

God Save the Child Study Guide

God Save the Child by Robert B. Parker

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Plot Summary

As Spenser sits in his office, he realizes he can lean very far back in his chair to see the sky from his office window. He has two potential clients in his office, Margery and Roger Bartlett. They tell him that their teenage son, Kevin, is missing and that the Smithfield Police haven't been able to find the boy. Margery says that "the boy" ran away. Roger says he doesn't know why Kevin would have left home. After spending some time with Margery and Roger Bartlett Spenser believes he knows why Kevin ran away. The Bartletts are self-absorbed, with Roger working all the time to provide his family with everything and Margery spending the money on clothes, classes and liquor. But just as Spenser is certain that Kevin is a runaway, the Bartletts receive a ransom note, demanding fifty thousand dollars. An elaborate sting is set up to follow the kidnappers when they pick up the money, but the pickup happens from a motorcycle and the getaway is achieved smoothly by taking a bridle path with multiple points of escape and no way for police cars to follow.

After the ransom is delivered, the Bartletts get a phone call indicating that Kevin can be found behind a school. Officers find a hearse with a wooden box in the rear, but a dummy stuffed with newspapers springs up when the box is opened. Then Margery is threatened, and the case takes an even more bizarre turn as Spenser has to decide whether the case has anything to do with Kevin, or if the attention to Kevin's disappearance has simply brought out the nut cases who have an unrelated grudge against Margery. When the Bartlett's attorney, Earl Maguire shows up the following day to help prepare for a party, he's killed in the Bartlett's living room. That doesn't stop Margery from throwing her party for sixty-five guests, and Spenser sarcastically notes that Maguire was inconsiderate, getting himself killed on Margery's living room floor.

Spenser will eventually discover that there is no kidnapping but that Kevin has run away with his idol, Vic Harroway. Vic is a body builder and when Kevin decided to go away with Vic, the two hatched the idea to ask for the ransom, planning to use the money for a new start together. Vic and Kevin were in the Bartlett house on the day Maguire arrived and Vic says the murder was an accident.

Spenser's investigation uncovers a scheme involving Vic and two accomplices providing girls for sex. One of the accomplices is Dr. Raymond Croft, a physician wanted in Washington for performing an illegal abortion. Spenser has Croft held by police as he goes to pick up Kevin and tries to unravel the mystery of the third accomplice. As it turns out, that third party is the Smithfield Police Chief, Trask, who kills Croft.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Spenser has two potential clients in his office, Margery and Roger Bartlett. Their teenage son, Kevin, is missing, and the Smithfield Police haven't been able to find him. Margery says "the boy" ran away. Roger doesn't know why Kevin would have left home. According to Roger, Kevin always got good grades until recently. He cites an "adolescent phase" as the reason. The one thing that Kevin took from home was a guinea pig. When Spenser asks if anyone was home when Kevin got the guinea pig, Margery is defensive, saying that she was at acting lessons—that a creative person simply must create. Spenser says that he fully understands because he's "trying to create some information". Roger interrupts, tells his wife that she should stop talking about herself and points out that this situation is about Kevin.

When asked if Kevin had ever run away before, Margery says "yes" while Roger says "no." Spenser learns that Kevin had spent the night at a friend's without telling his parents. Roger justifies it by saying that "any kid'll do that," but Margery says that if they hadn't gone and gotten him, he wouldn't have returned home. Margery wanted psychiatric counseling for Kevin, but Roger said it was too expensive. They argue, with Roger saying that Margery spends enough on clothes to pay for counseling for twenty years. Spenser sticks his fingers in his ears and waits until they stop the argument. He says he will not assess their parenting skills, but he needs information in order to find their son. Roger says that "it's only money" and writes Spenser a five hundred dollar check. Spenser puts it in his pocket as if he gets checks for that amount all the time.

Spenser will go to Smithfield to talk to police, the school, and look over the neighborhood. Spenser can devote all his time looking for Kevin, unlike the police who have other duties. Spenser is still at the window of his office as the Bartletts go up Stuart Street to the parking lot. They emerge minutes later in a blue Dodge Club van with Bartlett Construction on the side.

Spenser arrives in Smithfield that afternoon, takes note of a neat town and that the Bartlett's house is yellow with green shutters and a slate roof. There's a barn it seems to be used for storage for lawn equipment. He pulls into the drive to the drone of an air conditioner. He is wearing a white linen sport coat but can't take it off because the gun at his waist would be very conspicuous in Smithfield. A young girl is mowing at the far side of the lawn, and a Labrador named Punkin is on the porch. The dog doesn't even raise her head to consider the visitor. When Roger opens the door, Spenser notes that he looks more comfortable in Bermuda shorts, but no happier.

Spenser accepts a beer and takes in his surroundings. The kitchen has a huge rack of copper-bottomed pans that look as if they've never been used. The overweight cop at the table is introduced as Chief Trask of the Smithfield Police Department. Disrespectfully, Trask says that he's checked up on Spenser, that he knows he was fired



by the AG's office, and that he isn't going to allow him to run the investigation into Kevin's disappearance without keeping the police informed. Roger interrupts, saying the talk is in the way of progress on the case, and Spenser asks Trask to fill him in on the investigation. Trask says the guinea pig doesn't matter, as that's not who they're looking for; they are looking for Kevin. Spenser asks to see Kevin's room.

Kevin's room is obsessively neat. After Spenser looks around carefully, he asks Roger if there is guinea pig food missing and inquires about the pockets on the shirt Kevin was wearing. Kevin doesn't seem like the kind of kid who would take his pet without taking something to carry the animal in - at least a large pocket - and something to feed it. He thinks Kevin is still nearby and that he had a destination in mind when he ran away. It's not likely that Kevin - who cared about the pet enough to return home for it - was going to carry it in his hand for a long distance.

By the time Spenser and Roger return to the kitchen, Margery is well on her way to getting drunk. Soon, Margery and Roger are embroiled in another serious argument. Spenser gets a beer from the refrigerator, noting that the fridge is red. Spenser goes outside and is on the porch scratching the dog's ears and drinking a beer when the Bartlett's daughter, Dolly, gets off the lawn mower. She starts toward the house, sees Spenser, detours to the front and emerges a short time later dressed for the pool. Spenser notes that she's just at the age to be filling out, and he's careful not to "lech" at her because he has an "arbitrary" age limit of sixteen. Punkin gets up and follows her to the pool and Spenser soon hears two splashes. Without talking again to the Bartletts, he gets in his convertible and drives back to Boston.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Margery Bartlett is blond and Spenser is willing to bet that she's older than she looks. She has on elaborate makeup as will be the case whenever she is anywhere she might be seen. She is also wearing a paisley caftan, and Spenser notes that it's split up the side so she can show off her legs. However, when she gets angry with Roger, she leans forward, forgetting that she was showing off her legs and covering them instead. Spenser says he wants to tell her that her legs are too thin but knows she wouldn't believe him anyway. Roger Bartlett is wearing white cuffed pants that are baggy, scarlet shirt and a pink tie with a matching handkerchief in the pocket, and Spenser says it's obvious that Margery chose the outfit. He says that Roger looks "as happy as a hound in a doggie sweater," and that he believes Roger would be more at home in casual attire. Spenser notes that Roger has grime under his fingernails that a simple shower won't touch.

The first argument Spenser witnesses between the Bartletts won't be the last. In fact, there will come a point where he will admit that if they were his parents, he might be tempted to run away as well. When he stays with the Bartletts for several days after Margery is threatened, Spenser says he might run away.



