

Four to Score Study Guide

Four to Score by Janet Evanovich

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Plot Summary

Four To Score is the fourth in the Stephanie Plum series. In this installment, Stephanie is looking for Maxine Nowicki, a woman arrested for stealing her boyfriend's car. Through the course of trying to find Maxine, Stephanie finds herself being stalked by some woman who has accused her of stealing a man's affections. As a result of this stalking, Stephanie moves in with Morelli, her childhood boyfriend. Now Stephanie finds herself in the middle of chaos and has no idea how to find her way out. Four To Score is an amusing, if at times tense, novel of accidental adventure that will leave Evanovich's fans begging for more.

Stephanie is angry with her cousin, Vinnie, for hiring Joyce Barnhardt to work for him as a bounty hunter. To get her off his back, Vinnie gives Stephanie a new case. This case involves a woman named Maxine Nowicki who failed to appear in court after being arrested for stealing her boyfriend's car. The first place Stephanie goes is to the boyfriend's house to see if he has heard from Maxine. The boyfriend, Eddie Kuntz, tells Stephanie he has not heard from Maxine, but that Maxine has some love letters of his that he would like back. Kuntz asks Stephanie if she would bring Maxine to him before she takes her to jail in order for him to retrieve his belongings. Stephanie agrees when Kuntz offers to pay her.

Stephanie then goes to the diner where Maxine was a waitress and gets the name of her closest friend. Stephanie goes to visit the friend and discovers she has badly injured her hand and is no longer working. However, the woman has no information on Maxine. Stephanie then goes to visit Maxine's mother and finds an unpleasant alcoholic who is belligerent and unwilling to help. The trail then appears to come to an end until Kuntz tells Stephanie that Maxine threw a brick through his window with a message on it. The message is in code. Stephanie asks around her building for anyone who might be able to decode the message and is sent to the nephew of one of the tenants, a man who is supposed to be really good with puzzles.

Stephanie goes to Salvatore Sweet's apartment and finds a man in drag. Sally Sweet plays in a bad full of cross dressers with his roommate, Sugar. Despite being odd, Sally is very good at codes and he deciphers Maxine's code in a matter of minutes. After the first code leads to another, Stephanie returns to Sally and asks that he continue to decipher the codes. Sally readily agrees on condition that Stephanie allows him to tag along on some of her bounty hunter related outings. Stephanie agrees. The codes lead Stephanie and her newly formed team on a wild goose chase that appears to be done with the intention of humiliating Kuntz. However, none of the clues led Stephanie to Maxine's whereabouts.

A few mornings later, Stephanie goes out to her car to continue interviewing Maxine's friends and neighbors only to find that someone has doused her car with gasoline. A note tells Stephanie that she has gotten too close to someone's boyfriend and this person wants her to back off. Stephanie automatically assumes the boyfriend mentioned in the note is her childhood friend, Joe Morelli and is instantly annoyed at



him for putting her in such a situation. However, this situation does not stop Stephanie from her job.

After following up on another lead on Maxine, Stephanie and Lula, her sometime partner, return to her building to find Mrs. Nowicki waiting for them. Mrs. Nowicki, who has recently suffered a terrible scalp injury, tells Stephanie that her daughter has moved on to Atlantic City and that she should leave her alone. When Mrs. Nowicki is done talking, she discards her cigarette beside Stephanie's car and the car explodes. Later that night, after returning from Atlantic City where she nearly caught Maxine, Stephanie finds that someone has firebombed her apartment, nearly destroying it.

Stephanie moves in with Morelli because of all her friends and relatives she figures he is the only one she does not mind putting into danger. However, this move complicates their relationship because they are attracted to each other but Stephanie knows that Morelli cannot provide the type of commitment she would like to have. At the same time, this situation leads Stephanie to learn that Morelli is working on a counterfeit case that might have something to do with her case. Stephanie takes this information and uses it to track down Mrs. Nowicki. Soon afterward though, Kuntz disappears. Stephanie goes to his home to see if there is some clue to his whereabouts. When Stephanie finds nothing on Kuntz's side of the duplex, she goes into the other half, hoping his aunt might have left some clue out where she can find it in regards to Kuntz's disappearance. What Stephanie finds it the dead body of Morelli's counterfeiter.

Stephanie's case blows wide open when Kuntz's aunt and uncle return home and confess their role in the counterfeiting ring. Soon after Stephanie finds out that Maxine is on the way to the airport. Stephanie catches up to her just in time to take the arrest from Joyce. With the case over, Stephanie is able to concentrate on her personal life, but realizes a relationship with Morelli is not something she wants to consider too closely just yet.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Four To Score is the fourth in the Stephanie Plum series. In this installment, Stephanie is looking for Maxine Nowicki, a woman arrested for stealing her boyfriend's car. Through the course of trying to find Maxine, Stephanie finds herself being stalked by some woman who has accused her of stealing a man's affections. As a result of this stalking, Stephanie moves in with Morelli, her childhood boyfriend. Now Stephanie finds herself in the middle of chaos and has no idea how to find her way out. Four To Score is an amusing, if at times tense, novel of accidental adventure that will leave Evanovich's fans begging for more.

Stephanie rushes into the offices of her cousin's bond office with the intention of killing him. Stephanie has learned that Vinnie has hired her worst enemy to work as a bounty hunter for him. Vinnie admits it and refuses to rectify the situation. Instead, he gives Stephanie a new case in hopes that it will distract her from her anger. The case is that of Maxine Nowicki, a young woman who failed to appear in court after being arrested for stealing her boyfriend's car. The first place Stephanie decides to go is the boyfriend's home, hoping he will have some idea where Maxine is. The boyfriend, Eddie Kuntz, has no idea.

Next Stephanie goes to the diner where Maxine worked. Here Stephanie learns the name of Maxine's closest friend, another waitress who has been out sick for several days. Stephanie goes to Maxine's apartment and sweet talks her neighbor into opening the door for her. Stephanie discovers that Maxine's apartment has been trashed as though someone had gone through it looking for something. Stephanie assumes this has nothing to do with her case and dismisses it. The neighbor also tells Stephanie that she saw Maxine leave a few days before and that she told everyone she was going on vacation. Stephanie worries that this might mean that Maxine has left the state.

Stephanie goes to Maxine's mother's house next. Mrs. Nowicki lives in a rundown little house that has not been cared for in years. Mrs. Nowicki herself resembles her house in that she does not seem to worry much about her own care. Mrs. Nowicki is not helpful and gives Stephanie the impression that Maxine does not want to be found. This is not good news to Stephanie who needs to find Maxine if she wants to get paid. Frustrated, Stephanie stops at a bakery for a few donuts only to find Joe Morelli waiting for her when she comes out. Morelli is an old childhood friend who is now a cop. Morelli and Stephanie have had an on again, off again relationship for years that is currently off. Stephanie attempts to get Morelli to apologize for not calling after a night of intimacy they shared several months before, but he avoids the obvious trap. Stephanie gets mad and drives away.

Stephanie goes home to check on her hamster before leaving once again to have dinner at her parents' home. Stephanie is there less than a minute before she discovers



that her grandmother has invited Kuntz to dinner, believing him to be a boyfriend of Stephanie's. Stephanie thinks about escaping, but her mother talks her into staying by announcing that they are having banana cream pie for dessert.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Stephanie Plum is introduced in this chapter. Stephanie is a young woman who works for her cousin as a bounty hunter. Stephanie is upset with her cousin because he has hired her worst enemy to work in the same capacity. To distract her from this anger, Vinnie gives Stephanie a new case. This case is Maxine Nowicki, a young woman who was arrested for stealing her boyfriend's car and failed to show up in court. The case appears to be routine at first, but as Stephanie begins to search for the young woman she finds certain things that imply this case may not be routine. First Stephanie discovers that Maxine's apartment has been broken into and searched as though someone thought Maxine had something important hidden in her apartment. Stephanie dismisses this information as irrelevant, but when she meets Maxine's mother and is given the impression that Maxine wants to remain hidden, Stephanie begins to wonder if there might be more to this case than simple theft.

Stephanie meets several characters in this first chapter. One of these characters is Maxine's boyfriend, Eddie Kuntz. Stephanie describes him in such a way that the reader feels he must be creepy. Later, Stephanie finds out that he has been invited to her family home for dinner and nearly makes a run for it out the back door. Stephanie's reaction helps the reader to see how uncomfortable Stephanie is around Kuntz and gives an impression of how Maxine might have felt in his presence, lending back story that will help explain some of Maxine's actions in future chapters.

Stephanie also meets Mrs. Nowicki, Maxine's mother. This woman shows little concern for her own welfare, but defends her daughter with passion. Mrs. Nowicki's insistence that Maxine has left town and does not want to be found shows not only her concern for her daughter's welfare, but it also leaves Stephanie worried that Maxine will not be found in time for her to recover her reward. Mrs. Nowicki will reappear later in the novel as a staunch defender of her daughter, leaving the reader curious if Stephanie will ever be able to get passed this lady in order to arrest Maxine.

Stephanie runs into her childhood boyfriend, Morelli, as well. Morelli has a reputation as a lady's man and the last time he and Stephanie were together he promised to call, but never did. Stephanie is not happy with her attraction to Morelli because she knows he will never commit to her. However, this meeting suggests to the reader that Morelli will return to the narration and will make things complicated for Stephanie because of her continuing affection for him.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Over dinner, Stephanie learns that Maxine called Kuntz and told him she would be sending him an airmail message. Stephanie is not happy with this news because it implies that Stephanie is a long distance from Trenton. After dinner, Stephanie asks Kuntz to call her when he gets the message. Stephanie then returns to the diner hoping Stephanie's friend will be there but she learns that the other waitress has called in sick again. Stephanie goes to the friend's house where she discovers that her finger had been severed in a kitchen accident a few days before. The friend, Margie, has no information on Maxine, however.

