this story. When Gail received the first note, she began to feel uncomfortable and even dirty. However, fear did not begin to develop until she began getting eerily-timed phone calls with no one on the other end. By the time she received the second note, Gail was fully aware that someone was watching her and had been watching her for some time. Gail's fear level reaches new heights when the stalker screams in to the phone "ARE YOU IN THE HOUSE ALONE?" When Phil arrives at Mrs. Montgomery's house, Gail does not suspect or fear him until he repeats the same question in the same shrill tone. Then, Gail knows what she is up against and knows she is in danger. Despite being afraid, Gail does not freeze. Knowing she should yell for help, but not wanting to wake up the children and frighten them or cause them injury, Gail does the only thing that occurs to her and that is to injure her attacker. In the face of extreme fear, Gail finds a weapon in the fireplace tools near her. Gail uses the poker to hurt her attacker and prevent him from hurting her further, but her attempt is unsuccessful. In fact, the tool Gail intended to hurt him with actually causes her physical injury when Phil hits her alongside the head with it.

After the rape, Gail fears that if she presses charges, she will once again be "victimized." Not wanting to go through it again in front of the courtroom, Gail decides to accept the rape and try to move on. Most rape victim advocates advise victims that they will fear men and other situations after their attack. While Gail feels she may not be interested in men for a long time, she does not fear them. As she told her mother near the end, there are many other "Phils" out there, and she needs to realize that.

Alison also feels fear but not the same fear Gail experiences. Unlike the fear associated with potential harm, Alison's fear stems from the fear of the unknown and fear of her future unraveling. Contrary to her plan, Alison knew that she wanted to be in Phil Lawver's future and vice versa. When Alison begins to suspect Phil in the attack on Gail, she tucks it away and pretends it did not happen. When Phil comes to Alison for an apology that night without telling her what he had done, Alison knew it involved Gail as soon as she heard rumors of Gail at the hospital. Fear of her future coming undone prevented her from accepting that suspicion as truth. When she finally realizes that Phil is not well and accepts the truth that he attacked and raped Gail and Sonia, Alison's fear changes from fear of losing what she had always wanted for her future to the fear of not knowing what to do.

Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is a difficult topic for most to think about, let alone talk about. Most of the reluctance to discuss sexual assault stems from the nature of the crime. Sexual assault is a crime of the most personal nature. It damages the core of a person by violating their



privacy in unimaginable ways. Usually, sex and genitalia are reserved for topics between people in intimate relationships, be it friends or lovers. When someone is raped, all of a sudden what is normally considered a private matter now becomes public. The authorities hear about the assault, the families learn of the assault, and the public learns about the assault. The rape victim shares specific details with many people, mostly strangers.

As in many rape cases, this suspect is not charged. Many reasons factor into the lack of charges, including class society, lack of proof, and fear of the public scrutiny of the victim. In this case, Phil Lawver is a member of the most influential family in the community. Phil comes from generations of Lawvers, direct descendents of the Pilgrims. The community has always held their family through the generations in high regard. Consequently, the family has power, wealth, and status. As soon as the police chief hears the Lawver name, he instantly tells the deputy to scratch the name. There was no point in writing it down because there was no point in pressing charges or even attempting to arrest a Lawver family member.

The officials, even Gail's attorney said there was lack of proof. There was no eyewitness to the crime and no proof that he burglarized the home, or even broke into the home. Prior to the term "date rape" being coined, it was much more difficult to prosecute rape in cases where the victim knows the attacker. As in this case, Gail opens the door and allows Phil to enter. Regardless of what Phil did to Gail, the official policy states that forced entry would have been proof that he forced himself into the house and attacked her. The doctor at the hospital did take cultures and retrieved sperm on the samples taken but even that did not seem to officials as "evidence" that she was raped. In a patriarchal society, women need to prove that they did not consent to the sex and that it indeed was rape. In this day, DNA unequivocally links the suspect to the crime. In this case and many others like it, DNA testing was not available. Not only was DNA testing not available for Gail, but during this time, the woman's sexual history always came into play, despite it not being relative to the crime. In fact, there are rape shield laws today that protect the rights of the victims. These rape shield laws also encourage the victims to come forward.