That afternoon, Spenser leaves Boston, goes north across the Mystic River and heads for Smithfield. He describes the trip in great detail. The toll worker is a person who takes pride in his job, taking the quarter with a "precise flourish." He notes the steeple of the Old North Church among the warehouses. In Chelsea, a bridge dips down just before the "Colonel Sanders' fast-food restaurant." Then the scenery becomes a blur of "discount houses, gas stations, supermarkets" and more. Just as he encounters the sign announcing Smithfield, the "land reappeared." Spenser drives down neat streets with large elm trees on each side that form a tunnel. The houses with large lawns and neat shrubs are back from the road. The entire picture of Smithfield seems to indicate a neat suburb town where good families live. The Bartlett's home, from the outside, is no different from the rest of the town. Spenser notes that there are dormer windows indicating that there could be rooms in the attic, but decides that the Bartletts aren't likely to be satisfied with staying in the heat of the attic, so those rooms must be set aside for servants.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Spenser begins the following day with a forty-minute jog along the Charles, returning home to coffee that he started before his run, showers, shaves carefully and prepares breakfast. After breakfast, he finishes dressing, includes his gun and dons a white raincoat that someone told him made him appear taller.

Smithfield High School is just out from the center of town in a "neighborhood of expensive homes." He speaks with Mr. Moriarty, the assistant principal. When Moriarty discovers Spenser is a private investigator, he says that he was an MP in the military. When Spenser assures him that Trask knows about Spenser's involvement. Moriarty says that Kevin is from a good family and Roger, Kevin's father, runs a successful business. Moriarty is hesitant to discuss the things Spenser asks - whether Kevin has behavior problems, friends or does drugs. Spenser just wants an answer as to "whether" any of those things apply. Moriarty becomes defensive, then suggests that Spenser talk to the guidance counselor, Susan Silverman.

Susan says she believes Kevin's identity role is "screwed up;" his parents drink too much; he seems to have problems with women teachers; he might lean toward homosexuality, and she isn't certain she is qualified to make such observations having only met with him twice. She says that Kevin is clever, that he doesn't have many friends, that those he does have could be a "damaging group," and that she believes he hangs out with a guy named Vic Harroway. Susan wanted to suggest to Kevin's parents that he see a psychotherapist but they didn't show up for a scheduled meeting.

Spenser heads back to the Bartlett home to see what he can find out about Kevin's friends. Susan describes the group as living in a sort of a "commune," but Spenser says he can't imagine such a thing in Smithfield. When he arrives, Trask's car is there, along with a Massachusetts State Police car. The state policeman takes Spenser's gun. The officer confirms Spenser's identification with Roger, and Spenser is allowed in the house, where Margery greets him with the news that "Kevin's been kidnapped." He learns that the Bartletts have received a ransom note by mail.

Earl Maguire, the Bartlett's attorney is there, as is State Police Lieutenant Healy, who knows Spenser. Healy is an investigator with the Essex County District Attorney's office, and Spenser says that there are some racketeers who steer clear of Healy's territory. In front of Margery, Healy accuses Spenser of "hotdogging", not being overly concerned with regulations. Margery Just wants Spenser to get Kevin back. Margery reminds Spenser of Donna Reed in the 1956, movie, Ransom. Trask pats Margery's hand and promises that they'll get Kevin back, which Healy likens to John Wayne's role in the 1956, film, The Searchers.



Healy shows Spenser two sheets of paper, each inside a transparent cover. The first is a hand-drawn comic strip featuring a voluptuous woman, dressed in a mini-skirt and seated at a bar. The ransom amount is fifty-thousand dollars, and the instructions must be followed exactly, and there is a warning to "be careful." Trask says that the pictures were a way for the kidnappers to hide their identities, but Healy refuses to comment. The instructions are specific. Margery is to have the money in a book bag at the corner in front of a riding stable, and any problems will result in Kevin's head being chopped off.

Roger has already made arrangements to put the business up for collateral. One of the odd things about the ransom note is that there is a two-day lead time. While it's suggested that Roger would need time to gather the money, the police and Spenser know that a better way to have handled it would have been to call with instructions at the last minute so that police won't have time to set up a stakeout.

Trask says that they can set up a stakeout to catch the kidnappers. Spenser suggests that they not catch them, but follow them to find Kevin. The ransom note indicates that Kevin will be released after the money is picked up. Margery won't approve anything that might cause Kevin to get his head cut off. Roger seems to agree, saying that "it's only money" and that he just wants Kevin's safe return. Trask promises to do what the Bartletts ask, but Healy says it's a mistake. Margery turns to Spenser, who says that Kevin might not survive at all but that the odds are slightly higher with police intervention. Spenser makes the final decision to stake out the pickup site. Healy instructs Trask to gather all his men in plain clothes and unmarked cars. Margery continues to cry and Maguire suggests that they call her doctor to prescribe something to calm her. Roger says that her physician is Dr. Ray Croft. Healy then tells Spenser that the two of them have work to do.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Moriarty is dressed in a dark blue, sharkskin suit, white shirt and knit tie, and Spenser immediately guesses that the man is also wearing white socks and cordovan shoes. When Moriarty steps from behind the desk, Spenser finds he is correct. When Spenser meets Earl Maguire for the first time, Maguire is wearing a "form fitting denim suit" and has longish dark hair. His handshake is vigorous and Spenser guesses that Maguire probably went to BC Law School. He asks Maguire, who confirms the guess. Spenser makes these "guesses" often in an array of situations and is always right. He will even think to himself on occasion that he wishes he had someone to bet with on those small details that he seems to adept at predicting.

Susan Silverman's receptionist has red hair and "a lot of good-sized bosom showing over and around a lime-green sleeveless blouse." Susan has a student with her and Spenser waits for her to finish. When she appears, Spenser notes that the secretary pales in comparison. Susan has dark hair, a "thin dark Jewish face," and is tall. Spenser says that he can't guess her age but that she exudes a maturity that puts her "on my side of thirty." Susan invites him to take off his raincoat, and he says that it's supposed



to make him look taller, but she points out that he's going to be sitting so he removes his coat. Susan asks how tall Spenser is, he says six-one, and she says he doesn't look that tall - even with the raincoat. She asks if he lifts weights and he affirms that, asking if her husband does as well. She says "ex-husband," and Spenser says he feels "the click" of a connection between them.

Despite the fact that Healy knows of Spenser's reputation, he seems to respect Spenser's abilities. While Trask has continually scorned Spenser's help, Healy will put the private investigator to use. When Spenser finishes reading the ransom note, he and Healy make eye contact, and when Spenser raises an eyebrow in an apparent unspoken observation, Healy says merely, "I know." Spenser says that the instructions are complicated, but not in the ways ransom notes are typically complicated. For example, there are no requirements as to denominations of the money to be provided. The bag is specific but there is a two-day lead time, which means the police have plenty of time to prepare. All these things add up to questions in Spenser's mind, though he doesn't yet seem to seriously consider that Kevin is in on the kidnapping. It's actually interesting that Spenser doesn't seem to focus on that possibility at all, though it will later be evident that he has at least considered the possibility.

When Margery's asks, Trask says that a stakeout is when the police "conceal ourselves in the adjacent area so's to be in a position to apprehend the kidnappers when they come for a ransom." Healy "whistles admiringly," and repeats the word, "apprehend." Spenser adds that the word "adjacent isn't bad either." The two men are apparently making fun of Trask's statement and will then begin to pick it apart. Spenser says that he might want to let the kidnappers pick up the money but keep them in sight in an effort to find Kevin.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Dr. Croft gives Margery a shot and she goes to lie down. Healy, Trask and Spenser are working on their plans for the stakeout. Trask says that the area behind the stables are wooded, and they plan to put a man there with field glasses. They discuss the place Margery is instructed to stand. They make plans to have cars along the northbound way to observe and to have someone on the southbound side in case the kidnapper makes a u-turn. They discuss possible destinations and determine that they'll need all twelve of Trask's deputies.

Healy and Spenser arrive and meet the manager. When Spenser says that he wants to "rent a high-spirited palomino stallion with a hand-tooled Spanish leather saddle and silver-studded bridle", Healy interrupts, telling Spenser to shut up. Healy introduces himself and says that he wants "this man" to pretend to be an employee of the stables for the next few days, and that he doesn't want to answer any questions as to why. The man introduces himself as Vinnie and promises Healy he won't say anything to anyone about the arrangement. After Spenser introduces himself as "Nick Charles", he and Healy leave.

