

The Good Nurse Study Guide

The Good Nurse by Charles Graeber

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Summary

The Good Nurse: A True Story of Medicine, Madness, and Murder by Charles Graeber tells about the investigation and conviction of Charlie Cullen, a nurse who killed patients. The killings occurred at random in the hospitals where he worked over his sixteen year career. It is a frightening tale that might not have ended in a conviction if one woman had not come forward and helped the police end the killing spree. The Good Nurse is a story of caution about the medical field that will frighten most readers.

Charlie Cullen had a difficult childhood. He was one of eight children. He was born so late in his parents' lives that his father died a short time before his birth. Charlie was close to his mother, but he was often tortured by his older sisters and their boyfriends. Charlie fell into a depression when his mother died after a car accident. He entered the Navy to give his life some purpose. He despised the Navy.

After Charlie's return to civilian life, he enrolled as the only man in nursing school. While working his way through school, he met and fell in love with Adrienne. Charlie and Adrienne married. He began his first job almost immediately. They had a daughter within a year, but Adrienne began to notice that Charlie acted oddly around the baby and their dog. Adrienne began to notice other odd things as the years passed, including abuse of the dogs and Charlie's heavy drinking, even around the children. Adrienne eventually filed for divorce, claiming Charlie was abusive. Charlie lost custody of his two daughters.

Charlie moved from job to job. He would do well on a job for awhile. Then, odd behavior would cause him to come under scrutiny. Charlie's first job was at St. Barnabas Hospital where he was suspected of spiking IV bags with insulin. Next, Charlie moved on to Warren Hospital. He was eventually let go from that hospital for suspicion of causing the death of a patient. A short time before he had been arrested and charged with breaking into a co-worker's house.

From Warren, Charlie went to Morristown. While there, Charlie was accused of not caring for his patients properly and leaving their rooms messy. Charlie tried to commit suicide for a second time and ended up spending time at Greystone Psychiatric Hospital again.

Charlie started working at a nursing home called Liberty. At Liberty, Charlie appeared to be involved in the suspicious deaths of two men. After one of the deaths, another nurse was fired. In her lawsuit against Liberty, she named Charlie as the suspect. Charlie left Liberty and got a job at Lehigh Valley Hospital. At Lehigh, Charlie was involved in several deaths, including that of a young burn patient. After another failed suicide attempt, Charlie was let go from Lehigh Valley Hospital. From Lehigh, Charlie moved to Saint Luke's, where he was eventually accused of throwing away perfectly good medication and stealing others.



Charlie worked at Somerset Medical Center for more than a year. During his time there, he met Amy Loughren. Amy and Charlie became good friends. Amy was unaware that Charlie was killing patients with overdoses of medication, often a cocktail of medicines. Charlie had to be tricky about the way he got the drugs because the hospital used a system called Pyxis to control the drugs being used. Charlie was nearly caught once when the hospital became concerned about the death of Reverend Gall, but the investigation stalled.

A pharmacy employee at Somerset called the Center for Poison Control during the investigation into Gall's death. The head of the Center for Poison Control warned Somerset that they should involve the police, but they did not. Instead, they informed the Department of Health who failed to act. The police were not brought in on the case until five months later.

Tim Braun and Danny Baldwin were relentless in their investigation of Charlie. However, they did not understand much of the information presented to them because it was medical in nature. However, Amy realized with just a look at Charlie's Pyxis records that he was doing something wrong. She agreed to help the police. Amy made several calls to Charlie that were recorded. The police eventually got enough information to arrest Charlie; and, he confessed.

Charlie was convicted of thirteen murders in the hospitals where he worked. For three years, he helped police look through medical records to identify other victims. Charlie was sentenced to life in prison. At one point, however, Charlie did something to save a human life. He donated a kidney to the brother of his former girlfriend.



Part 1: Chapters 1-14

Summary

Part 1: Chapters 1-14

Chapter 1: October 3, 2003

Over a sixteen year career, Charles Cullen had racked up four police investigations, two lie detector tests, and many suicide attempts. However, he was still considered a good hire because he was always on time, he was neat and clean, and had experience in intensive care, critical care, cardiac care, ventilation and burns. His latest job was at Somerset Medical Center in New Jersey.