The next morning was Sunday and Stephanie slept in. Later in the morning, Kuntz calls her and tells her that someone threw a brick through his window with a message from Maxine attached. Stephanie goes to Kuntz's apartment where he gives her the message. The note tells Kuntz that he is a jerk. If he wants his property back, he will have to decode the message at the bottom of the note and do what it says. Stephanie asks what property and Kuntz tells her a story about some love letters he gave Maxine that are potentially embarrassing. Stephanie does not believe him but does not push the subject. Kuntz then offers to pay Stephanie if she will bring Maxine to him when she finds her before taking her to the police. Stephanie agrees.

Stephanie takes the note home and asks some of the elderly people who live in her building if they can decode it since many of them are good with puzzles. No one can help, but one lady suggests Stephanie go to her nephew Salvatore who has a knack for puzzles. Stephanie goes to Salvatore's apartment and finds Sally Sweet, a cross dresser who plays in a band. Sally agrees to decode the message and solves it quickly. The message sends Stephanie to a Dumpster in the parking lot of a local fast food restaurant. Stephanie calls Kuntz to go through the Dumpster but he does not want to go through it any more than she does. Instead, Kuntz calls a friend who knocks the Dumpster over with a backhoe. Stephanie finds the next clue in a jar and quickly leaves with it before the restaurant employees can call the police.

Stephanie calls Sally and leaves a message for him asking for help with the newest coded message. While waiting for a return call, Stephanie listens to her messages that include one from a fellow bounty hunter, Ranger. Ranger wants Stephanie's help with an apprehension. Stephanie agrees to help. The target is a young man in the mob who is attending the funeral of a relative. Ranger sends Stephanie into the funeral home in a sexy dress to distract the man and bring him outside where Ranger can get to him. Stephanie does her job, getting the man out on the front steps, but before she can pull her pepper spray and subdue him, another woman comes up and recognizes Stephanie. This woman tells the target who she is.



Chapter 2 Analysis

Stephanie goes to the home of a friend of Maxine's and finds a woman who has been injured in a kitchen accident. This means little to Stephanie at this point, but could prove to be important later in the novel. The woman refuses to tell Stephanie anything helpful about Maxine, leaving Stephanie more convinced than ever that Maxine has skipped town. Kuntz's news that Maxine is planning to send him airmail does make the situation seem any less bleak. However, airmail turns out to be a euphemism for a brick through the window. The note mentions some property of Kuntz's that Maxine has. When asked, Kuntz claims these are embarrassing love letters, but Stephanie does not believe him. At this point, though, the truth about this property is not as important as the code on the note. The property will be something that will come up later and help explain a great deal of Maxine's motivations.

Stephanie finds a man to help her decode Maxine's note. This man is a cross dresser who is a nephew of one of Stephanie's neighbors. Sally is a member of a band and this is why he dresses like a woman, as a gag to get attention for the band. Sally is not gay, something that will prove to be important later in the novel. Finally, Stephanie gets a call from her friend, a fellow bounty hunter, Ranger, asking for her help. Stephanie is to dress sexy and entice a man out of a funeral so that Ranger can arrest him. In the middle of doing just this, a woman approaches and recognizes Stephanie from a newspaper article printed the year before. The theme of danger comes into play in this scene as the reader is left wondering what this knowledge will do to the situation and if Stephanie is now in danger.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The target becomes angry with Stephanie and grabs her. Stephanie pulls the first lethal thing she can find out of her bag and sprays the man. It turns out to be hairspray. In the middle of the chaos, the target's parents come over to see what is happening. When they learn that their son missed his court date, they insist that he give himself up and go with Ranger. Early the next morning, Sally calls to let Stephanie know he has solved the code in the latest note. While they talk, Stephanie can hear Sally's roommate yelling at him to come to breakfast. Sally says that his roommate, Sugar, likes to cook and take care of him, almost like a wife.

Stephanie stops at the bond offices in order to check in. Stephanie asks Connie and Lula about the woman who upset her undercover operation with Ranger the night before. Stephanie finds out that the woman is the daughter of a mob boss and also a girl that Morelli dated for a time in high school. This information upsets Stephanie, but before she has time to wonder why, Sally walks in. The note Sally has decoded sends Kuntz to Mrs. Nowicki's house. Stephanie decides to go herself, hoping to find something indicating where Maxine is hiding out. However, Lula and Sally insist on going with her.

When Stephanie and her gang arrive at Mrs. Nowicki's the house seems abandoned at first. Stephanie finds the next clue under the front porch, but is unwilling to climb underneath because of the bugs. Stephanie and Lula begin looking around for something to dig it out with when Lula looks through the kitchen window. There she sees Mrs. Nowicki on the kitchen floor, possibly dead. Reluctantly, Stephanie calls the police. When the police enter the house, they discover that Mrs. Nowicki is not dead, but suffering an injury to her scalp. Mrs. Nowicki claims that she accidentally cut herself while trying to cut her hair with a butcher's knife. Stephanie recalls Margie's finger accident and begins to wonder if these accidents have anything to do with Maxine.

Stephanie decides to go home and make a few phone calls, planning to return that night to retrieve the latest clue. While eating lunch, Stephanie calls a cousin at Maxine's bank and learns that Maxine has not withdrawn money on her account in two weeks. Then Stephanie calls a convenience store Maxine had frequented. The night manager recalls having seen Maxine a few nights before. Stephanie grabs a photo of Maxine and goes to the convenience store to make sure the night manager had identified the right woman. The night manager, Helen, confirms the identity, but has little else to add to Stephanie's investigation. Stephanie decides then to tour the homes of Maxine's friends and family, hoping to catch sight of something suspicious. Stephanie wants to stop at Mrs. Nowicki's and get the clue, but there are still too many people around. Instead, Stephanie heads home where she finds Morelli waiting for her with take-out. Stephanie and Morelli begin talking about Stephanie's case, but the conversation quickly turns to their on again, off again relationship. Morelli makes it clear to Stephanie that he has



come to rekindle their romance, but Stephanie informs him of her lack of contraception. He decides he would rather watch a ball game on her television.

Chapter 3 Analysis

With Ranger's target arrested, Stephanie turns her attention back to Maxine Nowicki. Sally has deciphered another coded message that takes them to Mrs. Nowicki's house. In the process of finding the latest message, Stephanie, Sally, and Lula discover Mrs. Nowicki passed out on the kitchen floor. Assuming she is dead, Stephanie calls the police. Stephanie is not happy about this as the police presence will make it difficult for her to get the latest message. However, Mrs. Nowicki's condition becomes interesting to Stephanie's case when she realizes that the woman is not dead, but has suffered some sort of head injury. This injury makes Stephanie think of the cut finger of Maxine's friend Margie and makes her wonder if the two injuries are not related. If the injuries are related, it might suggest that someone else is also looking for Maxine and that they are using physical threats as a way of intimidating these women into telling someone where Maxine is. If this is true, it makes Stephanie's case much harder. Not only that, but it also brings tension to the plot and once again touches on the theme of danger as the reader begins to wonder what kind of danger Stephanie might be in.

Stephanie then turns the investigation in a new direction and calls the bank Maxine uses and learns she has not touched her bank account in two weeks. Stephanie finds this information interesting, because a woman on the run would have emptied out her bank account before leaving town, but Maxine does not seem to have done this. Then Stephanie learns from Helen, the night manager at the convenience store Maxine was known to frequent, that Maxine had been there recently. This information leads Stephanie to believe that Maxine might still be in the area. Finally, Stephanie returns home after a long day and finds Morelli waiting for her. Morelli makes it clear to Stephanie that he would like to reconnect with her in an intimate way, something that worries Stephanie because of his reputation as a lady's man, especially after learning she had met one of his ex-girlfriends the day before. However, Stephanie gives in only to have Morelli end the encounter when he learns she has not contraception in her apartment. Morelli's actions leave Stephanie frustrated and angry, suggesting to the reader that she is attracted to Morelli if not falling in love with him.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Stephanie begins to get nervous when Morelli does not leave. Stephanie wants to go get the next clue from Mrs. Nowicki's house, but she does not want to explain to Morelli what she is doing. However, just as Stephanie is about to give in, Sally arrives with the note. Sally and Morelli have a brief and tense encounter when Sally gets the impression that Stephanie is having trouble making Morelli leave. Stephanie soothes their ruffled feathers and sends Sally home. Left with the clue, Stephanie is forced to explain to Morelli what it is. When Morelli begins to make fun of the case and Stephanie, she sends him home.

The next morning, Stephanie stops by Kuntz's house with the new clue. The clue says that Kuntz is to wait for Maxine on their bench in a local park. Kuntz cannot even remember which bench it is. While they are discussing plans to meet Maxine's demands, Kuntz's neighbors, his aunt and uncle, arrive. Betty and Leo Glick are friendly and invite Stephanie over for cake, but Stephanie politely refuses. With plans for the park finalized, Stephanie leaves. Stephanie goes to Mrs. Nowicki's and finds her home from the hospital and in a foul mood. Morelli has told Stephanie that Mrs. Nowicki was partially scalped. Stephanie confronts Mrs. Nowicki with this information and demands to know who did this to her and why. Mrs. Nowicki confesses that two people came looking for her daughter, but she did not tell them anything. Stephanie then asks where Maxine would go if she had the luxury of time. Mrs. Nowicki suggests Point Pleasant.