Friendship

When Gail moved, she was in junior high school and the first friend she met was Alison Bremer, another transplant. The two girls hit it off from the start despite their apparent differences regarding their future. Gail was always unsure of what she wanted for her future. On the other hand, Alison was intent on keeping Phil Lawver's attention and marrying into the family, with all the wealth, promise, and security it meant. As the girls grow up, their friendship remains solid, until the vulgar notes appear in Gail's locker. The first test of their friendship is when Alison tells Gail to simply ignore the incident and pretend that it did not happen.

The final test of their friendship occurs after the rape. Alison hears about Gail in the hospital but does not come visit her. Only after Madam Malevich visits Gail does Alison



make her first appearance. Then, she pretends not to know anything about it. Not only that, but she refuses to believe that Phil had anything to do with it and accuses Gail of getting into trouble with Steve and trying to blame it on Phil. There is some redemption or attempt at resurrecting the friendship made by Alison only after Gail corners her in the locker room. Alison breaks down and tells Gail everything and the two share a bond: a frightened sensation that they cannot stop Phil from attacking again. However, the damage to their friendship is deep, and Gail refuses to advise Alison on how to handle the situation. From this point forward, the girls only discuss surface-level topics, avoiding anything personal.

Teen Love

In this story, the characters experience teen love. The story chronicles the relationship of Gail and Steve, even describing their sexual intimacy. Through Gail, the reader learns about how her relationship with Steve began. The relationship begins as friends and evolves into one where there is general love for one another. Then, the relationship morphs into that of lovers. Slowly, though, the relationship begins to unravel. Perhaps it is their young age or their newness to such a complex relationship, but neither is able to end their romantic relationship when it should have ended. Instead, Gail removes herself from Steve, not wanting to use him for emotional support after the rape. In the hospital, Gail thanks him for visiting her because she really needed a friend. When Steve questions her that he is just a friend, Gail dismisses him without really addressing the status of their relationship. Like most teen relationships, this one ends but it does not end as abruptly as most. Usually, one teen jilts the other. In this relationship, they slowly change and grow apart. Even in the end, both care for the other but not in the same way, they once did.

The other teen couple in the story is Phil and Alison. Phil mentioned to Gail that Alison always had her bra on. This statement leads readers to believe that had been trying to get somewhere with Alison physically but Alison was not willing. Not accustomed to hearing the word "no," Phil does not know what to do. Perhaps this is one reason why Phil strikes out against Gail and then Sonia. The relationship between Phil and Alison is complex because Phil is lacking critical emotional balance. One minute he is dotting on Alison while the next he hides her away. Alison never knows what to expect but adores the time when Phil adores her.



Themes/Characters

Neither extremely popular nor an outcast, Gail Osburne is a typical American high school student. Gail's father commutes to New York City, where he works as an architect. Gail later learns that he has lost his job because of an economic recession but, unable to break the bad news to his family, has continued commuting to the city as if still employed.

Although Gail's mother is a loving and concerned parent, she also proves unable to communicate her feelings with her daughter.

Peck provides skillful thumbnail sketches of the secondary characters who populate Gail's school and community. Gail's best friend, Alison, dates and hopes to marry Phil Lawver, a member of the wealthiest and most respected family in town. Steve, Gail's intellectual boyfriend, no longer fits in with his working-class family or childhood friends. Sonia Slanek, the most complete outsider in the school's social system, bewilders and fascinates the other students with her artistic flair. Miss Venable is too young and inexperienced a guidance counselor to help Gail with her problem, but the drama teacher, Madame Malevich, provides more understanding. She helps Gail to cope with her crisis but cannot change the social system that ostracizes rape victims and regards them with suspicion. Peck refuses to treat rapist Phil Lawver with any sympathy whatsoever. He remains a flat, villainous character seen only through Gail's eyes. Nevertheless, Phil fits in quite comfortably with the typical inhabitants of the community, rendering him all the more frightening.