An unwanted pregnancy, Charlie grew up in a house full of women. He was the only male in his nursing class, which suited him fine. Charlie paid for school working at fast food restaurants. It was here that he met his future wife, Adrienne. He married her shortly before beginning his first nursing job.

Chapter 2: June, 1987

Charlie began his nursing career at Saint Barnabas Medical Center in New Jersey, the only certified burn unit there. Charlie saw all kinds of patients at the burn unit. He quickly learned how to read the patient's burns and assess the likelihood of survival. The children were different, most of them victims of abuse. Charlie recognized the abuse because he suffered abuse, as well.

Chapter 3: October, 1987

Charlie had a problem with alcohol while in the Navy. This prompted his wife to get rid of all the alcohol in the house after their marriage. Charlie simply hid alcohol and drank in the basement. In the first year of marriage, Adrienne noticed that Charlie often adored new things in the beginning, but then would lose interest. This included her dog, Lucky. When Adrienne got a second dog, Charlie allowed it to run away. Charlie also seemed to lose interest in their first child, a daughter born late in the first year of marriage. Adrienne began to suspect that Charlie would sometimes drug the infant to make her sleep longer. Later, Adrienne began to wonder when a neighbor's dog went missing and she discovered that Charlie had mutilated pictures of their daughter.

Chapter 4: February 11, 1991

At St. Barnabas, it was discovered that an IV bag which should have only held saline and heparin contained insulin. A few days later, a patient had a low sugar reaction while receiving heparin through an IV. The IV was removed, and the patient stabilized. The IV was hooked back up, and she crashed again. The same thing happened to another patient. Eventually, the connection between the heparin bag and the low sugars was



made. Lab tests confirmed the suspicions. Records also showed that something similar had happened to several other patients. A conclusion was made that the insulin had been introduced to the bags intentionally.

The head of security at Saint Barnabas, a retired police officer, began looking into the situation. The investigation pointed to the nursing staff. Only three nurses were consistently present during the episodes. Charles Cullen, one of the three, was also behaving oddly. However, the investigation could not find conclusive evidence that Charlie had done anything despite the fact that he was often present when the incidents occurred. As they prepared a broader, deeper, investigation, Charlie disappeared.

Chapter 5

Charlie was guilty and expected to be arrested at any moment. However, when Saint Barnabas failed to press charges, he felt as though he had been absolved.

Chapter 6: January 10, 1992

Charlie told his wife he had been fired from Saint Barnabas because he was made a scapegoat for something someone else had done. She didn't believe him. Charlie found a new job at Warren Hospital in Phillipsburg, New Jersey. He even put Saint Barnabas down as a reference.

Chapter 7

Soon after the birth of their second child, Adrienne confronted Charlie about his drinking. Charlie claimed to be depressed, but refused a different treatment. Charlie would also make flagrant displays of his depression, such as calling funeral homes for their rates or making a big show of pretending to take an overdose of pills. In November of 1992, Adrienne filed for divorce. Adrienne agreed, however, that Charlie could remain in their home until he could afford to move out.

Chapter 8: January, 1993

Charlie tried to kill himself for the fourth time when Adrienne called the police and accused him of domestic violence. The first time was when he was a kid and mixed chemicals from a chemistry set with milk. The second was shortly after his mother died and he felt the hospital lied to him about her accident. The third was on board a Navy ship in an attempt to get out of his contract. While in the hospital, he was visited by a fellow nurse, Michelle Tomlinson, a woman he hoped thought of him as a friend, and perhaps something more. Charlie represented himself in his divorce and finally moved out of the house he shared with Adrienne.

Chapter 9

Charlie went out to dinner with Michelle once. Charlie came on too strong and soon Michelle was avoiding him. Michelle's on again, off again husband told Charlie to back off.



Chapter 10: March 23, 1993

Charlie drove past Michelle's house multiple times. He broke in and watched her sleep. In-between visits, he tried to call her. After the break in, he called her and she woke, telling him that someone had broken in. Charlie admitted to breaking into her house. Charlie went home and was not surprised when the police showed up. Charlie took an overdose of pills before he was arrested. Charlie was released. On the way home, he managed to call his former babysitter for help.