Spenser spends the next two days "hanging around" the stable. He quickly learns that horses are not overly intelligent and that Vinnie spends a lot of time watching television. On the morning of the pickup, he watches as Margery gets out of the car and stands on the corner. Spenser has a sandwich so he can observe from a bale of hay without seeming out of place. He knows there is a man in the woods behind him but sees no sign of him, not even a flash of sunlight off binoculars and attributes that to Healy's overseeing of the set up. He looks carefully at traffic but is momentarily distracted by a motorcycle with a small front wheel and sissy bar. The biker pulls up to Margery, slows and grabs the backpack from her and heads up the stable drive, passing Spenser and heading onto the bridle path behind the stables. In a fit of temper, Spenser breaks his rake handle in two and heads for his own car. He leaves money to pay for the handle.

Spenser joins Trask and Healy several blocks away. Healy says the man in the woods lost sight of the motorcycle as soon as they entered the cover of the trees. There are dozens of options as to where the kidnappers might have come out of the woods and no way for the police to track the motorcyclists. Trask is notified by radio that the Bartletts have been told where to pick up Kevin. Spenser hopes it's true.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

The stable is set back from the road near a package store and restaurant, and Spenser says that it looks like a place to rent a donkey. The building is faded and there's a rusted trailer from a tractor-trailer rig parked to one side. There's a pile of asphalt and tree



stumps that includes a rusted hot water tank and bicycle frame. Spenser calls it "Marlboro country," and he and Healy sit looking at the area for several minutes before getting out of Spenser's car.

Spenser agrees to be posted at the stables and he and Healy drive there to make the arrangements. Healy remarks that Spenser's car roof leaks and Spenser suggests that Healy could pay him per diem so that he could get a new one. The rain continues to fall and Healy and Spenser sit in the car for several minutes at the stable, looking over the area. Then they get out and walk to the spot where Margery is to stand with the ransom money. When Healy leads the way back to the stable, Spenser hurries to catch up so he's not trailing behind. He says that Healy makes him feel like a "trainee," and it's obvious Spenser is accustomed to being in charge and having others trail behind him.

Spenser is at the stables when Margery arrives at "high noon," as the note had required. Spenser wonders if there's a "low noon" and says that if it does exist, no one would use that term. He also says he'd always wondered what someone should wear to a random drop and that he now knows. He says that she has on toreador pants, a ruffled red shirt and bronze vest that reaches her thigh, along with a bronze hat and gloves and high-heeled boots.



Chapters 7 through 10

Chapters 7 through 10 Summary

The phone call is an elaborate spoof, and indicates that Kevin is "behind a school in Old Smithfield." Officers are sent searching and it's soon discovered that there's a hearse parked behind the junior high. Healy, Trask and Spenser are all there within minutes. Spenser sees the hearse and realizes that there's a box that resembles a homemade coffin in the back. It's Healy who lifts the lid of the box, and all the officers jump backwards as a dummy springs up into a sitting position. The dummy is stuffed with newspapers and the car had been reported stolen days earlier. There's nothing unique about the clothing and officers immediately begin processing the scene in search of fingerprints.

When the Bartletts learn the details of the hearse, Margery is again sedated, but Roger is mad, scared and mournful, but Spenser notes that it's the mad that shows. Roger is now yelling at Healy and Trask, having already finished yelling at Spenser. He goes home and calls Susan, inviting her to dinner. She agrees to come when Spenser says he needs to know more about Kevin.

When Susan arrives, he realizes that the name "Silverman" means that she's probably Jewish and that he's made the mistake of offering pork, but she assures him that she's not offended and that she's not Orthodox.

Spenser turns the conversation to Kevin. He says that kidnappings are usually motivated by greed, but that there's something strange about this case, and he doesn't have any clues that will lead him to Kevin. He fills her in on the case so far and , learns that Vic Harroway - the "leader" of that group Kevin hangs out with - is about thirty. Susan says she has the impression that there's something strange about the man.

She calls the following morning and says she's learned the location of Vic's "commune." She and Spenser to go the house together. The road to the house is overgrown and there's a lot of junk piled up around the house. There's a generator in the carport producing a steady whine.

A girl on the steps yells for Vic. Spenser tells Susan that she was right in her assessment that there is something unusual about the man. He's a bodybuilder, about five-foot-ten and two hundred fifteen pounds. When Spenser doesn't back down from Vic, he jumps from the porch and Spenser pulls his gun. He tells Vic that he's looking for Kevin; both Vic and the young girl deny knowing Kevin, and Spenser and Susan leave. It probably wasn't a wasted effort, Vic might make a move because of the visit. He tells Susan that private investigating is like tennis - you keep returning the ball until someone makes a mistake.



Chapters 7 through 10 Analysis

After Spenser listens to the recording of the phone call, he says that there's "something wrong," which makes Margery begin asking questions as to what could be wrong. Healy interrupts, saying that Spenser was talking about something else. Spenser believes that the elaborate details of the call - the music and the fact that the instructions of where to find Kevin - mean that this isn't simply a ransom, but is personal. After they discover that Kevin is not in the box, Healy and Spenser walk onto the baseball field behind the school for a few moments. Healy says that he'd wanted to continue to play baseball after high school but that he'd gone into the military instead. He says he has five children; the youngest is fifteen and plays baseball. He seems to be considering that it could be his son who is missing though he doesn't voice that thought. Then he says, "sonovabitch," and Spenser says, "me too."

Spenser finishes putting dinner on to cook as he waits for Susan, then puts a bottle of red wine on to chill. He says that he knows he's supposed to serve it at room temperature, but that he prefers it cold. He says that, "once a hick, always a hick." When Susan arrives, she tells him she appreciates the fact that the wine is cool and doesn't like it warm either. Spenser then says that they should get married and Susan suggests that there should be something more solid as a basis for marriage. Spenser has wood carvings in his apartment and Susan asks where he got them. Spenser blushes as he admits he did them himself. Susan says he's very good.

Susan says that she expects Spenser to make a pass at her but that he'd been all business, asking her about Kevin. He says that once the business is out of the way, he did plan to make a pass at her. Their connection is instant but then Susan breaks the contact, saying that she can't get past her mother's advice - that "good girls" don't have sex on the first date. She alludes to a promise that it will be different next time and invites Spenser for dinner at her house the following Tuesday.

When Spenser and Susan arrive at Vic's, he says, "What do you turds want," which prompts Spenser's reply of "We're looking for Walden Pond, you glib devil you." The sarcasm passes right past Vic and he says that there's no Walden Pond in the area and tells them to leave. When Vic calls Susan a slut, Spenser reacts, and Susan later tells him she doesn't need him to defend her. Spenser says that faced with the threat of Vic's size, he is in a quandary. He can't leave Susan to search for Kevin, and he can't leave Vic and the girl outside while he searches either. He says to complicate matters even further, he doesn't have a warrant. He finally decides that he's just going to leave.



Chapters 11 through 13

Chapters 11 through 13 Summary

Spenser learns from the Boston Police Department that Vic has no police record. He has a message from a woman named Brenda Loring asking if he'd like to go away with her for the weekend but Spenser doesn't reply to the invitation. Margery has called five times. She tells him that her life has been threatened and demands that he come to her home immediately. When he arrives, there's a policeman named Paul Marsh in the drive; Dolly is eating macaroni in the kitchen, and Maguire is waiting with Margery. Margery says that she got a phone call about noon, that the police had already removed the recording device from the phones so there is no recording of the call, that the caller said they have Kevin and that they're going to shoot Margery.