Clearly, the novel's theme centers on the effects of rape on a teen-age girl.

After demonstrating how easily a rape can occur, Peck reveals the victim's error in retreating from friends, family, and the authorities, and the positive effects of calling out for help. The author focuses his rage not on the characters in his story but on the laws and societal norms that view the rape victim as guilty of the crime. Mr. Naylor, a lawyer, presents this theme most clearly as he warns Gail of the problems she will encounter in seeking justice. Gail asks, "Why does the law protect the rapist instead of the victim?" and Naylor replies, "Because the law is wrong."

The novel also stresses the positive effects of communication. Mr. Osburne's denial of his unemployment mirrors Gail's solitary struggles with her emotional crisis. If Gail and her father could communicate more effectively with other family members and friends, their burdens would be more bearable.



Style

Points of View

The story is told using first-person point of view through the eyes of Gail. Gail recalls the story in chronological order beginning with her intimate relationship with her boyfriend, Steve. The chronological telling of the story helps build the suspense about the plot and gets the reader thinking about the suspect. Gail does not reveal the identity of the attacker until she is recovering in the hospital. The identity of the stalker could have been revealed earlier, but it would have taken away from the suspense and emotional reaction after the rape.

Other points of view are provided using conversation. For example, Gail learns about her father's unemployment when she visits his former employer. The receptionist, Connie, explains the situation to her and tells her about the fragile male ego. Connie explains to her that it is difficult for men to accept failure. This point of view changes Gail's strategy for talking to her father about her own problems, since he is obviously struggling with his own.

Alison expresses her point of view after Gail cornered her in the locker room. Alison tells Gail everything she knows about Phil and his unusual behavior and her suspicions. When Alison finishes, Gail knows why Alison remained silent through it all.

Setting

The story is set in a small, western Connecticut town called Oldfield Village. It is a charming suburb of New York City, where the architecture follows that of traditional New England. Home styles include Georgian with "bull's-eye windowpanes" (p. 31), Colonial Craftsman, clapboard, Cape Cod saltboxes, and bungalows. There had been a recent craze to restore everything to a Colonial state, including Williamsburg red, Williamsburg green, and even Williamsburg beige. The downtown businesses were designed and adorned in a Colonial manner, too, even the Planned Parenthood office. The high school was almost an exact replica of Independence Hall.

The high school is the setting for much of the activity that transpires in the story. For example, Gail's locker is the medium that the boys use to get her attention. First, Steve writes a poem for Gail and sticks it in the vents of her locker, leaving it for her to read. Then, Steve places white flowers in her locker vents as a follow up to his poem. Gail turns around to find him standing near her waiting for her to notice him. Phil also uses the lockers to get his notes to Gail. Unfortunately, his notes are not amiable. The lockers also provide an important element in the relationship between Alison and Gail. Since their lockers are side-by-side, after the rift between them, Gail avoids using her locker as much as possible. One day when Gail's load is too heavy, she goes to her locker despite Alison being at hers. This is when Steve comes by with his suspicions of Phil



being her attacker and questioning why Gail did not tell him. With Alison having a reason to be at her locker, the author creates a legitimate reason for her to overhear the conversation and for Gail to ask Alison if she thinks the same person that attacked her also attacked Sonia.

Mrs. Montgomery's house is probably the most crucial setting in the story. Gail's regular babysitting job puts her there predictably every Saturday evening. The routine is the same every Saturday night, so the stalker can easily figure out what his window of opportunity is to commit his crime without being thwarted or caught. In the evening of the attack, Gail opens the door and lets Phil in to use the phone. Phil claims he needs to find Alison because he says he thought she was here. When Gail turns around, she realizes that Phil is the voice behind the calls and the author behind the notes. Phil attacks Gail in Mrs. Montgomery's living room next to the fireplace.