Stephanie returns to her apartment to change. On the way, Stephanie notices a Jeep Cherokee following her and realizes she has seen it before. Stephanie dismisses the idea that she is being followed and drives out to Point Pleasant. Stephanie spends the day on the beach, but does not see any sign of Maxine. When Stephanie returns to her apartment, she gets a phone call from Sugar. Sugar is looking for Sally, but Stephanie has not seen him all day. Later, the next morning, Stephanie again sees the Jeep Cherokee, this time parked down the street from her building. Stephanie goes out to confront the person in the Jeep and finds Joyce Barnhardt. Apparently, Vinnie has decided Stephanie is not locating Maxine fast enough and has put Joyce on the case as well. Stephanie rushes off to the office to confront Vinnie, but he is out of town. Instead, Lula goes out to the Jeep, which followed Stephanie to the office, and shoots one of the tires.

Stephanie turns her attention to the meeting in the park Maxine's last note indicated. Lula hears about it and wants to come along. Stephanie agrees, because she feels she might need backup if Maxine shows. However, Kuntz is reluctant to go along with the plan. Stephanie convinces him, but decides she needs some kind of disguise. Stephanie and Lula go to Sally and ask him to help with a disguise. Sally immediately begins picking out wigs for Stephanie to wear.



Chapter 4 Analysis

Stephanie has the latest coded message and goes to tell Kuntz what it says. Kuntz is hardly receptive to the idea of following the demands on the note, clearly unhappy with doing anything a woman tells him to do. However, Stephanie manages to talk him into it. While doing this, Stephanie meets Kuntz's neighbors, Betty and Leo, who happen to be Kuntz's aunt and uncle. Stephanie finds them nice and polite, simple people who would not be suspicious even under scrutiny. Stephanie's meeting with these people is important because they will show up again later in the novel and their behavior will be important for the reader to note.

Stephanie discovers that she is being followed by someone in a Jeep Cherokee. Stephanie confronts this person and finds her worst enemy, Joyce Barnhardt, at the wheel. This upsets Stephanie, especially when she learns that Joyce is following her because she has also been placed on the Maxine Nowicki case. Stephanie rushes to the office to confront Vinnie but he is not in the office. There is nothing Stephanie can do, so Lula shoots out one of Joyce's tires to keep her from following Stephanie for a while. In return, Stephanie cannot refuse to allow Lula to go with her on the sting in the park she has planned for later that afternoon.

Stephanie again visits Kuntz and finds he is still reluctant to jump through Maxine's hoops. Again Stephanie sees Betty and again finds her polite, though her husband seems less friendly than before. The plan for the park is all set, but Stephanie decides she needs a disguise because Maxine might know what she looks like since she has visited her mother and friend. Stephanie and Lula go to Sally for the disguise, once again bringing Sally into the case. Important to note about Sally in this chapter is his roommate's attachment to him. Sugar has been described as a man who likes to care for Sally like a wife, and now Stephanie is getting phone calls from Sugar looking for Sally. Stephanie does not think much about these incidences, but the reader should take note because they could prove important later.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Sally and Lula get Stephanie dressed up in one of Sally's sexy outfits and a wig, even convince her to buy new shoes to go with the outfit. Then the three of them go to the park and set up surveillance of the bench that Kuntz claims is the one Maxine considers theirs. Nothing happens at the bench where Kuntz sits, but a jogger a few benches down gets a pie thrown in his face. When Stephanie confronts the perpetrators, they tell her some woman paid them to do it. Stephanie finds a note in the pie mess and realizes that Kuntz had the wrong bench and the pie had been meant for him. Before they can leave, Joyce shows up and demands to see the note. Stephanie refuses, but Joyce will not take no for an answer. Lula hits Joyce with her stun gun, and they leave before she comes to.

When Stephanie returns home she finds that someone has left a message in permanent marker on her door, telling Stephanie the author hates her and plans to get even with her. Stephanie is not terribly upset by the message. On her answering machine is a message from Helen, the night manager at the convenience store. Helen has new information and wants Stephanie to stop by. Kuntz calls and Stephanie tells him about Helen, hoping to keep him off her back for a little while. Then Stephanie goes shopping for groceries. When Stephanie returns home, she discovers that Joyce is back on her tail. Stephanie calls Ranger and asks him to get Joyce to stop following her. Ranger goes out to talk to Joyce and Joyce leaves. Ranger tells Stephanie that he informed Joyce that he and Stephanie were going to spend the night in bed, and there was nothing for her to watch.

Stephanie leaves a short time later to meet Helen at the convenience store. When Stephanie arrives the store, she finds a young clerk and an older man, but no Helen. Stephanie learns that Helen is suspected of having walked out of her job without telling anyone and without leaving someone in charge of the store. Stephanie asks if there were signs of a struggle or any other signs of foul play, but both the clerk and the owner insist it looked as though Helen had just walked away. Stephanie finds a book of matches from a bar in Point Pleasant and believes that this might be the new evidence Helen had called her about. Stephanie is spooked by this latest development on top of the message on her door and the injuries Mrs. Nowicki and Margie suffered. Stephanie calls Morelli and asks for his help.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Stephanie goes to the park in hopes of catching Maxine attempting to approach Kuntz, but instead Kuntz proves his insensitivity and an innocent jogger gets a pie in the face. Stephanie manages to get the next coded message despite the fact that Joyce shows up to steal it. Joyce seems to think that if she just follows Stephanie she can steal the



arrest. The reader is struck by the unfairness of this and hopes that Stephanie will eventually beat out Joyce. In the meantime, the reader cheers when Lula stuns Joyce and leaves her passed out in the grass.

Stephanie returns home and finds a message written on her front door in magic marker. The message does not particularly upset Stephanie until later in the chapter when she goes to speak to the convenience store manager and discovers that the woman has mysteriously gone missing. Stephanie begins to add together the manager's disappearance with Mrs. Nowicki and Margie's injuries and begins to wonder if maybe the message on her door might not mean that she is in line for an injury of her own. In her fear, Stephanie reaches out to Morelli, setting an interesting precedence that might make the reader think Stephanie's feelings for her on again, off again lover are deeper than she has allowed to show thus far.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Stephanie is suspicious that Kuntz might have had something to do with Helen's disappearance since he is the only other person who knew that Helen had new information for Stephanie. Stephanie decides to go to Kuntz's apartment and peek through the windows to make sure Kuntz did not have her strapped to a chair or something. Stephanie finds Kuntz home talking on the phone. Before Stephanie can sneak up to his windows to get a closer look, someone grabs her from behind. It is Morelli. Morelli pulls Stephanie away from the Kuntz residence and then tells her that he has found Helen. Helen is dead. Helen's body was found in an alley not too far from the convenience store with her finger cut off and evidence of strangling on her neck. Stephanie is upset by this news as it sounds as if the same person who is after Maxine killed Helen.

The next morning, Sally calls to let Stephanie know he has decoded the next message. Soon after Kuntz calls and tells Stephanie that someone has left a box on his porch. The box appears to be the same one mentioned in the latest note, so Stephanie tells Kuntz to open it. Kuntz refuses, afraid it might be a bomb. Stephanie assures him it is not a bomb and agrees to come over before he opens the box. Before Stephanie can leave, there is a knock on her door. The visitor turns out to be Maxine. Maxine handcuffs Stephanie to her refrigerator and tells her that the box has dog excrement in it. Maxine wants Kuntz to put his hand in the box in order to retrieve the next clue and wants Stephanie to stay away. Maxine is trying to punish Kuntz for the way he treated her during their relationship. Maxine then leaves Stephanie handcuffed to the refrigerator. Sally comes by a short time later and, after teasing Stephanie, gets the superintendent to cut the handcuffs for Stephanie.

When Stephanie is free, she rushes out of the building to her car. Joyce pulls up and tells Stephanie that she has a contact that knows where Maxine is hiding and no longer needs to follow Stephanie. When Joyce is gone, Stephanie turns to her car and finds a note under the windshield wiper. The note warns Stephanie to stay away from someone's boyfriend. Stephanie automatically thinks this is about Morelli and thinks about the mob woman she had met the other day at the funeral parlor. Stephanie then begins to get in her car when she realizes it has been doused with gasoline. Stephanie knows she cannot drive the car like this, so she calls Lula.

Lula drives Stephanie to Kuntz's house. Stephanie tells Lula about the dog excrement in the box, but does not tell Kuntz. Instead, Stephanie encourages Kuntz to open the box himself. As soon as Stephanie has the newest note, she and Lula leave. Back at Stephanie's building, Lula parks beside Stephanie's car, and they begin inspecting the damage. While they are standing there, Mrs. Nowicki walks up. Mrs. Nowicki wants Stephanie to know that Maxine has moved on from Point Pleasant and might be in Atlantic City. Then, as she is turning to leave, Mrs. Nowicki throws her cigarette on the



ground. Seconds later, Stephanie's car explodes and Lula's car catches fire. After dealing with the police, Stephanie arranges to borrow her father's old Buick for a trip to Atlantic City.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Stephanie goes to Kuntz's duplex because he is the only other person who knew that Helen had new information for Stephanie. However, when Stephanie arrives, Morelli also arrives to keep her from doing anything stupid. Morelli has gotten word that Helen's body has been found. Morelli tells Stephanie that Helen's finger has been cut off, connecting her death with the injuries that Mrs. Nowicki and Margie suffered. Stephanie is sure now that Helen's disappearance has everything to do with Maxine, and it makes her scared.

The next morning, Maxine shows up at Stephanie's apartment to keep her from stopping Kuntz from putting his hand in a box full of dog excrement. Maxine's trick only works for a few minutes, but Sally quickly arrives to rescue Stephanie. However, it seems someone else has a grudge against Stephanie when she arrives at her car to find it has been doused with gas. Stephanie thinks, due to a note left under the windshield wiper, that this trick was done by a girlfriend of Morelli's, touching on the theme of revenge. Stephanie is angry with Morelli for putting her in such a situation, again suggesting to the reader that her feelings for Morelli are deeper than originally implied.