Margery eventually becomes so upset that she leaves the room and Spenser talks with Dolly. She says that there was more to the conversation than Margery is reporting. Dolly says that it's common knowledge that her mother "screws around" and that Dolly has become accustomed to the situation, though she isn't certain Kevin ever has. Spenser says that maybe boys have more trouble with that sort of situation. Margery then asks him to stay and he agrees, going home to pack for a several-day stay.

He arrives at the Bartletts to find Roger slicing a roast turkey breast for sandwiches. Roger says the entire situation sounds like revenge and asks Spenser's opinion. Margery enters, asks for a refill on her drink; Roger tells her to slow down and it prompts an argument. Spenser asks if they know anyone who might be mad at them, suggesting a business situation with Roger, but Margery sarcastically says that no one gets mad at "good old Rog." Margery denies she has vengeful ex lovers. The only person she can think of who actually hates them is Kevin. Roger takes a drunken Margery to bed.

The following morning, a Saturday, Margery opens a package that arrives in the mail to discover Kevin's guinea pig inside, dead. Spenser says the animal's appearance actually suggests that Kevin is still alive. The guinea pig has no signs of trauma, so it probably died of natural causes. A kidnapper wouldn't have kept the animal alive if they'd already killed Kevin. Trask arrives and questions Margery. Spenser follows Dolly to the barn. They talk for a few minutes, then she tells Spenser that Kevin often spent time in a half-finished room in the barn's loft. They go up there and Spenser discovers a locked trunk. He breaks in, promising Dolly that he won't tell Kevin that she led him to the trunk, but he has to find anything that will help locate Kevin. He discovers body-building magazines, many featuring Vic. Spenser reads them all, discovering much about Vic in the process. Dolly says her mother wouldn't approve and that's why Kevin hid them. Back at the house, Margery orders Spenser along on a shopping trip to protect her and tells Dolly that she's to spend the night with an aunt.



Chapters 11 through 13 Analysis

When Spenser arrives at Margery's, he tells Paul Marsh that he's going to be at the Bartlett home for awhile and that if Paul wants, he can go get something to eat. Paul says that Trask would be angry if he did and suggests that maybe Trask is "hot" for Margery.

Margery makes a point of saying that she was practicing her lines for a play, Othello, when the phone rang. As she's telling her story to Spenser, Dolly interrupts several times, asking for dessert after her meal of macaroni and asking why her mother buys Tab when Dolly would prefer something else. It seems evident that Dolly is accustomed to her mother's ways. Margery does take time to tell Dolly that the Tab is lower in sugar, therefore better for her. Spenser continues to observe the family dynamics and seems to be learning more about the Bartletts, therefore about Kevin.

Dolly later says that she listened in on the call, and that her mother didn't tell of the entire conversation. Dolly says that the caller indicated knowledge about Margery's tendency to "screw around," and that was the reason for the threat. Spenser will later determine that Margery's life isn't actually in any danger, and a connection to Kevin's disappearance will never be proven.

When Trask arrives to see the guinea pig, he puts an arm around Margery's shoulders, assures her that they're doing everything they can, then asks to see "the evidence." He asks Spenser if he "messed with" the box and Spenser says he's kept it under "close surveillance," then adds that he believes the guinea pig is faking being dead.



Chapters 14 through 17

Chapters 14 through 17 Summary

They shop in Peabody and return to Smithfield at a quarter till two. Spenser carries the bags inside and finds Maguire dead in the living room. Spenser pulls his gun and carefully searches the downstairs in case the killer remains in the house. Margery is on the phone, talking to the caterers regarding the party she's hosting that evening. There's no sign that either the front or back door has been jimmied; the front is still locked and Spenser watched Margery unlock the back when they arrived; there's a poker lying near the body. Margery hangs up the phone and Spenser hurries to intercept her, telling her that Maguire is dead in the living room. Trask and the coroner arrive five minutes later, followed by Healy. Healy and Spenser examine the house. Margery says Maguire has his own key, and that he was at the house to prepare the bar for the party. Healy asks Margery if she knows who might have killed Maguire; she suggests that as an attorney he might have made enemies.

Spenser takes time to invite Susan to the party, but explains he'll be on duty. At the party, Margery is dressed in an outfit that might be a skirt or pants, and a top that fits like latex. She tells a man named Vaughn that it's a good thing he is married to one of her good friends. When Susan arrives, Spenser catches her up and she wonders if it's courage, obsession or madness that makes Margery hold a party with all that's going on.

Margery becomes increasingly drunk and at one point tells Spenser that he's a "handsome brute." Spenser receives a phone call from the state police, saying that Maguire's death has been ruled a homicide, that he died of a broken neck from being hit on the side of the head. As Spenser hangs up, he looks around and discovers that Margery is no longer in the kitchen. Just as he begins to search, he hears Margery scream from outside, rushes out and finds that Vaughn has hold of Margery. Spenser shoves him away; Vaughn says that she had teased him into thinking they were going outside to be alone but then changed her mind.

At two-thirty am, Roger is in bed and Margery is very drunk. At four, Spenser helps Margery to her bedroom, where she climbs into her twin bed with Roger asleep in the other. Spenser goes to bed himself and is the first one up at ten o'clock. He tells the cop on duty at the drive that he's going to be gone for a while and to remain close to the house. He drives about a hundred yards past Vic's road and parks. He cuts across the woods, arriving at the crest of a hill so that he has a good view of the house. Vic's house is quiet and even the generator isn't running. Spenser watches the house until one twenty-two, when Kevin and Vic emerge, get into Vic's car, and leave. Spenser remains at his position throughout the day and into the night, but Vic and Kevin don't return.



Chapters 14 through 17 Analysis

As Healy is leaving, Spenser asks to be informed when the coroner makes an official determination of cause of death. Healy asks if Spenser is staying at the Bartlett home, and he says that he's staying in the guest room. Healy asks if there's anything else he can do for Spenser and suggests that he might need a shirt ironed.

Margery, having had her son kidnapped and her attorney and friend killed in her living room, doesn't put aside her plans for the dinner party. It's interesting that the police will continue to monitor the house though there are sixty-five guests expected. Spenser says that helping Margery overcome her grief requires a lot of housework. He helps the caterers carry in the food and set up the tables.

At two-thirty that morning, Margery has changed into a different blouse after having had her other one torn by Vaughn. Roger has gone to bed, though the party is in full swing. Susan introduces Spenser to Dr. Ray Croft, but Spenser says they've already met as Dr. Croft was caring for Margery. When Dr. Croft leaves to refill his drink, Spenser says it seemed that he was patting her hip. He says that he has Susan staked out for his own and that he doesn't like poachers. Susan says that Croft is an important man, big house and wealthy, but Spenser says only that he's pushy. Susan says that there's something about a big, adolescent man that makes a woman want to hold his head in her lap. Spenser says they might be noticed in that action, but Susan assures him that they could marry and have a family with no one at the party noticing. Susan notes that Margery is really drunk by now and says that it's no wonder Kevin ran away. Spenser asks if she really thinks Kevin ran away rather than being kidnapped, and she asks if Spenser wouldn't run away if he were faced with Kevin's parents. Spenser says that he's been thinking about running away himself.

The following morning, Spenser is going over the facts of the case. He recalls that Susan said she wouldn't blame Kevin for running away. He says that the coffin is actually a childish prank, but wonders why, if Kevin ran away, there was then a ransom demand.

Spenser can't do anything about it when Kevin and Vic appear from Vic's house and leave having made the mistake of leaving his car much too far away to reach in time to follow the two. Spenser notes that the two look like lovers and rightly determines that Kevin isn't in any immediate danger of being harmed by Vic, and that he is there of his own free will. Spenser berates himself for the handling of the situation. He goes over what he would have to say about the day - that he'd found Kevin and lost him again in a matter of moments. Spenser says that in some ways, it makes the situation better because Kevin obviously isn't likely to be harmed. Based on his observation of the two, it seems more likely that they are good friends - or something more. Spenser says it also makes the explanations much more difficult, and that there's suddenly a distinct possibility that Kevin is in on the entire escapade, including the murder of Earl Maguire.