Chapter 11

April 1993. After his fifth suicide attempt, Charlie was placed in the Greystone Psychiatric Hospital in Morristown. Charlie did not lose his job, however.

Chapter 12

Charlie, because of a restraining order place on him by Michelle, was transferred to telemetry, a sort of halfway between Intensive Care and regular hospital rooms. It was Charlie's job to explain devices and procedures to patients. During his divorce from Adrienne, Charlie took two lie detector tests. Charlie insisted on these tests when Adrienne accused him of drinking while watching the children and of domestic violence. He passed. Adrienne, however, was granted a restraining order against him.

Charlie needed a lawyer to defend him in the case against him for breaking and entering. Charlie could not get a court appointed lawyer because he appeared to make too much money, so he hired a lawyer who quit just three days later, claiming Charlie was too difficult to work with. Charlie finally pleaded guilty and then went home to attempt suicide again. He took himself to Warren, was treated and released.

Charlie fought to keep custody of his children. He went to see the court appointed family services counselor, George, sober to convince him that he was a good father. However, Charlie's history of multiple suicide attempts counted against him and he lost.

Chapter 13: September 1, 1993

Mrs. Helen Dean was in the ICU at Warren recovering from breast cancer surgery. The day before she was to be discharged, Charlie went to see her and sent her son away. When the son came back, Mrs. Dean told him that the nurse had injected her with something. The son, Larry Dean, complained to the doctor, but the doctor dismissed the complaint. Dean spoke to the other nurses and identified the male nurse as Charlie Cullen. After his mother died, Dean called the Warren County prosecutor. There was an investigation and Charlie was placed on indefinite paid leave, but Helen Dean's cause of death was ruled natural causes. Charlie attempted suicide again while waiting for the police to come arrest him.

Chapter 14



After a stint in a psychiatric hospital, Charlie was subjected to another polygraph. Charlie passed again. Charlie applied for a job at Hunterdon Hospital in Flemington, New Jersey, using both Saint Barnabas and Warren Hospital as references. Charlie did well at Hunterdon, receiving high praise on his evaluations. Charlie even started dating a fellow nurse, Kathy. After a short time, however, Charlie turned dark and began acting out at work. He would make medicating mistake and over lubricate patients after baths. Another patient died of a digoxin overdose, like Mrs. Dean. A few weeks later, Charlie was told one more incident would end in his dismissal. Charlie chose to write out his resignation, but then regretted it. The hospital allowed him to stay, but strictly as a freelancer. However, Charlie never showed up when they called him.

Analysis

Charlie grew up unwanted and in a home full of difficult people. It was a rough childhood that culminated with the death of his mother, an experience that scarred Charlie and made him not trust hospitals. Later, Charlie went to the Navy where he had even more difficult experiences.

Charlie became a nurse because the work was something he understood. Charlie worked hard, fell in love, and lived the American dream. However, Charlie was clearly disturbed. His wife noticed it in the first year of their marriage. Charlie would be excited with new situations, new experiences, but would quickly lose interest. This included the family pets and his newborn daughters. It was a pattern that deeply concerned Charlie's wife as she began to worry about the safety of her children.

Charlie's odd behavior revealed itself to other people, as well. One of those was Michelle, a nurse Charlie worked with. Charlie became convinced that Michelle was his soul mate; but, when Michelle did not agree, Charlie broke into her apartment in the middle of the night. Before he was arrested, he took an overdose of pills, hoping to make the grand gesture of dying in a holding cell. Instead, he was released and went to a hospital.

Charlie was dramatic. He would make a lot of grand gestures that included attempted suicide. He even found that he enjoyed staying in the psychiatric hospital he was sent to on several occasions. However, Charlie's suicide attempts were never legitimate. He always sought help before he could die.

Charlie's drama also bled into his work. Charlie was the best nurse on staff, or he was the worst. There was never any in between. Charlie was also accused of spiking IV bags with insulin at Saint Barnabas. Charlie was also suspected of killing a woman at Warren Hospital. However, none of these accusations was ever proven.