Stephanie makes Kuntz find the next note in the box, not telling him that she knew all along what the note was inside of. Then Stephanie returns home where Mrs. Nowicki tells her that Maxine has left Point Pleasant and gone to Atlantic City. Stephanie makes plans to go to Atlantic City to look for Maxine. However, before this can happen, Stephanie is forced to borrow her father's car as Mrs. Nowicki blows up her car, assumedly by accident.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Stephanie goes to her parents' house for dinner and finds herself forced to allow Grandma Mazur to join her, Lula, and Sally in Atlantic City that night. When they go to pick up Sally at his apartment, they find Sugar on a baking spree, filling their small apartment with numerous pies and cakes. Stephanie thinks little of this, in a hurry to get to Atlantic City. Once at the casino where they think they might find Maxine, Stephanie and her partners separate. The night seems to be a bust, except that Grandma Mazur meets a man, until Stephanie catches sight of Maxine across the room. Stephanie rushes after her and follows her into the parking lot where Maxine escapes into a waiting car. Stephanie watches her go and suddenly gets the impression that this has all been a set up to get Stephanie off the track.

Stephanie drops everyone at home and heads to her own apartment. Before she reaches the building, Stephanie sees fire trucks. Stephanie rushes to the building and learns that someone threw a firebomb through her bedroom window. Stephanie's main concern is her hamster. When she learns Rex is okay, Stephanie begins picking through the ruins for her belongings. Stephanie finds very few things since the entire apartment, with the exception of the bathroom, has been burned. Stephanie takes Rex and tries to think of a safe place to go. Stephanie does not want to go to her parents' house in case the bomber wanted to try again. Instead, Stephanie goes to Morelli's.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Stephanie, Lula, Sally, and Grandma Mazur go to Atlantic City to look for Maxine. When Stephanie goes to pick up Sally, she finds his roommate baking a lot of cakes and pies. Stephanie does not think much of this, but it seems curious to the astute reader. Sugar is a man who likes to take care of Sally as if he were his wife. This connection is strong and the reader should be curious if the fact that Sally does not return the sentiments is a problem for Sugar. In Atlantic City, at first it seems like a bust, but then Stephanie catches sight of Maxine. Stephanie chases her through the casino only to lose her out in the parking lot when Maxine jumps into a car that had clearly been waiting for her. Stephanie begins to think then that the whole Atlantic City thing had been designed to through her off the track. Stephanie calls an end to the evening and takes everyone home.

Stephanie returns home only to find her apartment has been firebombed. Stephanie is frantic for the well-being of her hamster. It is not until afterward that the emotion of it settles on Stephanie. Stephanie is now afraid for her life, touching on the theme of danger. Not only this, but Stephanie has nowhere she can go without putting someone else's life in danger. The only person Stephanie can think of to turn to is Morelli, since she figures he can take care of himself if danger does present itself again.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Stephanie goes into Morelli's house intent on not letting her emotions get the better of her in front of him. However, in the process of telling him what has happened, Stephanie cannot help but dissolve into tears. Morelli consoles her as best as he can and sets her up in his spare bedroom. Stephanie spends the next morning shopping for a new wardrobe. Later Stephanie and Lula go to Point Pleasant to look for Maxine. It seems like another wasted day until Stephanie spots Margie in a booth on the boardwalk. Stephanie follows her to a local house. Stephanie and Lula knock on the door and barge into the house, looking for Maxine. Stephanie and Lula have to fight Mrs. Nowicki and Margie, but they manage to find Maxine. Before Stephanie can arrest her, however, Joyce barges in with two other women and attempt to steal the arrest. However, in the chaos Maxine disappears.

Stephanie returns to Morelli's and finds him watching television. Stephanie complains about her day and Morelli tells her that he checked on her apartment and found it to be a disaster. Stephanie's mother calls and tells her that she has handled the insurance for her car. Later, Stephanie goes to take a shower and Kuntz calls, causing Morelli to come into the bathroom. Morelli finds himself attracted to Stephanie and urges her to tell Kuntz to call back later.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Stephanie goes to Morelli after her apartment is bombed, giving the impression to the reader that she trusts Morelli more than she originally implied. Either that, or Stephanie feels that Morelli's safety is not something she should care about. Either way, Stephanie is now living with Morelli, setting the scene for some romance later in the novel. In fact, the end of this chapter leaves Morelli attempting to coax Stephanie into bed. This situation touches on the theme of commitment as the reader begins to wonder if Stephanie will change her mind about a relationship with Morelli now that she is forced into this situation in which she is drawn romantically to Morelli.

Stephanie goes to Point Pleasant to continue looking for Maxine after coming to the conclusion that the information about Atlantic City was designed to get Stephanie off the trail. Stephanie catches sight of Maxine's friend Margie and follows her to a house where she finds Maxine. However, before Stephanie can arrest Maxine, Joyce barges in and causes such chaos that Maxine gets away. Joyce has made a mess of what should have been an easy arrest, most likely causing Maxine to go further underground, perhaps even leave town. The situation is becoming bleak for Stephanie because, if she does not find Maxine soon, she will not get paid.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Stephanie and Morelli spend the night in bed together. The next morning Stephanie finds herself thinking about things such as buying Morelli a cookie jar. Commitment enters her mind, causing her distress since Morelli is not the kind of guy who settles down. Stephanie suffers teasing when she goes in to the bonds office and the girls guess what she spent her evening doing. However, Stephanie is all business, speaking to Vinnie about Joyce's interference on the Maxine Nowicki case. Vinnie agrees to take Joyce off the case as long as Stephanie proves success within the next few days.

While Stephanie is still in the office, Ranger comes in and asks for her help with one of his cases. Ranger is after a repeat offender who is known to be a difficult arrest. Ranger does not tell Stephanie just how difficult this man can be until they reach the man's apartment building and it is too late for her to back out. Ranger and Stephanie barge into the man's apartment and are immediately bombarded with flying groceries. Stephanie is hit several times with eggs and flour, but Ranger somehow manages to avoid being hit at all. Ranger finally gets handcuffs on the man. The man refuses to walk, so Ranger and Stephanie have to carry him outside.

Stephanie rushes back to Morelli's to change because they are due to have dinner with Morelli's mother. However, the egg in her hair refuses to come out. Stephanie hands Morelli some scissors and asks him to cut it out. Then Stephanie and Morelli go to his mother's where they find that his grandmother and aunt are also going to join them. Stephanie is unhappy with this. Morelli's grandmother is known to put curses on people she does not like, and she does not like Stephanie.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Stephanie and Morelli spend the night together, leaving Stephanie thinking about the future. Stephanie's thoughts touch again on the theme of commitment, leaving the reader wondering where this relationship is headed. Stephanie is now clearly open to a future between the two of them, but Morelli's intentions seem to lean more toward the sexual rather than romance. The differences in their implied intentions add tension to the novel as the reader predicts an unpleasant end to this relationship.

Stephanie helps Ranger with an apprehension, finding herself in the middle of a firestorm of groceries. Ranger finds the whole thing amusing while Stephanie is frustrated with the situation. To add insult to injury, this episode makes Stephanie late for dinner with Morelli's mother. Stephanie rushes to get ready and finds she has to have Morelli cut a chunk of egg out of her hair. They make dinner, but upon arrival find Morelli's grandmother in attendance. Morelli's grandmother's presence upsets

Stephanie because she is known to put curses on people and Stephanie is convinced she will be the next victim on the old woman's displeasure.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Rather than curse Stephanie, Morelli's grandmother claims to be able to see a future in which Morelli and Stephanie marry and have three sons. Stephanie becomes fixated on this idea, scared to death that she might already be pregnant. Stephanie has little time to dwell on the idea, however, because she is in a rush to meet Sally and Lula at a local bar that is the latest location where Maxine has demanded Kuntz show up. Morelli insists on going with Stephanie, but she manages to make him wait in the parking lot. While waiting for Maxine to show up, Stephanie spots Joyce. Stephanie approaches her and demand she leave since Vinnie had taken her off the case. However, Joyce reveals that Vinnie changed his mind and put her back on the case.

During an argument with Joyce, Stephanie loses track of Kuntz. Stephanie asks Morelli if he saw Kuntz leave and he says he did. Stephanie returns to the bar to speak to the bartender. Before she reaches the bar, Stephanie is stopped by a beautiful woman who warns her to stay away from her boyfriend or she'll do something worse than burn her apartment. Stephanie has never seen the woman before and has no idea who the boyfriend is that the woman is talking about. Before Stephanie can ask the woman the answer to these questions, the woman disappears into the crowd. Stephanie continues to the bar and finds out that Kuntz received a message that caused him to rush out of the bar, but the bartender has no idea what the note said or who it was from.

Stephanie returns to Morelli's car and tells him about the strange woman. Then they drive home in silence. Stephanie thinks about Morelli and admits to herself that she is in love with him. However, Stephanie also knows that Morelli was not the greatest candidate for a long-term relationship because of his dangerous job and his reputation as a lady's man. When they get home, Morelli attempts to coax Stephanie back into bed but Stephanie resists. Morelli bets her that she will cave before him, a bet that Stephanie is determined to win. The next morning, Morelli goes with Stephanie to check out Kuntz's house. Stephanie wants to talk to him about where he disappeared to the night before, but Kuntz is nowhere to be found. Convinced that Maxine might have Kuntz, Stephanie directs Morelli to the house in Point Pleasant where Maxine was hiding out. When they arrive, they peek through the windows and find a terrible mess. Stephanie thinks that someone other than Joyce has followed her to the house the day before.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Stephanie has dinner with Morelli's family and his grandmother says she sees them in the future having three sons together. Stephanie is mortified by this vision and it makes her think about a possible future with Morelli. Stephanie does not think Morelli is husband material despite the fact that she has been in love with him since she was a



small child. Stephanie is caught in a terrible dilemma that causes her to refuse intimacies with Morelli, which leads to a bet Morelli makes with her. Stephanie is determined to win the bet, but feels weak from the get go. The situation Stephanie is in again plays with the theme of commitment, revealing both Stephanie's desire to be in a committed relationship and her need to feel secure in her relationships.