Chapters 18 through 21

Chapters 18 through 21 Summary

Spenser wakes just after ten the next morning and heads to Harber Health Club on Atlantic Avenue. He meets with Henry Cimoli, asking him about Vic Harroway. Henry identifies the man in the photo as Vic, and identifies him as being gay. According to Henry, Vic was fired from a health club for "fooling around," and Henry hasn't recently heard anything about him. Henry can't offer additional information and Spenser leaves, heading to an area near the Ritz to "Race's Faces," a photography studio. Spenser shows Race the photo of Vic, and suggests that Vic might be someone Race would spend time with, and Race says that Vic looks like the kind of guy who would always want to lead. Race says that he might have information but demands to know why Spenser is looking for Vic. Spenser says only that Vic has Kevin and that he's wanted for questioning about a murder. Race says he's seen Vic at a bar called The Odds' End. Race says that Vic is a "fag who doesn't like fags," that he shoves people around and has lots of money.

At the Odd's End, Spenser tells the bartender to start a tab. Over the next hours, Spenser is hit on several times and manages to make at least one patron angry. At four thirty, Vic shows up. He talks to a fat man for a few minutes, has a couple of drinks, then leaves. Spenser follows, careful to stay some distance behind. At the Common, Vic stops and Spenser continues past him, head down so as not to be recognized, pretends briefly to be drunk then lays down on a park bench.

Just as Spenser is becoming aggravated at having to lay on the bench in the rain, a tall man approaches Vic and trades a briefcase for an envelope Vic takes from an inside pocket. The two men depart in different directions, and Spenser debates which to follow. He watches the tall man for a couple minutes, discovers he is Dr. Croft and that the man is headed for a parking garage. Since Spenser's car is back at The Odds' End, he runs back in that direction, hoping to catch up with Vic. He doesn't see Vic anywhere so goes back in the bar where he has cognac and warms up.

The next morning, Spenser heads for Smithfield. Margery has called nine times but Spenser simply ignores the messages. He goes to the drive leading to Vic's house and waits. At seven fifteen that evening, Vic's car pulls out and heads for Smithfield. Spenser doesn't see who is inside, but follows the car out of Smithfield and onto Route 1. The car pulls into a motel. There is a young girl with Vic, and Spenser estimates that the girl is still high school aged. Spenser checks to see which slot the clerk pulls the key from, notes that it's room 112, sits down on a chair in the lobby, picks up a newspaper and prepares to wait as he plans his next move. Spenser is still there when Vaughn - the man who ran confidence courses and who had been making a pass at Margery during the party - arrives and asks for "Mr. Victor's room." Something is happening and Spenser's best chance of figuring it out is to sit still and wait. About ten minutes later, Vic emerges from a corridor and takes a seat in the hotel restaurant. At nine forty-five, the



girl comes out and then leaves with Vic. Spenser goes down the hallway to room 112 and knocks, saying that it's Vic. When Vaughn opens the door just a crack, Spenser pushes his way inside. Vaughn doesn't have on his pants and Spenser tells him that he's busted, then asks for his real name. Vaughn refuses to tell, but Spenser pulls the wallet from the man's pants pocket and finds that it's issued to Fraser W. Robinson. Spenser tells Fraser that he'll trade - keeping Fraser's meeting with the young girl a secret if Fraser will tell him who is involved and how it works.

Fraser says his physician, Dr. Croft, told him that Vic has girls available. The local law enforcement officers seem to be involved because there have been parties involving reefers and a goat, and that no one has been arrested.

Chapters 18 through 21 Analysis

Henry Cimoli is an apparent weightlifter and former boxer. Spenser describes him as having the appearance of "an overdeveloped jockey," indicating that he is short but heavy. According to Spenser, Henry has a thick neck with a large Adam's apple. He has scars around one of his eyes and dark hair, cropped short and brushed forward. Henry and Spenser obviously have a history. As they are leaving the bathing room, Spenser says that it's a shame Henry has "let himself go." Henry says that a person his size has to stay on top of the game or he'll look like an old, fat broad. Spenser then suggests that Henry head back into the bathing room where he can get a good workout with the two men in the tub. Henry says only that he has to offer the bathing room for those customers who sit in the hot water for awhile and tell everyone that they're spending time at the gym. Henry then says that Spenser should remember that he also offers "the real stuff," referring to workout options.

Spenser's wit shows itself again when he enters Race's Faces. The receptionist asks, "May I help you?" Spenser replies that he's certain she could, but that it would involve wrinkling her dress. She ignores him but asks if he has an appointment, and Spenser says that he wonders if Race minds wrinkling his dress. His wisecracks continue when she asks why he wants to see Race; Spenser says that he's posing for the centerfold for "Jack and Jill" magazine. The receptionist says she isn't familiar with the magazine and Spenser says that it's for heterosexual readers. When Race says to send Spenser in, the receptionist says very politely that Spenser should "shove 'Jack and 'Jill' Magazine up your ass."

Again, he is obviously familiar with the man he calls "Race." Race is tall and bald, wearing black velvet pants that are tucked into white cowboy boots. There is some sparring back and forth and Spenser says that he'd never agree to a relationship with someone who won't tell their real name, and that there's no way his mother really named him "Race." After Spenser and Race finish their conversation, the sparring starts again and Spenser tells Race that he might be interested in the secretary, but Spenser says that the secretary is only interested in the female model he's currently photographing.



Fraser, who Spenser first knew as Vaughn, first tries to bluff Spenser, saying that he'll have the detective arrested for coming into his room uninvited. Spenser counters with the fact that it's Vic's room and then says that he can have Fraser arrested for an array of charges, including statutory rape. Then Fraser offers money, saying he doesn't have much on him but that he can get whatever money Spenser wants in return for his silence. When Fraser eventually does start talking, he's anxious to blame his wife for being frigid and not meeting his needs, and Dr. Croft for suggesting the use of Vic's girls. He shows Spenser a card with a phone number on it and Spenser will use that card later to tie Dr. Croft to the entire set-up.



Chapters 22 through 26

Chapters 22 through 26 Summary

Late for dinner, Spenser stops for a bottle of Dom Perignon and makes it to Susan's by ten thirty. She is angry at first but when he explains what he's found out, her anger evaporates. They talk about the possibility of a police officer's involvement in Vic's ring of girls, and Spenser points out that cops are simply people. Spenser calls the State Police, asking them to find out what they can about Dr. Croft. Spenser and Susan share a bottle of wine and end up in bed together, getting up in the middle of the night to eat the meal Susan had prepared. The following morning, Susan calls in sick to work and they stay together until noon.

In the afternoon, Spenser bullies his way into Croft's office. Croft has Spenser seated on the opposite side of his desk and first denies knowing anything about Vic or the girls, then says that it's very common for a person to come to their family doctor with issues about sex - as is the case with Fraser and his wife. Croft says that he knows about Vic simply by reputation, but Spenser discovers more business cards like the one Fraser had. Croft immediately changes his story, saying that it's not something he'd admit but that he does recommend Vic's girls on occasion to patients such as Fraser.