Once Steve and Gail reach the stage in their relationship when they decide to become lovers, they seek privacy on Powdermill Lake in the Pastorini family cottage. There the young couple experience with their sexuality and pleasure themselves thinking this is the only place they can go to be alone. Unfortunately, the stalker realizes the couple goes there for their trysts and watches them, fueling his fire and his needs.

Language and Meaning

Much of the language is contemporary, although there are some New England and Puritan phrases that come into the story. Some of the language used describes the type of housing specific to Colonial New England. For example, many of the houses Gail describes refer to Williamsburg this or that, clapboard, Cape Code, etc. Written in the 1970s, the author uses contemporary language, so the reader can move through the story with ease. By defining colloquialisms used as part of the sentence structure, the reader is not required to find the meaning in the dictionary.

At times, the reader needs to read "between the lines" in order to get the full understanding. For example, throughout the story there is tension between Gail and her mother. However, not once does the author describe or explain when or why the tension arose. During conversations between mother and daughter, Gail will make a mental note that expresses her feelings. For example, when Gail is dressing for the big night over at the Lawver's, Mrs. Osburne tries to persuade her to wear an evening skirt. When Gail refuses, Mrs. Osburne makes a wise crack about her "at least not wearing Levi's" (p. 11). Gail thinks to herself that she does not wear her Levi's any more than anyone else does, but her mother had to say something. Then, to add another insult, Mrs. Osburne makes a wise remark about being downstairs and ready when Steve arrives so that they can leave right away, and Steve can escape talking to Mrs. Osburne and her husband. Gail chooses not to get into it with her mother about Steve then but continues to share her feelings about the situation, giving background information for the plot.



Structure

The entire story is told as a flashback. Gail does not keep a journal, so she tells the story in a conversational tone as she reflects back on the period of her life. The story has fourteen, untitled chapters that explain her life as the trouble begins with a two-page prologue to provide insight into the nature of her relationship with her boyfriend Steve. The average chapter length is just a little over twelve pages. There are three chapters that are fifteen pages or longer while the shortest chapter is only four pages. Ironically, the shortest chapter is when the rape occurs. As one might imagine, the tragedy takes place quickly, but the aftermath lasts a lot longer. Such is the case in this story. Whereas the shortest chapter describes the assault, the chapter that follows the attack is the longest chapter of the story - sixteen pages. Just as the victim faces physical recovery, Gail also needs to recover emotionally. The effect of being attacked means that the victim is also involved with the police and the law. In the longest chapter, Gail learns about the law, her rights, and the rights of the accused. It is understandable that the longest chapter in the story parallels the longest chapter in Gail's life.

As Gail tells the events as she remembers them, the pace of the story line quickens. When the drama surrounding the anonymous notes and phone calls climaxes, the rhythm of the story speeds up even more. This technique allows the suspense to build and keeps the reader's interest in the desire to learn the outcome. When Phil unveils his identity to Gail, it is as if the crime were unfolding before the reader's eyes for the first time and time slows down. With the physical confrontation and Gail realizing the direness of the situation the action speeds up again. Time stopped when Phil took the poker and hit her on the head, knocking her unconscious.

As Gail recuperates in the hospital, time goes by slowly. When Gail is able to return home, the pace continues at the slow speed. Slowly, as Gail resumes her "normal" life style, the pace of the story continues to quicken until it finally reaches a moderate pace, which mirrors the pace before the trouble began.



Quotes

"Some people just concentrate on the present and let the future take care of itself."
Chapter 1, p. 22.

"Romeo and Juliet in western Connecticut," she said. Chapter 2, p. 29.

"It's safer to stick to surface impressions - the way the firelight from the Lawyer's hearth had played across her serene-looking face that Friday night." Chapter 3, p. 36.

"...He keeps me in one of two places. Half the time I'm on a pedestal. The other half, I'm in a closet." Chapter 4, p. 47.

"Romeo and Juliet in western Connecticut," she said. Chapter 2, p. 29.

"Gail, have you and Steve - I mean, are you and he - " Chapter 5, p. 56.

"It never happened, Gail." Chapter 5, p. 58.