Stephanie, Lula, and Morelli go to a bar where they have been sent by another of Maxine's notes. Stephanie loses sight of Kuntz, who is supposed to be waiting for a message, but finds herself confronted by the woman who bombed her apartment. This woman is someone that Stephanie has never seen before, but assumes has something to do with Morelli since he is the only man in her life at this point. The reader is not sure this woman is attached to Morelli, however, since there are two other men in Stephanie's life at this point, Ranger and Sally.

Kuntz disappears from the bar, so Stephanie and Morelli go searching for him the following day. Kuntz is nowhere to be found. Stephanie and Morelli then go to Maxine's house in Point Pleasant hoping to find sign of Kuntz or Maxine there, but find the house not only deserted, but also ransacked. Morelli decides they should try to get inside, surprising Stephanie with his disregard for the law.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Morelli opens the door and he and Stephanie take a look around the house. It appears that there was a struggle of some sort in the house and the women took off in a hurry. Kuntz is also still missing. Back at Morelli's Stephanie calls Betty, Kuntz's aunt, but she has not heard from him either. While waiting for her turn in the shower, Stephanie answers the door and finds one of Morelli's relatives there with a casserole. It seems that word has gotten out in the family that Stephanie and Morelli are expecting a baby. When Morelli leaves, Stephanie calls her best friend in a panic and asks her to bring a pregnancy test. However, when they are both calmed down, Stephanie's girlfriend explains that it is too early for her to test.

When Morelli returns home that night, he finds the attentions of his relatives to this rumor of Stephanie's pregnancy amusing. While they are arguing about it, someone throws a firebomb through the front windows. Even though the bottle does not break, Stephanie is terrified by the episode. After dealing with the police, Stephanie gets a call from Sally. Sugar has disappeared, and Sally needs to get ready for a gig. Stephanie and Morelli go to his apartment and help him with his makeup and girdle. Stephanie and Morelli then go with Sally to his gig to watch the show. Stephanie is shocked when she sees Sugar. Sugar is the woman that Stephanie met in the bar, the same woman who claimed responsibility for the firebombing of her apartment. Stephanie tells Morelli who has his cop friends check Sugar out. However, they cannot find any evidence in his car, and Sugar has disappeared.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Stephanie and Morelli get into Maxine's house and discover evidence of a struggle. Stephanie believes that someone came looking for Maxine after she and Joyce left, and that Maxine and her girlfriends got the better of him and disappeared. Once again, it seems that Maxine is on her way out of town. Kuntz is also still missing and Stephanie is having no luck finding him. On top of these discouraging developments on her case, Stephanie has to deal with rumors running wild in Morelli's family that she is pregnant. Stephanie is becoming convinced of it herself, insisting on taking a test even though it is too early.

Morelli's house is firebombed, but the bomb lands on carpet and does not burn. Stephanie is terrified by this event, but not so upset that she cannot help Sally get ready for a gig. Stephanie and Morelli follow Sally to his gig, and Stephanie recognizes Sugar as the woman she saw in the bar, the same woman who admitted to firebombing her apartment. The reader knows this makes sense since Sugar was overly attached to Sally and clearly felt that Sally was someone for him to take care of. However, Sugar

has disappeared and Morelli cannot arrest him. The reader suspects that Sugar will appear again later in the novel, perhaps with deadly attentions against Stephanie.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

The next day, while Morelli goes off to work on a mystery case, Stephanie goes again to Kuntz's duplex to see if he has shown up. Kuntz is not there, so Stephanie speaks to Betty. Betty is not nearly as friendly as she had been in the past and encourages Stephanie to move on, that Kuntz was a bum who would turn up eventually. Stephanie checks out both Mrs. Nowicki and Margie's houses, but both are clearly empty as well. It occurs to Stephanie then that both women will have to visit a doctor to take care of their wounds. Stephanie makes some calls and learns that both women have doctor's appointments in a few days.

When Morelli gets home, Stephanie tells him that she saw him on stakeout outside the convenience store where Helen worked. Morelli tells her that his case involves counterfeit money. This gives Stephanie something to think about, but she does not share her suspicions with Morelli. Stephanie and Morelli go to her parents' house for dinner. While there, Lula calls and reveals that she has found out who has been giving Joyce information on Mrs. Nowicki. Stephanie rushes off with Lula to meet this guy, who turns out to be a produce guy at a local supermarket who sells marijuana on the side. Stephanie speaks to the guy and learns that Mrs. Nowicki had been to see him a few days before. Stephanie talks him into giving her the money Mrs. Nowicki paid with and to call her if Mrs. Nowicki shows up again. Stephanie then takes the money to Morelli who tells her the bill is counterfeit.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Kuntz is still missing. Betty, his aunt, has had a change of personality as well. Betty is almost rude to Stephanie, unlike the friendliness she had shown before. This behavior change is curious to Stephanie who believes that Betty knows something about Kuntz's disappearance but that she is afraid to tell anyone what that is. Stephanie then goes to check on the other witnesses, but has little luck until she figures out that Mrs. Nowicki and Margie will need to see a doctor for their injuries. This news is encouraging to Stephanie who now believes that there will be an opportunity to find both women when they keep these appointments.

Stephanie then learns the identity of Joyce's informant. Stephanie goes to talk to this man and learns that Mrs. Nowicki has been to see him recently. Stephanie is encouraged by this news, assuming it means that Maxine is still in town. Stephanie convinces the man to call her the next time he sees Mrs. Nowicki. Stephanie also takes the money from him that Mrs. Nowicki paid him. Stephanie takes this bill to Morelli who tells her that it is a counterfeit bill, confirming to Stephanie that the other person looking for Maxine must be the person who gave her the counterfeit bills and that these bills must be the property that Kuntz wants so badly to retrieve from Maxine.



Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary

While Morelli and Stephanie are discussing the counterfeiting case, Sally shows up. Sally and Sugar had a fight where Sugar threatened to kill Sally. Sally reveals that he stole Sugar's diary in which he wrote about his anger toward Stephanie and his attempts to kill her. Morelli tells Sally he can move in, but Morelli does not want Stephanie or Sally to actually stay in his house, but to pretend to while hiding at Stephanie's parents' house. Morelli hopes that this arrangement will draw Sugar out into the open. The next morning Morelli tells Stephanie that the police have found Kuntz's car abandoned at the Farmer's Market. Morelli leaves to check it out while Stephanie and Sally go to the hair salon. Afterward, Stephanie and Sally go to Kuntz's duplex to speak to Leo and Betty again. This time Leo is downright rude, sending Stephanie on her way without answering her questions.

Stephanie gets a call from the produce guy while leaving the Glicks. Mrs. Nowicki is in the store that moment trying to buy marijuana. Stephanie talks the produce guy into putting her off. Stephanie arrives at the grocery store just in time to follow Mrs. Nowicki back to her house. Stephanie asks Mrs. Nowicki about Maxine's whereabouts, but gets little except for the impression that Maxine is nearly ready to leave town. Stephanie then returns to the grocery store and checks out the money Mrs. Nowicki gave the produce guy. Again, it is counterfeit. Stephanie wants to work surveillance on Mrs. Nowicki, but she does not have a car that would not stand out and be obvious. Stephanie goes to her parents' house in frustration and discovers that Sugar was at the house delivering a note for Stephanie. Stephanie is deeply disturbed by Sugar's boldness. Stephanie calls Ranger for backup and then goes with Sally to the bars where Sugar might be hanging out in hopes of catching him.

Chapters 13-14 Analysis

Sally shows up and reveals that Sugar has threatened him as well, so he stole his diary and ran away. Morelli sets up a situation in which Sally and Stephanie move in with her parents while making everyone think they are still living with Morelli. While trying to catch Sugar, Stephanie goes about the Maxine Nowicki investigation, trying to find Kuntz. However, Kuntz's car is the only thing that shows up, abandoned in a parking lot without sign of struggle. Stephanie believes Kuntz has been kidnapped or met a bad end at the hands of whoever is also looking for Maxine. Stephanie tries to talk to Leo and Betty about this situation, but they are rude and refuse to help her. Stephanie is now convinced that Leo and Betty know something, but what this is she is not sure.

Stephanie gets a call from Mrs. Nowicki's drug dealer and learns that Mrs. Nowicki is at that moment trying to buy drugs. Stephanie follows her home and learns that Maxine is about to leave town. Stephanie needs to keep an eye on Mrs. Nowicki, but has no



access to a car that is not obvious. Stephanie then goes home to her parents' house to think things out and discovers that Sugar has come to the house to deliver her a note. Stephanie is scared over this, because it proves that Sugar knows she is staying with her parents. Stephanie decides she has to find Sugar that night and sets out in search of him, with Sally, Lula, and Ranger as backup.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The last place Stephanie and her crew go to is a bar that is frequented by gays and cross dressers. Stephanie learns that Sugar is there when she speaks to the bartender. Stephanie puts everyone on alert and then begins to search the large bar. When Stephanie has trouble finding Sugar, she slips off to the bathroom. Sugar follows her inside. Sugar pulls a gun and marches Stephanie out to the alley. Sugar tries to shoot Stephanie, but is unaccustomed to the gun. Sugar's hesitation gives Stephanie time to hide behind a Dumpster. Stephanie then runs away, heading toward an assisted living center next door where she thinks there is a night guard on duty. However, there is no longer a guard employed. Stephanie and Sugar fight on the floor of the community room where a group of elderly people watch. Eventually, Ranger arrives and saves Stephanie.