Croft eventually says that Vic stays in Boston sometimes, and Spenser insists that he provide the address. Spenser then calls Healy and says that he has "John Doe," who has provided information about Kevin, and that he needs this informant kept safely away from telephones so that he won't warn Vic that Spenser is on his way. Spenser and Croft leave the office and meet a state trooper a short distance away, who takes "Mr. Doe" into custody. Spenser goes to pick up Margery at home and Roger at his work before returning to Boston to search for Kevin. They arrive at an apartment building, have the superintendent open the door. Kevin's clothes are on a bed and Spenser says that it's evident they'll be returning soon. He warns the superintendent not to say anything to the two if they return and heads outside with Margery and Roger to wait. Soon, Kevin and Vic come toward them, jogging. Vic is encouraging Kevin to continue trying, and it's obvious that Kevin is straining to keep up. When Spenser and the Bartletts show themselves, Kevin takes off at a run toward a football field. Roger follows; Vic follows Roger, and Spenser follows Vic. Roger catches Kevin but Vic quickly shoves Roger away. When Spenser would have intervened, Roger says that Kevin is his son and that he'll handle the situation. Kevin says that no one can beat Vic and Spenser says that it's crazy, but Roger is intent on trying. The fight is brief and at one point, Margery gets involved but gets a bloody nose and is also out of the fight. Spenser, hearing Kevin repeat that Vic can't be beaten, takes off his shirt and his gun and the two big men begin to battle, with Spenser eventually coming out the winner. Just then, there are sirens in the distance.

Spenser goes to Susan's house while Vic is held by the police, and Kevin returns home with his parents. Vic admits to the police that he killed Maguire and that it was an



accident. Spenser and Susan talk about the case, including the fact that Vic and Croft apparently have a third partner. Vic has denied knowing the third partner's name and Spenser isn't certain Croft will be willing to tell.

Spenser then heads for the Smithfield Police Station where he plans to pick up Croft. When he arrives, Trask is at the front desk, which Spenser finds very odd. He says that even a small police force would probably not have the chief doing desk duty at the jail. Trask tells Spenser that Croft is in a cell in the back and remains at the desk while Spenser goes to talk to the doctor. Spenser isn't especially surprised to find that Croft has been hanged with his own tie. He goes back to the front and tells Trask that Croft is dead, but the police officer doesn't seem particularly surprised either. Trask pulls a gun on Spenser but Spenser tells him that he's exhibited his "mammoth intellect," because several State Police officers know that it was Croft being held in the Smithfield jail. Trask says it won't matter because Spenser won't be alive to help figure out the details, but Spenser throws a cup of coffee at Trask, knocks the gun from his hand, and throws it through a glass window. He calmly tells Trask that he's going to talk to Healy and that he's certain they'll be in touch before walking out of the police station.

Chapters 22 through 26 Analysis

Spenser is pushy with Dr. Croft's receptionist, insisting that she ask the doctor to see him. When he goes into Croft's office, Spenser is seated in the "patient's chair in front of Croft's big reassuring desk." Spenser notes that there are diplomas on the wall, also meant to be reassuring, and that Croft has on a medical coat over a blue striped shirt and striped tie. Spenser says that Croft's first words have a reassuring tone and it takes some time before Croft fully gives in to the fact that Spenser has the information about Vic's girls and Croft's part in it. At one point, Croft says he wants a lawyer and Spenser says that he's willing to let Croft off the hook if he can find Kevin, but everything changes into a legal investigation if Croft gets a lawyer. He says at that point Croft could even become involved in Maguire's murder.

When Spenser tells Margery that he knows where Kevin is, Margery says that Spenser has been hired to return Kevin. Spenser says that he was hired to find Kevin, and that he's done that. He says that his job is to take care of any trouble they encounter as they try to pick up Kevin, but that it's Margery and Roger's job to bring Kevin home. It seems evident that Spenser knows that Kevin isn't going to want to return and that he believes Roger and Margery should be the ones to convince their son that he belongs at home, or at least see his reaction at being returned home. When they meet up, Kevin yells that he wants to stay with Vic, and Vic responds that no one is going to take Kevin away.

The complexity of the relationship between Kevin and Vic can be seen to some degree during the fight between Vic and Spenser. Kevin repeats that Vic simply can't be beat, and Spenser will later say that Kevin's statements were the only reason he challenged Vic. He says that Kevin apparently worshiped Vic, and he thought seeing that Vic could be beaten might put that hero worship into better perspective for the young boy. When Vic goes down, Kevin yells at him to get up. His insistence that Vic keep fighting when



Vic is obviously hurt is a statement of his youth and immaturity. Spenser tells Kevin that Vic has fought longer than most men would have, and that he obviously did it for Kevin. As Vic goes down, Spenser says that part of the reason for the fight was that Vic had called Susan a slut, but Vic obviously doesn't remember the incident. Vic's devotion for Kevin remains apparent as he faces questioning about Maguire's murder because he says Kevin wasn't involved and wasn't even in the room, though Kevin says differently. Spenser notes that Vic is obviously trying to protect Kevin even then.



Characters

Spenser

The detective hired by Roger and Margery Bartlett to find their son, Kevin, who they believe has run away. Spenser is a large man and says he had once believed he might be a boxer but doesn't say why he changed his line of work. He had been an employee of the Attorney General's office but had been fired for "hot dogging." Spenser tends to do things his own way and has a wisecrack for almost every situation. For example, when the police chief asks if anyone has tampered with the box and the dead guinea pig that arrived at the Bartlett's house, Spenser says he's kept a close eye on the evidence and that he believes the guinea pig is faking.

His size and attitude are misleading because Spenser is also a tender, caring person when the situation calls for it. He seems to care for Susan, though he is also appreciative of her good looks. Spenser lives alone without even a pet and is neat and an excellent cook. There are no bowls of cereal or other quick meals for Spenser—his meals always consist of finer foods such as fried tomatoes, steamed vegetables and pork tenderloin. Spenser also seems to be a defender of the weak. When Vic calls Susan a "slut," Spenser immediately wants to fight the man. The two men don't battle until much later but Spenser admits that he is pleased to have exacted revenge for the comment, though Vic doesn't remember Susan or the fact that he called her a slut.

As Spenser talks over the case with Susan near the end of the story, he says that he believes Roger and Margery may have discovered that they care more for their son than they had realized. While there's little to support this other than the fact that in the heat of the moment both parents were willing to fight Vic over Kevin, it seems that Spenser wants this to be true.

Chief George Trask

Chief of the local police force. Trask checks up on Spenser as soon as he learns that he's working on the case and says that he knows Spenser has a tendency to ignore local law enforcement. Trask warns Spenser that he is to fully cooperate with the police or prepare to be arrested. He is also obviously angry that the Bartletts have hired a private detective, seeming to take it as an affront to his abilities. When the ransom note arrives, Trask says that the police will not interfere based on the Bartlett's wishes. The Bartletts allow Spenser to make the final decision, and he determines that they'll stake out the pickup site, despite Trask's objections. Much later, Spenser will discover that Trask is involved with the situation itself. Trask apparently kills one of his partners in the criminal situation, Dr. Croft.



Kevin Bartlett

The teenaged boy who runs away from home, prompting his parents to hire Spenser to conduct a search. One of the first things Spenser learns about Kevin is that he's very neat. His room has none of the clutter of a typical teenage boy, and the apartment where Kevin lives with Vic is similarly neat. Kevin has apparently had some trouble at school and his guidance counselor, Susan Silverman, attributes at least some of it to the people Kevin runs around with. Kevin is apparently gay, having decided to be with Vic of his own volition. Though Kevin plays a central role in the book, he puts in only a few brief appearances.

Roger Bartlett

Description

Margery Bartlett

Kevin's mother. At their first meeting, Margery goes on about her need for acting lessons because creative people need an outlet. At their second meeting, she is obviously well on her way to being drunk and tells Spenser that she believes he would look good without a shirt. Margery turns almost every situation around so that it's all about Margery. While she defends her decisions and actions, she seems overly defensive. For example, Spenser asks if anyone was at home when Kevin returned to pick up his guinea pig. Margery says that she was at acting class and that it's not her fault that no one was at home for Kevin. She says that she is a creative person and that she must have an outlet for the creativity. She also says that she takes the classes for her family, to keep herself interesting and attractive for them.

Delilah Bartlett

Kevin's sister. Everyone calls her Dolly. Spenser notes that she's a young teenager who is just beginning to get a figure. It's Dolly who tells Spenser that her mother isn't telling the truth about the threatening phone call. Dolly says that the caller threatened in retaliation for "screwing" all over town. She says that her mother is guilty of that, that she has gotten used to it but that Dolly thinks Kevin never really has.