Vocabulary

Accusation, undertone, restructuring, rejuvenate, direction, routine, character, validation, termination, ignore, depressed, antidepressants, decided, confronting, employer,



appreciated, demonstrations, example, prescriptions, futility, scheduled, demonstration, sympathy, crouching, sympathetic, regretted, delivered, visitors, recovery, escorted, articulate.



Part 1: Chapters 15-28

Summary

Part 1: Chapters 15-28

Chapter 15

Charlie applied to and received a job at Morristown Memorial Hospital. Charlie acted improperly from the beginning, often leaving patients in pools of their own blood and leaving a mess in the rooms. Charlie was also caught administering medications improperly. Then a patient died because Charlie failed to administer heparin to him before his surgery. Charlie was fired. Charlie protested his termination, but the process was so slow that he again decided to try suicide. Charlie was taken to Warren where the gossip immediately spread. Charlie wanted to go back to Greystone, but the ER doctor wanted to take a blood sample first. Charlie refused. He was sent to Greystone anyway. Upon his discharge from Greystone, Charlie tried to press charges against the ER doctor for trying to take his blood. At the same time, Charlie learned his complaint against Morristown had been dropped because he did not respond to the paperwork.

Chapter 16

Charlie applied to Liberty Nursing and Rehabilitation Center of Allentown, Pennsylvania and was quickly hired. Shortly after going to work there, Charlie gave an elderly patient with a broken neck an overdose of insulin. The man died soon after. After an investigation, Liberty fired a nurse named Kimberly Pepe. Pepe sued, her lawyer claiming that Charlie was more likely to blame. Pepe settled out of court and no criminal charges were ever filed. Charlie was moved to psychiatric wing where he was fired five months later for failure to follow drug protocol.

Charlie got a job at Easton Hospital in Easton, Pennsylvania after leaving Liberty. Ottomar Schramm was a patient at Easton after a series of strokes. His daughter recalled a male nurse taking him for tests. The following day, Ottomar became very ill. After a few days, he stabilized, but someone at the hospital ordered a group of blood tests and discovered that Ottomar had a disturbingly large amount of digoxin in his blood even though he had never been prescribed the medication. Ottomar's daughter was then told that her father had died. Ottomar's general practitioner suggested an autopsy might be necessary. When the daughter arrived at the hospital, Charlie was waiting for her. Charlie appeared to be trying to keep the family from ordering an autopsy, but after being asked by Charlie, a female nurse, and a third nurse, the daughter finally requested an autopsy.

Chapter 17

Charlie left Easton and took a job at Lehigh Valley Hospital. Charlie worked at the burn unit at Lehigh and felt that he was a veteran, but he was being treated like a newbie. At



Lehigh, Charlie gave a burn patient, Matthew Mattern, an overdose of digoxin. Mattern was badly burned and not expected to live. Afterward, Charlie attempted to commit suicide by burning charcoal in a hibachi in his bathroom.

Chapter 18: April 2000

Charlie moved to Saint Luke's Hospital in Fountain Hill a few months later. Charlie was assigned to the Coronary Care Unit at Saint Luke's. There was an increase in deaths in the CCU after Charlie came, but no one attributed it to him. They did notice, however, his odd behavior. Charlie made a game out of moving chairs from the nurse's station around during his shift.

Chapter 19: February 2001

The world of nursing had changed since Charlie first went to nursing school. Charlie now works with three other male nurses. One day Charlie is called in to care for a dump, a patient who is dying and is sent to a new hospital to keep the mortality rate of the other hospital down. Charlie kills the woman with an overdose of digoxin.

Chapter 20

Charlie was throwing away the medication Pronestyl in an attempt to get attention, but no one really investigated. During his shift, Charlie went around injecting digoxin into the saline drips of the patients, angry that no one cared about the missing Pronestyl.

Chapter 21: June 2001

One morning, a nurse found the sharps container was full. She had the box opened and found bottles of drugs inside, as well as several cardboard boxes containing unused Pronestyl. One of the drugs inside the sharps container was vecuronium bromide, a dangerous drug that causes paralysis. The amount missing from the bottles was overwhelming. For the rest of the day, several nurses kept an eye on the drug room. It was because of this that they realized Charlie was the one who had been using the dangerous drug. Charlie was watched. When the sharps container was discovered to be stuffed several more times on his shift, Charlie was delivered to one of the hospital's lawyers.