"If there's anything that's worrying you, Gail, anything at all, you can tell me... You know, we single ladies have to stick together." Chapter 5, p. 58.

"Like men can't afford to fail." Chapter 6, p. 68.

"I just don't want you to get hurt," she said. "If you have to...experience everything now, what do you have to look forward to?" Chapter 6, p. 75.

"Everybody needs somebody," Alison said, very definite. "I mean, you never know when you'll need a friend." Chapter 8, p. 93.

"ARE YOU IN THE HOUSE ALONE?" Chapter 8, p. 103.

"The Lawyers are above that, aren't they?" Chapter 11, p. 129.

"Our own doctor wouldn't have called in the police." Chapter 11, p. 129.

"...I said you are going to have to be strong. That involves confronting the past before you look ahead." Chapter 11, p. 135.

"Why does the law protect the rapist instead of the victim?" Chapter 11, p. 137.

"Because the law is wrong." Chapter 11, p. 137.

"Don't try to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders from now on. And don't pretend that everything is fine when it isn't." Chapter 11, p. 136.

"Before you are as old as I," she replied, nearly sighing, "you will cease looking for justice at every turn." Chapter 12, p. 143.



"...Unspoken truths only fester..." Chapter 12, p. 143.

"What if you yell and nobody cares?" Chapter 14, p. 161.

"He thought everything belonged to him and that he could do no wrong. Nobody had ever told him otherwise." Chapter 14, p. 163.

"It all could have been a lot worse." Chapter 14, p. 172.

Adaptations

Richard Peck's first young adult novel, *Don't Look and It Won't Hurt*, established him as an excellent writer of "problem novels." The book deals with teen-age pregnancy, but the family's real problem is the lack of communication and acceptance that forces each member into an isolated struggle with feelings of rejection and worthlessness. Alienation within the family recurs in several of Peck's other novels dealing with social problems: *Representing Super Doll* reveals the exploitation of the young in the world of beauty contests; *Father Figure* treats the death of a parent; *Close Enough to Touch* portrays the death of a girlfriend; *Remembering the Good Times* deals with teenage suicide. Peck's gift for comedy is evident in his Blossom Culp books: *The Ghost Belonged to Me*, *Ghosts I Have Been*, *The Dreadful Future of Blossom Culp*, and *Blossom Culp and the Sleep of Death*.

Three of Peck's novels—*Father Figure*, *Are You in the House Alone?*, and *The Ghost Belonged to Me*—have been adapted for television. Aired in 1980 to moderate critical enthusiasm, the adaptation of *Father Figure* was directed by Jerry London and starred Hal Linden, Timothy Hutton, Jeremy Licht, Martha Scott, and Cassie Yates. Most critics were disappointed with the 1978 adaptation of *Are You in the House Alone?*

directed by Walter Grauman and starring Katherine Beller, Blythe Danner, Tony Bill, Robin Mattson, Tricia O'Neil, and Dennis Quaid.



Topics for Discussion

1. Why is Gail selected as a victim?

Does she do anything to encourage the attack? How does her behavior contrast with that of LaVerne Shull, who hangs around with the "sweathogs"?

2. When does suspicion first fall on Phil? What clues given throughout the story indicate that he is the rapist?

3. How does Gail become isolated from her friends, family, and teachers as threats from the rapist become more intense?

4. Rape is not the only problem in this novel. What conflicts confront Sonia Slanek, Alison, Miss Venable, Madame Malevich, and Mrs. Montgomery?

5. Gail's father loses his job as an architect. How is his problem similar to Gail's problem as a victim?



Essay Topics

When Gail discovers the vulgar note in her locker, why does she keep it to herself and not take it to her parents or a person in authority?

Gail finally decides to turn to her father for help with her problem (the stalker). When she arrives at his office, she discovers that the firm let him go the month before. Gail realizes that her father has not been honest with her and possibly even her mother. Gail decides to take Connie's advice and let her father keep his secret. Do you think the way this family handles the situation is right or wrong? Explain your opinion.