Susan Silverman

The guidance counselor at Smithfield High School. Susan is attractive and there's an immediate connection between Susan and Spenser. Susan offers information about Kevin, including that she believes his sexual preferences may be in question because of his parents, but cautions Spenser that she's not a psychologist, and she hasn't spent enough time with Kevin to provide anything more than opinions. Susan goes with



Spenser to Vic's house in the country, called a "commune" by those who know it, and is visibly shaken after the encounter with Vic. She gains Spenser's respect by leaving the property at a sedate pace rather than peeling out as she drives away. Susan and Spenser make a sexual connection as well, and they have much in common, which prompts Spenser to suggest that they elope, while Susan counters that their tastes in wine is hardly enough to justify marriage.

Vic Harroway

A friend of Kevin's. It's Susan Silverman who calls Vic a "dissident," and suggests that Kevin might be with Vic. When Spenser meets Vic, he discovers that the man is a muscle builder and that he has apparently worked many hours to gain his size. When Vic threatens Spenser and Susan, Spenser pulls a gun and Susan says she's not certain Spenser could have taken on Vic. Vic is known around the area both as body builder, as having money and as being gay. As it turns out, Vic is gay and has a crush on Kevin. Vic is running a prostitution ring, offering the services of young girls. Vic provides the girls; Dr. Croft provides the referrals, and Chief Trask provides protection against arrest. As it turns out, Vic isn't as good at fighting as Spenser. When the two meet for the final time near Vic's Boston apartment, Spenser emerges from the fight as the winner, though Spenser says that Vic fought longer than most men would have. It was Vic who killed Earl Maguire, though he said the man surprised them, and he didn't mean to hit him so hard.

Earl Maguire

Roger Bartlett's attorney. On the day of Margery Bartlett's dinner party, Spenser finds Earl dead in the Bartlett's living room. The autopsy later reveals that the man died of a broken neck having been hit in the head with a blunt object. It will be revealed that Maguire walked in on Vic and Kevin while Kevin was picking up some belongings, and that Vic hit Maguire, inadvertently breaking his neck.

Lieutenant Healy

The chief investigator for the Essex County District Attorney's office. He is at the Bartlett home after the ransom note is received and it's soon apparent that he shares Spenser's opinion of Trask's policing skills. Healy suggests that Spenser be the person who poses as an employee of the stables when the ransom is to be picked up. When the two men go to check out the location, Spenser finds himself trailing behind Healy. Spenser says it makes him feel like a trainee, a situation to which he is apparently not accustomed. Healy agrees to hold Croft until Kevin can be found and his own savvy comes through at that point as Spenser says that there's a "John Doe" who should be kept away from a telephone. Healy doesn't press for a name but agrees to help and sends an officer to pick up "Mr. Doe."



Ray Croft

A physician in Smithfield. Susan describes him as "a big man" in town, serving on several boards, including the Board of Selectmen and the Planning Commission. Spenser will eventually discover that Croft is no longer licensed as a doctor and is wanted in Washington for performing an abortion. Spenser says he believes Croft isn't really a bad guy but that he got caught up with Trask and Vic. Croft is apparently killed by Trask in the Smithfield Police Department while Spenser is searching for Kevin.

Race Witherspoon

A photographer and the owner of Race's Faces studio. One of the first things Spenser says to Race is that he wants to know his real name, insinuating that it's an ongoing question between the two. Spenser says that no one is actually named Race Witherspoon. but Race refuses to say that isn't his real name.



Objects/Places

Smithfield

Where Spenser goes to begin his search of the missing boy.

Apple Knoll

The subdivision in Smithfield where the Bartletts live.

Marlborough Street

Where Spenser's apartment is located in Boston.

Smithfield Junior High School

Where Kevin was a student until going into high school, and where he and Vic put the hearse with the coffin after the ransom demand.

Boston Police Department

Located on Berkley Street, this is where Spenser goes in search of any police record of Vic Harroway but finds no previous arrests on file.

Punkin

The Labrador retriever owned by the Bartletts. The dog lies on the porch when Spenser arrives the first time and doesn't get up, and later turns down a "Nutter Butter" cookie, which Spenser says makes him a smarter-than-average dog.

Race's Faces

The photography studio where Spenser goes as he is searching for Vic Harroway.

The Odds' End

A gay bar where Spenser goes in search of Vic Harroway. The bar is located in the Bay Section of Boston. When Spenser orders beer, he's told the drink is on the house, having been identified as a cop by the bartender.



136 Park Drive

Where Vic Harroway has an apartment, and where Spenser is told that Kevin is in hiding.

Smithfield Police Department

Where Croft is taken and killed.



Themes

The Need for Love

Kevin is growing up in a home that is virtually devoid of parental love. His mother is so busy with acting classes, community events such as plays and getting drunk that she seems to have no time for Kevin. What's more, she justifies her activities by saying that she is keeping herself young and interesting for her husband and her family. Roger seems the more stable parent, but he is also largely an absent parent. He is gone for days at a time to oversee his construction business. Dolly, Kevin's sister, says that everyone knows that her mother screws around, but she isn't certain that Kevin has ever come to accept the situation. It's from this background that Kevin goes into a relationship with Vic Harroway.

While Vic is older and is definitely an unsavory character - prostituting young girls for money - there also seems to be no doubt that Vic cares for Kevin. Kevin may also care for Vic, but it seems more likely that Kevin is simply basking in Vic's attention. Vic's love for Kevin is evident when the two are jogging back toward Vic's Boston apartment. As the two jog, Kevin is having trouble keeping up. Vic continues to praise his efforts, telling him that he can make it a little farther. It's also evident that Vic cares for Kevin when Roger says that Kevin is to return home. Kevin says he wants to stay with Vic, and Vic promises that no one will take him away. While Vic is beaten by Spenser in a fair fight, Spenser notes that Vic continues to fight long after most men would have quit and attributes that to his love for Kevin. Kevin, however, seems to exhibit a more selfish love, begging Vic to get up even after it's evident that Vic's hurt.

While Spenser is the tough guy, he also seems to be seeking something as evidenced by his budding relationship with Susan.

Heroism

Spenser, as the main character of the book, exhibits all the characteristics of a hero. While he is tough, he is also sensitive, making him - in the eyes of many women - the perfect man. Spenser is equally at home in the kitchen as on the trail of a body builder, who has killed a man. The fact that Spenser doesn't live the life of a typical bachelor, but has farm-fresh tomatoes, basil, berries, rosemary and olive oil readily available is just the beginning of this side of his personality. Spenser is also quite capable of making an elaborate meal and knows what is socially correct - that wine is to be served at room temperature, for example - though he may not always follow those dictates.

Spenser is also quick-witted. He almost always has a snappy wisecrack and isn't afraid to say what he thinks. His sarcasm is sometimes lost on those with whom he deals, a sign of his superior intelligence. His confidence can be partly attributed to his size, but he is also certain of himself in any situation, including when danger is likely.



It's interesting that this self-confident man is willing to dance attendance on Margery Bartlett because he's been hired to do so. When Margery is headed out for a day of shopping, Spenser goes along, though he might have insisted that Margery simply stay at home where she would be safe. He admits that he tries to stand around the dressing rooms without looking like a pervert but otherwise tolerates the demands made on him.

Spenser isn't the only hero, though the others are less obvious to the casual observer. Vic is a hero to Kevin and it's at least partly because Kevin admires Vic for his body building. That hero worship is why Spenser fights Vic, saying that he believes it might have been a good thing for Kevin to see Vic beaten. Another unlikely hero is Roger Bartlett. Though Margery has little respect for Roger and says that no one ever gets angry with "good old Rog," Roger is ready to fight Vic because of the need to protect Kevin. Though Roger can't hold his own against the body builder, Spenser notes that it takes guts to have tried.