Chapter 22

Charlie was interviewed by the lawyer about the missing drugs. Charlie was asked to resign. He reluctantly agreed.

Chapter 23

Charlie began working at Sacred Heart Hospital almost immediately. Charlie lost his job only a short time later, but he had begun dating a woman named Cathy Westerfer. At the same time, the administrators of Saint Luke's called around and warned other hospitals about Charlie, but never called the police or the State Nursing Board.



Chapter 24: September 2002

Charlie got a job at Somerset Medical Center in Somerset County, New Jersey. Charlie was well liked and appeared helpful. Charlie also made friends with a young nurse named Amy Loughren. Amy had had a difficult childhood and suffered from panic attacks. Amy had also contracted a virus that damaged her heart and was suffering from heart failure. It was a secret that Amy and Charlie shared. When Amy finally collapsed at work and her condition was revealed, requiring her to take time off, Charlie began killing patients in earnest.

There were so many that Charlie had trouble keeping track. One patient he did remember, however, was twenty-one year old Michael Strenko. Strenko had an autoimmune disease that complicated his heart ailment, but there was hope he would make it through his medical crisis. Charlie made sure he did not.

The insulin protocol was changed and Amy thought it was stupid. She protested and refused to go along. Shortly after Charlie gave an overdose of digoxin to one of his former patients just after she was taken off of digoxin. The woman survived, but was very ill. Sometime later, Reverend Florian Gall arrived at the hospital. He had a bacterial infection and likely pneumonia. He was receiving digoxin for an irregular heartbeat. Gall died a few days later and high levels of digoxin were found in his blood. This was the fourth patient to die with such high levels of digoxin in his blood.

Chapter 25: July 7, 2003

Nancy Doherty from the pharmacy department of Somerset Medical Center called the New Jersey Poison Control Center. She spoke to Bruce Ruck and explained what had been happening at the hospital, off the record. Nancy also told Ruck about a couple of insulin ODs at the hospital. Ruck told Nancy that the situation required the police. Ruck informed the poison control director, Dr. Steven Marcus. The following day, they called Nancy again, but get Nancy's boss, Stuart Vigdor instead. Vigdor says that the situation has been handled. There was an investigation under way.

Chapter 26: July 8, 2003

Marcus put pressure on the administrators at Somerset in regards to the drug overdose investigation. Marcus told Somerset that they needed to bring in the police before another person died. Ruck then called Nancy to warn her that the administrators were looking to blame her. He assured her that she had done nothing wrong. She had done the right thing. Marcus then reported the situation at Somerset to Dr. Bresnitz, the state epidemiologist and assistant commissioner of the Department of Health, and Amie Thornton, the assistant commissioner of health. A few hours later, Mary Lund, an administrator at Somerset, made a report with the Department of Health. On July 14, 2003, Raymond J. Fleming had an interview with Charlie. The investigation has picked up irregularities with the Pyxis, the computer programmed drug dispenser.

Chapter 27



Charlie had killed a man the night before his interview with Fleming with a different drug, dobutamine. At the same time, he continued to kill patients with an overdose of insulin.

Chapter 28: September 22

Charlie injected a patient, Mr. Strickland, with an overdose of insulin before leaving for the day. Mr. Strickland suffered convulsions, but survived. Weeks later, Charlie killed him with an overdose of digoxin. Charlie had also learned not to leave tracks on the Pyxis.

Analysis

Charlie moved to several hospitals over the next few years. At Morristown Medical Center, Charlie was a difficult nurse, rarely attempting to perform his duties properly and often written up for his behavior. Charlie was even accused of failing to give a patient medication, causing his death during surgery. Charlie attempted suicide again, but did not receive the reaction he wanted from the ER at Warren. For this reason, he tried to bring charges against the ER doctor who treated him.

Charlie moved to a nursing home in Pennsylvania shortly after getting his Pennsylvania nursing license. Charlie did this because he seemed to have worn out his welcome in New Jersey. However, things did not go well there, either. Charlie was involved in at least two patient deaths, one of which resulted in the firing of another nurse. Charlie was named in the nurse's lawsuit against the hospital, but no investigation was ever done and Charlie got away with it, again. It seemed every time Charlie got away with murder, it only made him feel that much more invincible.