Stephanie turns her attention back to the Maxine Nowicki case. Stephanie asks Morelli to put surveillance on Mrs. Nowicki, but Mrs. Nowicki has already disappeared. Stephanie decides to check out Kuntz's place again. When Stephanie arrives and finds no sign of Kuntz, she decides to break in and have a look around. Stephanie finds little inside the duplex that is of help. Stephanie does find keys to the Glick side and decides to go check that out. Stephanie hopes that she might find a ransom note on the counter or some such thing.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Stephanie goes searching for Sugar and finds him at the last place she checks. However, Sugar is not allowing herself to be found in the open. Stephanie goes into the bathroom, and Sugar finds her. Sugar takes Stephanie out to the alley to kill her, but Sugar does not know how to use a gun and fails. Eventually, Ranger comes to Stephanie's aid and takes Sugar into custody, ending the threat on Stephanie's life.

Stephanie then turns back to the Maxine Nowicki case and decides to break into Kuntz's duplex, hoping to either find him or some idea where he might be. Stephanie does not find anything, but decides to check out the Glick half of the duplex in hopes there might be a clue there. The reader suspects Stephanie will find something that will explain the change in personality of Kuntz's aunt and uncle.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Stephanie goes into the Glick's half of the duplex and finds a very clean home, except for a terrible smell coming from the basement. Stephanie goes down there and discovers a dead body. Before Stephanie can leave, however, the Glicks come home. Leo tells Stephanie that he was a mob enforcer before retiring to Trenton and that he had been running a counterfeit money scheme with a partner, the man who is dead downstairs. Maxine found out about the counterfeit money when Kuntz was holding the plates for the Glicks during Morelli's investigation. Thinking the plates were Kuntz's, Maxine took off with them to hurt Kuntz. Instead, Leo went after Maxine and her family and friends to get his plates back. Leo is now intent on killing Stephanie, but Lula has been working as lookout and called Morelli, who bursts in and saves the day.

While the police are wrapping up the situation at the Glick home, Kuntz suddenly shows up. Kuntz is naked and has been covered in tattoos. Kuntz tells them Maxine kidnapped him and humiliated him before leaving him naked on a street corner. Joyce picked him up. Kuntz then tells Stephanie that Maxine, her mother, and Margie are headed for the airport. Stephanie tears off after them and finds them on the side of the road, in the middle of being arrested by Joyce. Lula shocks Joyce with her stun gun, locks her in her Jeep, and helps Stephanie take Maxine in. With the case finished, Stephanie finds herself ready to think about her relationship with Morelli. However, Stephanie decides this is something she does not want to think about just now.

Chapter 16 Analysis

As the reader has suspected, Stephanie discovers Leo and Betty are not the people they claim to be. Betty and Leo are counterfeiters who have killed their partner as he was nearly caught by Morelli. Leo attempts to kill Stephanie for discovering this truth, but Morelli comes to her rescue much like Ranger did the night before. Now Stephanie knows who has been chasing Maxine besides her and Joyce. Now it seems it is safe for Maxine to come in, but no one knows where she is.

However, Kuntz shows up, covered in tattoos. Maxine, in line with the theme of revenge, has kidnapped Kuntz and humiliated him as she had been trying to do from the beginning. Now she is free to leave town. Stephanie learns Maxine is on the way to the airport. Stephanie chases after her and manages to steal the arrest from Joyce. Now the case is over, and Stephanie is able to concentrate on her personal life. However, Stephanie, in her fear of commitment, chooses not to.



Characters

Stephanie Plum

Stephanie Plum is a bounty hunter who works for her cousin's bonds company. Stephanie is given a case to work on at the beginning of the novel, finding a fugitive named Maxine Nowicki. Nowicki was arrested for stealing her boyfriend's car and failed to show up for court. Stephanie begins the case by interviewing the people closest to Maxine, including her boyfriend and her mother. Within a few days of Stephanie taking on the case, she discovers that the people around Maxine are suffering unusual accidents. Maxine's mother is nearly scalped and her friend from work loses a finger. A few days later, a manager at the local convenience store is found dead. All of this combined makes Maxine begin to wonder if there is not something deeper involved in this case besides a simple failure to appear.

While Stephanie is searching for Maxine, she finds herself the target of some woman who believes that Stephanie is trying to steal her boyfriend. This woman first douses Stephanie's car in gasoline and later fire bombs her bedroom, destroying a large portion of her apartment. Stephanie is forced to move in with Morelli as a result of this attack, causing a great deal of trouble for Stephanie who finds herself attracted to Morelli despite a reluctance to get involved romantically with him. While struggling with her feelings for Morelli, Stephanie continues to search for Maxine, finding the case more complicated than she originally believed. Maxine is baiting her ex-boyfriend with coded messages that Stephanie at first believed would lead her to Maxine, but later realizes are just a game to torture Eddie Kuntz.

Finally, Stephanie begins to find evidence of the true nature of Maxine's case. It turns out that Maxine, her mother, and a good friend are on the run from someone more dangerous than Stephanie is. Not only this, but somehow the counterfeit case that Morelli is working on is somehow connected to Maxine. Stephanie never truly grasps the true depth of the case until things begin to dissolve around her, and she finds herself the victim of the true criminals.

Joe Morelli

Joe Morelli is a cop with the Trenton police department. Stephanie and Morelli have known each other since they were small children, having grown up in the same neighborhood. Morelli and Stephanie have had an intimate relationship in the past, but because Morelli has a reputation as a lady's man, Stephanie is reluctant to become further involved with him. However, after her apartment is firebombed by someone Stephanie initially believes is connected to Morelli, she chooses to move in with him until her apartment is fixed. Stephanie moves in with Morelli because she is afraid of bringing danger on any of her other friends or her relatives. This living arrangement



causes a situation in which Stephanie finds herself forced to face her feelings of affection for Morelli.

While Stephanie is busy trying to locate Maxine Nowicki, Morelli is working overtime on a counterfeit case. Morelli's case crosses over Stephanie's case however when some of the suspicious bills show up at a convenience store where one of Stephanie's witnesses worked. Soon Stephanie realizes that Maxine and her mother have access to the fake money, proving that her case and Morelli's are related. However, Stephanie tries not to give Morelli this information, afraid he will hone in on her case and cause her trouble in locating Maxine. Morelli is a smart cop, though, and puts Stephanie's actions together and ends up rushing in to save her when she is nearly killed by the real counterfeiters.

Lula

Lula is an ex-prostitute who works in the bonds office as a file clerk. On occasion, Lula goes out with Stephanie to help bring in FTAs. Lula dresses in a unique fashion, causing her inability to blend in with a crowd. Stephanie uses her a few times in this case to help track down Maxine. At one point, Stephanie calls Lula to give her a ride when her car is doused with gasoline. Inadvertently, this causes Lula's car to explode when she parks it next to Stephanie's car that is subsequently lit on fire by a carelessly discarded cigarette. Lula is not upset about this, however, because she leases the car and is able to replace it quickly.

Lula is also with Stephanie when she goes to Atlantic City to find Maxine and when she goes to Point Pleasant to search for Maxine. Lula is a good friend to Stephanie. Lula proves this friendship when Stephanie calls her to be the lookout as Stephanie breaks into Eddie Kuntz's duplex. Kuntz has disappeared and Stephanie wants to see if there is any evidence indicating where he has gone in the duplex. When Stephanie finds nothing in Kuntz's half of the duplex, she decides to go into the other half that is occupied by Kuntz's aunt and uncle. While in this half of the duplex, Stephanie finds a dead body. When the owners of the duplex return, Lula comes to Stephanie's rescue by calling Morelli.

Salvatore 'Sally' Sweet

Sally Sweet is a cross dresser who Stephanie befriends when she needs someone to decode Maxine's messages for Kuntz. Sally is a very tall man who likes to dress like a woman as a gimmick for his work in a rock band. Sally discovers he likes the excitement of Stephanie's job and joins her on several outings to search for Maxine. Sally's interest in Stephanie causes his roommate, Sugar, to become jealous. Sugar is also a cross dresser. Sugar has a crush on Sally and hoped at one point that if he cares enough for Sally, he would eventually fall in love with Sugar. However, Sally is not gay and does not have any romantic feelings for Sugar. Sally's lack of feelings have no affect on Sugar, who is determined to take what he sees as obstacles out of his way. In the meantime,



Sally is a big help to Stephanie in the case, decoding all the messages and providing backup on many of Stephanie's investigative trips.

Maxine Nowicki

Maxine Nowicki is a waitress who was arrested for stealing her boyfriend's car. Maxine took the car during an argument in order to get away from her violent boyfriend. Maxine's case would have most likely been dismissed or resulted in probation, but she failed to show up for court. Stephanie is given her case as her cousin wrote Maxine's bond. Soon after taking the case, Stephanie discovers that Maxine is sending coded messages to her boyfriend. Stephanie has the messages decoded and follows their instructions in order to find Maxine, but has little luck. Eventually, Maxine comes to her and asks that she stop interfering, because the notes are designed to humiliate Kuntz.