A Sense of Duty

Spenser is willing to do his duty no matter what that entails, but he has definite ideas regarding what that duty is. When he finds Kevin, he goes back to get Margery and Roger, insisting that they accompany him. He tells Margery that he'll handle any problems that arise and that he has located Kevin, but he doesn't intend to drag the boy back home. Spenser has done enough investigating to determine that Kevin isn't going to come willingly and leaves the details to his parents.

There are several other law enforcement officials who are focused on doing their duty. Several officers are posted at the drive of the Bartlett home and stay on guard. When Margery screams after opening a box containing Kevin's dead guinea pig, an officer is at the house in seconds.

Susan Silverman is another person who is doing her duty to the best of her ability. Susan offers Spenser her opinions of Kevin and his family, but hastens to say that she's not a trained psychologist and that she's spent limited time with Kevin, meaning she may not be completely qualified to offer more than an opinion. Ironically, though the high school assistant principal, Mr. Moriarty, refuses to talk to Spenser, he, too, may be just doing what he feels is his duty. He asks Spenser if Chief Trask knows that he's investigating Kevin's disappearance and whether he should be talking about Kevin.



Style

Point of View

The book is written in first person and entirely from Spenser's point of view. The limited perspective could be overly limiting in some situations, but isn't particularly a problem in this case. Spenser's thoughts and observations are included in the story line, as well as descriptions of people, places and events in which he is involved. For example, each time Spenser meets a new person, there is a description of that person as Spenser sees him or her, but those descriptions are not included in first person from Spenser. They are merely observations, though there are never any real deviations from first person. It seems likely that Spenser notices that a particular person is wearing "lavender sunglasses" or a striped tie even though he doesn't voice those thoughts. Instead, most of those descriptions are merely presented as observations. The same is true of places, including interiors. These descriptions are sometimes tedious and distracting from the story line, but they do aid the reader in visualizing appearances of characters and places.

Setting

The novel is set in New England, in the apparently fictional town of Smithfield, Massachusetts. The timing is likely in the 1970s, which is the time of the book's copyright. Much of the novel is written in a timeless manner and could be set in almost any modern-day time frame. However, the references to money date the story. For example, Spenser tells the parents of a missing boy that he charges one hundred dollars a day for his services as a private eye, and they don't hesitate at the cost.

Smithfield is located near Boston and the descriptions of Boston are thorough, indicating that the writer is likely familiar with the area. The details of these descriptions - the "muddy river," streets and neighborhoods - seems reasonable and lends credibility to other descriptions.

Language and Meaning

The book is written in easy-to-read language and though some terms are outdated, a reader with an adequate vocabulary will be able to keep track of the happenings. Spenser has a "smart alack" remark for almost every situation and is quick with a comeback. For example, when a man at the Bartlett's party is getting fresh with Susan, Spenser interrupts. He says that he himself was thinking about hitting on her and that he doesn't like poachers. In another instance, when the "kidnapper" picks up the ransom money and escapes up the bridle path, Spenser is asked why he didn't think of that possibility. He says that he's been too busy the past couple days "pushing manure around" to have time to think. His witticisms are sometimes very funny, but most readers will likely find at least some of them to be lacking in real humor. The humor is not so



overt as to be annoying but might be distracting to some who simply want to know who kidnapped Kevin.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty-six chapters of varying lengths. Some are as brief as four pages while others have as many as ten to twelve, though most are fewer than eight. The chapters are numbered with no titles. Chapters are roughly divided into events, though some stop in the middle of a happening. For example, the dinner party at the Bartlett home spans two chapters with the first chapter covering the event, ending just after Spenser has a fight with a guest.

There are some extensive descriptions that some readers may find distracting. For example, the second chapter begins with a description of what Spenser sees as he is driving out of Boston - "a plastic canyon of sub-sandwich shops, discount houses, gas stations, supermarkets, neocolonial furniture shops (vinyl siding and chintz curtains), fried chicken, big beef sandwiches" ... The list goes on for more than a half page and there seems to be no reason for it other than to display the author's ability to ramble with descriptions of insignificant businesses taking up what was once open country.

Quotes

"Besides the white linen jacket, I had on a red checkered sport shirt, dark blue slacks, and white loafers. Me and Betsy Ross. I was neat, clean, alert, and going to the back door. I rang the bell. Ding-dong, private eye calling." Chapter 2, Page 19

"If you're going to New York or California, you probably don't want to carry a guinea pig in your hand the whole way. You can't put him in your pants pocket, and you probably don't buy him a cheeseburger and a Ho-Jo at Howard Johnson's." Chapter 2, Page 23

"She must have been thirteen or fourteen and was just beginning to get a figure. I was very careful not to lech at her. There has to be a line you won't cross, and my lower limit is arbitrarily set at sixteen." Chapter 2, Page 30

"Pickup day was beautiful, eighty-two degrees, mild breeze, cloudless sunshine. A day for looking at a ball game or walking along with a girl and a jug of apply wine or casting for smallmouth black bass where an elm tree hung out over the Ipswich River. That kind of day. A day for collecting ransom, I supposed, if that was your style." Chapter 6, Page 57

"The mail had accumulated in a pile under the mail slot in the door. I stepped over it and went across the room to open the window. A spider had spun a symmetrical web across one corner of the window recess. I was careful not to disturb it. Every man needs a pet." Chapter 11, Page 91

"'Oh, Earl has his own key. He's an old and dear friend. He often lets himself in. We're having a party tonight, and he said he'd come early and help me set up the bar and things because Roger wouldn't be able to get home till after supper. Almost time for ... My God' - she looked at her watch - 'it's after four. My company is coming in three and a half hours. I have to get ready. Spenser, you're going to have to help me.'" - Margery after finding Maguire dead in her home, Chapter 14, Page 117

"'I'm a grape stomper at a winery. I stopped by here to get my feet bleached.'" - Spenser telling a guest what he does for a living, Chapter 15, Page 125

"At one twenty-two Kevin Bartlett came out of the house with Vic Harroway. The boy's arm was around Harroway's waist and Harroway's arm was around the boy's shoulder. Like lovers." Chapter 17, Page 140



"Well, hell, I mean he never made no pass at me, but everybody knows about Vicki. I mean, all the lifters know Vic, you know? He's queer as a square donut." Chapter 18, Page 144

"Well, for crissake, Spenser, I don't know every queer in the country. It's one thing to come out of the damned closet. It's quite another to run a gay data bank." - Race Witherspoon, Chapter 18, Page 148

"He said 'Hey' again but stayed on the bed. I was out of his weight class anyway, but it is always hard to feel tough in your underwear." Chapter 21, Page 161

"I poured the water on her head. She screamed and stepped back. She opened her mouth but nothing came out. The relief was wonderful." - Spenser, Chapter 24, Page 181

"No salutation, no golly, Spenser, it's swell to hear your voice. Sometimes I wasn't sure how fond Quirk was of me." Chapter 26, Page 197

"I think Croft wasn't that bad a guy and he made a mistake that was motivated by a decent impulse and it destroyed him, and you used it to make him a goddamned pimp and then you killed him." - Spenser to Trask, Chapter 26, Page 201

Topics for Discussion

Describe Kevin's relationship with his mother. With his father. With his sister. Describe the relationship between Margery and Roger. What is good about each? Bad? What changes with each over the course of the case?

How does Spenser get involved in the case? What are his initial impressions? How do those develop over the course of the case?

How does Spenser meet Susan Silverman? How does their relationship evolve?

What are some of the facts Spenser learns about Kevin? How does he come to these conclusions? How does his opinion change over the course of the case? What happens to prompt these changes?

Describe the ransom request. What does Spenser find odd about it? What happens?

How does Spenser come to the conclusion that Kevin isn't being held against his will? How is that confirmed? What is the relationship between Kevin and Vic?

Describe the bigger crime Vic is involved in. Who are his partners? What are their roles?