Explain why you believe Gail did not want to tell her mother about the note and the phone calls.

When Mrs. Osburne discovers that Gail has birth control pills, why does she insist on hearing all the details on how Gail obtained them? Explain.

Explain why Gail did not scream when Phil was assaulting her. How does her decision not to scream affect her "proof" that the rapist is Phil Lawver?

The question that looms is why Gail did not alert the police or her parents about the disturbing notes. When the attorney learns that there are notes involved, there is a little hope for proof to substantiate her claim. Does Gail feel hopeful or hopeless about the notes? Explain.

Mr. Naylor informs Gail that if anyone in the future attempts to harm her, she needs to "yell bloody murder." How is this advice similar to what officials currently tell girls and women to do? Do you think this advice would have brought about a different outcome in Gail's situation? Explain your thoughts.

The title of the book is also the question that the stalker-turned-rapist asks Gail when she answers the phone at Mrs. Montgomery's house. Explain the parallel between Phil's question to Gail and Gail's insight on his loneliness ("He'd be in his house alone, no matter who was there with him." p. 163).

Using a Venn diagram, illustrate the differences between rape in the 1970s, versus today.

Choose a position either in support or against Gail's choice NOT to proceed with charges filed against Phil Lawver. Explain how her actions may or may not have mattered in the attack on Sonia Slanek.

Consider the parallels between Steve and Phil. Although strikingly different in their value systems, each use notes in Gail's locker to get her attention. Explain the difference between the notes and the incentive behind each boy.



At the end of the book, Gail alludes to the fact that she could still do something. Think of some ideas of things she "could do" to make a difference.

The attorney told Gail that the law is wrong. How does this explanation make a statement for the entire theme of the story?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Sonia Slanek discovers an old silent movie, *Roses in Ruin*, starring Madame Malevich in her youth. What appears to be the plot of the movie? What attitude toward rape is portrayed? Find other examples of the rape theme in literature, art, or movies.
2. Research the crime of rape in American society: its legal implications, statistics about its frequency, the age and status of victims and rapists, and societal attitudes towards the victim and the criminal. Does Peck's novel portray a "typical" situation?
3. Read "The Problem Novel" by Sheila Egoff in *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*. Discuss Peck's *Are You in the House Alone?* as a problem novel.
4. Choose another of Peck's works from the following list and discuss it as a literary work and as a "problem novel": *Don't Look and It Won't Hurt*; *Representing Super Doll*, *Father Figure*; *Close Enough to Touch*; *Remembering the Good Times*.
5. Richard Peck wrote this novel to make young adults aware that rape victims are frequently treated as if they were more guilty than the rapist. Describe the treatment Gail receives from the police chief, the nurses and doctors, the lawyer, her parents, Alison, Steve, Mrs. Montgomery, and Madame Malevich. Which characters most clearly express the author's conviction about the legal and social systems and their treatment of rape victims?



Further Study

Duncan, Frances. "The Young Adult Novel: One Writer's Perspective." *Horn Book* 62 (April 1981): 221-228. Duncan argues that young adult novels are not written for today's young adults; rather, they are written by yesterday's adolescents about yesterday's adolescence. She feels that the category is false and that young adult books belong in the mainstream of modern fiction.

Egoff, Sheila. "The Problem Novel." In *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*, edited by Sheila Egoff, G. T. Stubbs, and L. F. Ashley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980. Egoff discusses the adolescent problem novel, concluding that it is too narrow in scope and style to be good fiction.

She analyzes the genre's vast appeal and its influence on children's literature as a whole.

Peck, Richard. "Coming Full Circle: From Lesson Plans to Young Adult Novels." *Horn Book* 59 (April 1983): 208-215. An autobiographical essay about Peck's career as a writer of young adult novels.

"Rape and the Teenage Victim."

Top of the News 34 (Winter 1978): 173-178. Peck discusses his reasons for writing a novel about rape.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotès Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

Copyright ©, 1996, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing Corp., P.O. Box 830, Osprey, FL 34229-0830

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996