Maxine is on the run, because she learned that Kuntz is involved in a counterfeiting ring. Maxine wants to hurt Kuntz, so she stole the plates and some of the fake bills that he was holding for the real counterfeiters. However, this plan backfires when the real counterfeiter learns of Maxine's theft and begins injuring her friends and family in order to get the plates back. Maxine refuses to be bullied and remains on the run until her revenge against Eddie Kuntz is done. Then Maxine takes off for the airport, but by this time Stephanie has figured out the entire story and arrests Maxine before she can escape.

Eddie Kuntz

Eddie Kuntz is the ex-boyfriend of Maxine Nowicki. Kuntz called the police when Maxine took off with his car one night after a particularly intense fight, causing Maxine to be arrested. This arrest is what causes Stephanie to have to chase Maxine after she misses her court appearance. Stephanie enlists Kuntz's help in finding Maxine and in turn Kuntz hires Stephanie to give him a chance to speak to Maxine before she is taken to jail. Kuntz claims that Maxine has possession of some highly embarrassing love letters that Kuntz wants returned. Stephanie agrees as she needs Kuntz's help in order to find Maxine. However, this agreement proves to be a bad choice when Kuntz proves to only be the target of Maxine's wrath. He refuses to keep Stephanie informed of several developments in the case, including the fact that Kuntz is more interested in the counterfeit plates Maxine took than any non-existent love letters. Maxine eventually gets her revenge on Kuntz, and Stephanie finds Maxine without his help.

Mrs. Nowicki

Mrs. Nowicki is Maxine's mother. Mrs. Nowicki has a drug and alcohol problem, making her easy for Stephanie to track through her drug dealer. However, before Stephanie finds out about the drugs, she goes to visit Mrs. Nowicki and finds her passed out on the kitchen floor. Mrs. Nowicki's scalp has been badly cut. Mrs. Nowicki claims to have accidentally caused the cuts herself when she tried to cut her hair with a knife, but



Stephanie quickly comes to the conclusion that someone else did this damage to Mrs. Nowicki's head. This episode causes Stephanie to come to the conclusion that someone dangerous is also after Maxine, injuring the people close to her in order to find her whereabouts. This information only makes Stephanie's job harder, until she discovers the counterfeit bills and their connection to both Maxine and Kuntz. This discovery helps Stephanie find Maxine.

Joyce Barnhardt

Joyce Barnhardt is a woman that Stephanie has known since they were both little girls. Joyce was a bully in school, always making fun of Stephanie to the point of humiliation. Later, when Stephanie was married, Joyce had an affair with Stephanie's husband. Stephanie dislikes Joyce. Stephanie's cousin is aware of this situation, but decides to hire Joyce as a bounty hunter anyway. Not only this, but Vince gives Joyce the same case Stephanie is working on, Maxine Nowicki. Joyce begins to follow Stephanie so she can steal Stephanie's leads in the case. Later, Joyce shows up while Stephanie is arresting Maxine, giving Maxine the chance to escape. However, Stephanie manages to get the jump on Joyce later in the novel, making the arrest while leaving Joyce abandoned in her car.

Gregory 'Sugar' Sweet

Gregory 'Sugar' Stern is Sally Sweet's roommate. Sugar is a cross dresser who performs in the same band as Sally. Sugar is a domestic goddess who likes to cook and clean, making Sally's life a joy. However, when Sally becomes involved with Stephanie, Sugar becomes convinced that there is something romantic happening between them. Despite the fact that Sally is not gay, Sugar had hoped that Sally would fall in love with him if he took care of him well enough. However, this would never happen. Sugar decides that Stephanie is the reason Sally does not fall in love with him and begins a terror campaign designed to get Stephanie out of the picture. Sugar douses Stephanie's car in gasoline and firebombs her apartment. When these attempts do not work, Sugar goes after Stephanie with a gun. This attack is also futile, and Sugar goes to jail for attempted murder.

Betty and Leo Glick

Betty and Leo Glick are Kuntz's aunt and uncle. Betty and Leo live on the other side of Kuntz's duplex and appear friendly to Stephanie, at first. However, after a time things begin to change and their behavior becomes suspicious. Despite this, Stephanie never imagines that Betty and Leo are criminals until she breaks into their side of the duplex hoping to find information on Kuntz's whereabouts. While in the house, Stephanie discovers a dead body in their basement. This body proves to be the counterfeiter Morelli has been watching, who it turns out is the partner of Leo Glick. Leo is the true counterfeiter and the owner of the plates Maxine stole. Leo is also the one who went

after Maxine's friends and family in an attempt to find her. Leo catches Stephanie in his duplex and tries to kill her. However, Morelli, called in by Lula, comes to the rescue and saves her from sure death.



Objects/Places

Stephanie's CRX

Stephanie drives a Honda CRX. One morning, Stephanie discovers that someone has doused her car in gasoline. Later, Mrs. Nowicki accidentally catches the car on fire when she throws a lit cigarette under the car.

Stephanie's Apartment

Late one evening when Stephanie is not home, someone throws a firebomb through Stephanie's bedroom window and burns nearly the entire apartment.

Coded Notes

Eddie Kuntz receives several notes from Maxine Nowicki that are written in a secret code that only Sally can translate.

Donut Shop

Stephanie likes to eat donuts when she is stressed, stopping often at a local donut shop. When Stephanie was a teenager, she worked in the donut shop. This was the sight of her first intimate encounter with Morelli.

Dumpster

One of Maxine's clues for Kuntz tells him to search a Dumpster at a local fast food restaurant for the next clue. Both Kuntz and Stephanie refuse to enter the Dumpster, so Kuntz has a friend tip the Dumpster over with a small forklift.

Park Bench

One of the clues requires Kuntz to wait on a bench that was special in his relationship with Maxine. Kuntz remembers the wrong bench and an innocent jogger gets a pie in the face that was meant for Kuntz.

Kuntz/Glick Duplex

Eddie Kuntz rents half of a duplex owned by his aunt, Betty Glick. Betty and her husband, Leo, live on the other side.



Morelli's House

Morelli inherited a house from an aunt. Stephanie moves in with Morelli while she waits for her apartment to be repaired. This living arrangement leads to false assumptions among Stephanie and Morelli's family members.

Firebird

Lula's Firebird is also burned in the fire that destroys Stephanie's car. Lula quickly gets a new Firebird to replace the ruined one.

Buick

Stephanie borrows an old Buick from her parents to use while she waits for her insurance to pay for a new car. However, the Buick proves to be a difficult car to use in surveillance.

Point Pleasant

Point Pleasant is a beach resort town where Maxine and her mother hide out while attempting to torture Eddie Kuntz.

Atlantic City

Mrs. Nowicki tells Stephanie that Maxine has moved on to Atlantic City. When Stephanie goes to look for Maxine there, she gets the idea that Atlantic City might be a decoy to distract Stephanie from Maxine's real location.



Themes

Revenge

Revenge is a theme of this novel in two ways. The first is Maxine's decision to get revenge on her boyfriend, Eddie Kuntz. Maxine feels that Kuntz treated her badly during their relationship by abusing her both emotionally and physically. Then Kuntz has her arrested for taking his car when he knew she would have brought it back eventually. As a result of this abuse, Maxine goes back to Kuntz's to punish him and stumbles on counterfeit money. Maxine steals some of the fake money and the plates used to make the money, in order to punish Kuntz. However, this causes the real counterfeiters to come after her. While dodging these people as well as Stephanie, who is chasing Maxine for missing her court date, Maxine begins to send Kuntz notes in code. Maxine wants Kuntz to decipher these notes so she can lure him into traps designed to humiliate him. Maxine wants Kuntz to feel the same way she felt when he abused her.

The other way revenge enters the novel is when Sugar attempts to kill Stephanie for causing Sally Sweet to lose interest in him. Sugar is in love with Sally Sweet and believes that if Stephanie had not come along, Sally would eventually have fallen in love with him. However, this theory is wrong as Sally is not interested in men. Sweet tries to hurt Stephanie first by dousing her car with gasoline, then later by throwing a burning bottle of gas in through her bedroom window, destroying Stephanie's apartment. Stephanie moves in with Morelli until her apartment is repaired only to have the same thing almost happen there. Eventually, Sugar comes after Stephanie with a gun, attempting to kill her.

Both these situations are caused by people who believe they have been wrong. Maxine believes Kuntz hurt her intentionally, and she decides to do the same to him. Sugar believes that Stephanie has stolen the affections of Sally from him and decides to take her out of the picture. Both situations are motivated by revenge. Maxine wants revenge for poor treatment against her by Kuntz, and Sugar wants revenge for what he believes is stolen affection. It is these situations and their motivations that make revenge a major theme of the novel.

Commitment

Commitment is a theme of the novel because Stephanie's confusion over her desire for a committed relationship has a great deal to do with the tension between her and Morelli. Morelli has a reputation for moving from girl to girl without commitment and leaving broken hearts in his wake. Stephanie finds Morelli irresistible, but she wants a commitment someday, a marriage with children. Morelli is not the kind of man that Stephanie believes she can find this with. However, this knowledge does not keep Stephanie from imagining a life with Morelli.



Stephanie's desire for a commitment is one that she sees in the distant future. When Morelli's grandmother claims that she can see into the near future, and she believes that Stephanie is already pregnant with their first child, Stephanie panics. Stephanie wants a commitment but she does not want one now. This panic causes Stephanie to take a pregnancy test when it is much too early to get reliable results. Stephanie does not want to be pregnant, and she does not want to be committed to Morelli until he can prove he has changed his ways. Morelli is not interested in commitment at all, teasing Stephanie when she talks about buying him a cookie jar.

Commitment is a running theme in this novel as well as the other Stephanie Plum novels. Stephanie is a confused young woman who does not really know what it is she wants in a relationship. However, Stephanie is deeply attracted to Morelli, and she feels a great deal of affection for him. The reader is left with the impression that the fight to avoid a commitment is one that will eventually be lost for both Stephanie and Morelli. However, the reader does not know if it will happen for both at the same time.