Charlie worked at several other Pennsylvania hospitals after Liberty. At each one, he ran into some sort of trouble with the supervising staff. At Saint Luke's Charlie was practically caught red-handed, yet there was still no investigation. Most of the hospitals where Charlie worked simply wanted him to go away. They did not want to deal with the repercussions of an investigation or have their reputation sullied by Charlie's actions. However, they never took into account the idea that Charlie would continue to kill patients until he was stopped.

At Somerset Medical Center, Charlie became good friends with Amy Loughren. Amy was a sassy young woman who was suffering from heart failure, a condition that eventually required her to have a pace maker inserted. Amy would fight for her rights as a nurse whenever the need arose. Charlie found Amy fascinating and he loved working with her.

At Somerset, Charlie was investigated after Reverend Gall, a patient on his floor, died unexpectedly. A look at Charlie's Pyxis records, the computer that controls the distribution of drugs, raised questions about Charlie's involvement in the death. However, no charges were ever filed; and, the investigation seemed to go nowhere. It appeared to be the same thing Charlie had faced at his previous jobs. Charlie again seemed invincible.



Vocabulary

Investigate, sincerely, needling, patient, restocked, absurdity, depending, arrangement, selecting, corresponds, medicines, basements, assisting, antibiotic, hepatitis, bio-hazard, environmental, poison, discovery, bromide, vaguely, recreational, reconstituted, increasingly, dangerous, paralytic, injected, generous, quirks, generous, rearrangements, prevent, wedged, additionally, regularly, manager, counter, breathlessly, consult, assistant.



Part 2: Chapters 29-39

Summary

Part 2: Chapters 29-39

Chapter 29

Tim Braun began as a security guard at Saint Barnabas Medical Center. Braun became a cop and went to work for the Newark Police Department. Braun developed a drinking problem, but he gained sobriety around his thirtieth birthday. The case of an elderly nurse who was gunned down in the street haunted Braun. Eventually, he and his family moved to Somerville, New Jersey.

Chapter 30

On October 3, 2003, Braun took a call from country prosecutor Wayne Forrest. Braun assigned the case to new transfer, Danny Baldwin. Danny was told that the investigation was a waste of time because the old man, McKinley Crews, had died of natural causes. However, Danny and Braun were called by the prosecutor's office and told that this case involved a number of unexplained deaths at Somerset Medical Center. The two detectives were used to hunting down shooters. They knew nothing about medical poisoning.

Chapter 31

Braun and Danny receive paperwork from the hospital that they expected to be about their internal investigation. Instead, they find notes on the interview Fleming had with Charlie and evidence of a lawsuit brought by the family of Reverend Gall. Braun spoke with Lund about Charlie. Lund claims that Charlie was not the focus of their investigation. Lund also tells Braun to interview Edward Allatt, a phlebotomist at the hospital. They also learned the Pyxis records were only kept for a month. They could get records for Mr. Crews, but none of the other suspicious deaths. The death of Mr. Crews was ruled natural causes, adding another wrench in their investigation.

Chapter 32

Braun did a background check on both Allatt and Charlie. The check on Allatt came up empty, but the one on Charlie came up with a note about digoxin. Apparent the Pennsylvania State Police had pulled Charlie's criminal file in Palmer looking for evidence in regards to a death of a patient at Easton, but had come up empty handed.

Chapter 33

When Braun learned that Charlie had worked at Saint Barnabas, he volunteered to go check it out since he had his first job there as well.



Chapter 34

Braun got a retired cop who worked security at Saint Barnabas to pull Charlie's file for him. Braun found nothing in Charlie's file except for fragments of write-ups. The following day, Danny spoke with Algretta Hatcher, the nurse recruiter. Hatcher did not know Charlie, but she was able to explain the write-ups, telling Danny that Charlie had been making medication errors and seemed to have little concern for the welfare of his patients.

Braun called Warren Hospital and learned that they had destroyed his employment file. Danny called Hunterdon Hospital and was told Charlie's file was missing. They called Morristown Hospital next. They had reason to hope Morristown would find their files.