Danger

Danger is a theme in this novel as Stephanie Plum is a bounty hunter, and the nature of her job causes her to place herself in danger. At first, Stephanie's job seems easy. Stephanie begins by simply interviewing people. However, it quickly proves to be a little more complicated than this when the people that Stephanie has visited turn up with morbid wounds or dead. Later, Stephanie goes in search of one of her witnesses and finds herself caught by the real bad guys, people she had assumed were friends. One of them pulls a gun on Stephanie and threatens to kill her until Morelli shows up just in time to save the day.

Stephanie also finds herself the target of an amateur bomber during the course of the book. Sugar, Sally's roommate, douses Stephanie's car in gasoline which later blows up and then throws a bottle of gasoline through her bedroom window. Sugar later comes after Stephanie with a gun, attempting to kill her but failing. These events also add to the danger of Stephanie's lifestyle. Stephanie's job and lifestyle are dangerous, making danger a theme of the novel.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is first person. The novel is written as if through the eyes of the main character, Stephanie Plum. Stephanie is a bond enforcement officer who has a comical view of the world. Stephanie shares her sense of humor with the reader as she narrates her adventures searching for a skip, or a client who fails to appear. This point of view keeps the focus of the novel on the main character and prevents the confusion of moving from one character to another the way many other fiction novels have a tendency to do.

The point of view works, because it keeps the focus of the novel on Stephanie Plum. Stephanie is the main character and therefore the most important character. If the narration were to be through the eyes of any other character, the novel would lose its direction and the plot would not make sense. This point of view also allows the reader to know Stephanie intimately in a way that another point of view would not permit. This connection with Stephanie is important as the plot follows her movements closely. The plot also places Stephanie in a degree of danger, therefore the reader might not care about this danger if the reader did not have a connection to Stephanie. By using the first person point of view, the writer makes the plot clearly about Stephanie and therefore creates a connection between reader and character that is important to the suspense that builds within the plot.

Setting

The novel is set in Trenton, New Jersey. The setting of the novel is important because of Stephanie's affection for her hometown. Stephanie talks about Trenton throughout the novel with the nostalgia that only someone who has lived in a place all their lives could express. The setting is also important, because it adds flavor to the novel with the unique speech patterns and behaviors of the New Jersey area. The heat of the New Jersey summer is also important to the novel as it causes the characters discomfort and becomes almost another character within the plot.

Another setting of the novel is Morelli's house. This setting is important because of the impact on Stephanie's life when her apartment is firebombed. Stephanie finds herself forced to move in with Morelli because moving anywhere else would place her friends and family in unnecessary danger. Stephanie and Morelli are on again, off again lovers. This new living arrangement brings Morelli and Stephanie's relationship back to the front burners. News of their living arrangement also spreads through their family and friends. This begins a rumor that Stephanie is pregnant, and she and Morelli are planning a wedding. This causes undo stress on Stephanie, especially when she begins to believe some of the rumors.



Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is precise English. The novel is simple and easy to read. There are no foreign phrases in the novel. However, there is some slang that is common to the setting of Trenton, New Jersey. Stephanie and her co-workers often speak to each other using phrases that are full of the quick slang that is common to the area in which they live. This slang adds some authenticity to the novel and gives the reader the sense of what it would be like if the characters were real and the reader were along for the ride. It is this authenticity that not only makes the novel easy to read and gives the setting a stronger sense of character, but it also draws the reader into the story without being aware of the techniques the reader uses in order to accomplish this important task.

The language of the novel and its meaning works, because it does help bring the reader into the story. It also works as it is true to the characters and therefore is not distracting as it may be if the characters were from England and speaking with New Jersey accents and slang. Language is important not only to tell the story, but to help the reader to believe in the story, to believe in the characters and want to care what happens to them. If the language were not authentic to the story, it would be difficult for the reader to care what happens to the characters because they would turn into humorous caricatures instead of people the reader wants to care about. Therefore, the language of this novel works, because it is authentic to the characters.

Structure

The novel is divided into sixteen chapters. Each chapter is between ten and twenty pages, including several breaks in the chapters where the characters move from place to place or situation to situation. The novel is told from Stephanie's first person point of view and includes many passages of exposition in which Stephanie allows the reader to see her thoughts. The novel also includes a great deal of dialogue that helps to introduce other characters to the story line and explore their motivations and general personalities.

The novel includes two main story lines. The first is about Stephanie, who is a bounty hunter, attempting to track down a woman who is wanted for missing her court date on a felony car theft arrest. Stephanie spends a great deal of time speaking to many of this woman's friends and neighbors trying to ascertain where she might be hiding. Stephanie also finds herself going on a wild goose chase as she attempts to decode messages the woman sends to her boyfriend. The second story line revolves around the attempts of an unknown person to stop and possibly murder Stephanie. Apparently Stephanie has offended a person who believes Stephanie is in love with this person's lover. This person proceeds to blow up Stephanie's car and apartment in an attempt to keep her away from her lover. Both story lines interact throughout the novel and come to a conclusion at the end of the novel within a few pages of each other.



Quotes

"Living in Trenton in July is like living inside a big pizza oven. Hot, airless, aromatic."
Chapter 1, pg. 7

"My mother gave me her resigned mother look. The one that said, So go...at least I got you to stay through desert and now I know you had one good meal this week. And why can't you be more like your sister, Valerie, who is married and has two kids and knows how to cook a chicken." Chapter 2, pgs. 35-36

"Neither of those felt exactly right for the day, so I took myself into the kitchen to see if I could find my identity in the refrigerator. I was plowing through a Sara Lee frozen cheesecake when the phone rang."
Chapter 2, pg. 41

"I'd been replaced by a raspberry Popsicle, and Morelli didn't look all that unhappy. I, on the other hand, wanted to smash something." Chapter 4, pg. 93

"The first thing I always notice about Atlantic City is that it's not Las Vegas. Vegas is all splash from the outside to the inside. Atlantic City is not so much about neon lights as about good parking. The casinos are built on the boardwalk, but truth is, nobody gives a damn about the boardwalk. A.C. is not about ocean. A.C. is about letting it ride. And if you're a senior citizen, so much the better. This is the Last Chance Saloon." Chapter 7, pg.178

"I could go to New York or Vegas with Lula and Sally and never be noticed. In Atlantic City it was like trying to blend in with Sigfried and Roy and their five tigers." Chapter 7, pg.179

"I looked over at Morelli. His features were softened by shadow, but even in the dark I could see the paper-thin scar that sliced through his right eyebrow. A few years ago, Morelli had walked into a knife. And he'd probably walk into another. Maybe a bullet. Not a comforting thought."
Chapter 10, pg. 261

"I was standing behind him, and I was trying hard to stay calm, but I was shaking inside, and I was having flashbacks of my ruined apartment. If I'd been home, in bed, when the bottle had exploded, I'd have been killed, charred beyond recognition. As it was I'd lost just about everything I owned. Not that it was much...but it was all I had. And now it had almost happened again." Chapter 11, pg. 289

"Sally looked like an overgrown, demented, testosterone-gone-berserk schoolgirl. Plaid pleated skirt, crisp white blouse, grungy sweat socks and beat-up Reeboks. No



makeup, no wig, two-day beard, hairy chest peeking out the top of the blouse." Chapter 13, pg. 324

"I took the cookie bag and ushered Sally out of the house. It was early, and we really didn't need to leave, but I didn't think I'd hold up to the grilling. There was no good way to tell my mother I was being stalked by a homicidal drag queen." Chapter 14, pg. 365

"I parked and looked around for Ranger. No Ranger in sight. That's because he's in the wind, I told myself. You can't see the wind. Or maybe the wind went home to watch Tuesday night fights."
Chapter 14, pg. 372

"I was outside, on my parents' steps, doing nothing. I could have been doing something deep, like thinking about my life, or Mother Teresa's life, or life in general, but I couldn't get turned on by that. What turned me on right now was the luxury of doing nothing."
Chapter 16, pg. 422



Topics for Discussion

What is the importance of Morelli to the story? How does he relate to the overall story? How does his presence affect Stephanie? Why does Stephanie choose to stay with him when her apartment is bombed? Is it out of a sense of protection for the rest of her family and friends, or is it because Stephanie is in love with Morelli and desires his protection for herself?

Why does Maxine send coded messages to her ex-boyfriend? Does Maxine receive the desired result even though Stephanie interferes? How does Maxine's taunting of her ex-boyfriend compare to Stephanie's interaction with Morelli?

Why does Stephanie dislike Joyce? There appears to be a great deal of competition between Joyce and Stephanie. Why do you think this is? Is there some envy involved in this competition? If so, what does Stephanie envy in Joyce? What does Joyce envy in Stephanie?

Why does Vince hire Joyce to work for him despite his knowledge of Stephanie's dislike of Joyce? Do you think Vince did this on purpose? How does this symbolize the relationship between Vince and Stephanie?

Why does Stephanie react the way she does when Morelli's grandmother claims she can see into a future in which Stephanie and Morelli become the parents of three boys? Is Stephanie afraid of marriage or just marriage to Morelli? What does it say about Stephanie when she insists on doing a pregnancy test after hearing this prediction?

Why does Stephanie's mother appear to hold her responsible for her grandmother's unique behaviors? Is Stephanie responsible for getting her grandmother in trouble? How does Stephanie do this? What is the significance of Grandma Mazur's character in this novel?

Why does Sugar try to kill Stephanie? Does Sugar really believe Stephanie is a threat to him? Why then does he turn his attention to Sally Sweet? Is Sugar psychotic? How does Sugar compare to Maxine? What is the irony in this comparison?