Braun and Danny went to speak to Paul Nittoly, the lawyer handling the investigation at Somerset. Nittoly told them that he and his investigator, Rocco, had handled the investigation but did not turn up any suspects and did not keep any notes or files.

Chapter 35

Danny interviewed Pennsylvania State Police Corporal Gerald Walsh and State Troopers Egan and Bruchak. They told Danny that they had investigated Charlie in regards to some unusual deaths at Saint Luke's hospital after they received a tip from Nurse Pat Medellin. They found many nurses who were willing to say that the number of deaths went up during Charlie's time at the hospital and that he appeared to be present for more than half of them. However, they were never able to pin anything specific on him. The hospital administrators refused to admit to the reason Charlie resigned.

Chapter 36

Braun and Danny struggled to find a way to get more evidence. The hospital was clearly reluctant to hand anything over and they had trouble getting cooperation from the Department of Health and the State Nurse Licensing Board. They finally went to the Center for Poison Control and heard the tapes of the phone conversations Ruck and Marcus recorded at the time.

Chapter 37

Braun and Danny spoke with the medical examiner, reviewed each of the suspicious cases from Somerset, and decided that Gall's body would be the best to use for evidence.

Chapter 38

Danny went to Gall's sister to ask her permission to exhume her brother's body and do an autopsy. She agreed.

Chapter 39: October 21, 2003



Charlie was having trouble with his girlfriend Cathy. That trouble led to dark moods. During that time, Charlie made large, nonsensical withdrawals from the Pyxis. He also killed a beloved patient, Ed Zizik, with an overdose of digoxin even though digoxin was not one of the drugs on his Pyxis list.

Analysis

The investigation at Somerset Medical Center eventually came to the attention of the police. Two former Newark detectives took the case. Tim Braun and Danny Baldwin did not understand the significance of the case at first. To them, it seemed like a bunch of medical nonsense. However, they remain on the case and worked at it until it began to make sense.

Charlie Cullen was their main suspect from the beginning. This came about because he was mentioned in some paperwork passed on to the police by the hospital and because of an investigation the Pennsylvania State Police ran on Charlie in connection to his actions at Saint Luke's. It was not enough to prove anything, but it was enough to suggest the possibility.

The hospital was reluctant to help. They told Braun and Danny that they did not have records regarding the investigation and that they could not help them. However, Braun and Danny both suspected that the hospital knew more than they were saying. The only way Braun and Danny were going to catch Charlie was if they had hard evidence. The only way to get hard evidence was to find it in one of the bodies. For this reason, they had the body of Reverend Gall exhumed.

Vocabulary

Corporation, suspect, homicide, gathering, information, prescribed, repeatedly, respiratory, fragmentary, renovations, evidence, criminal, destroyed, subpoena, confirmed, background, paperwork, featured, reported, insulin, conclusions, sessions, informal, interviews, tomes, trample, medical, prosecutors, witnesses, cooperative.



Part 2: Chapters 40-50

Summary

Part 2: Chapters 40-50

Chapter 40

Danny met with Nittoly and Rocco at Saint Michael's Hospital so that an uninvolved party could help him decipher the records Nittoly and Rocco were to supply him with. The records showed that four patients in question at Somerset were killed by outside agents. Danny and Braun then attended the exhumation of Gall's body. An autopsy was then carefully performed.

Chapter 41

Charlie was pulled over and his car impounded for unpaid parking tickets. Later Charlie was told there had been a mistake and the car would be returned to him. That same night Charlie was fired from Somerset.

Chapter 42

Amy was upset about Charlie losing his job and believed him when he told her it was because he was inaccurate about the dates he worked at Saint Luke's.

Chapter 43

Braun and Danny had had Charlie's car impounded so they could putting a tracking device in the door. They were still desperate for evidence, though. Braun called the manufacturers of Pyxis and learned that the machines hold all the information they ever receive for the life of the machine. Braun and Danny confronted Lund about the information on the four suspicious cases at her hospital. However, the information did not immediately help.

Chapter 44

On November 4, 2003, the detectives began interviewing the nurses in the CCU, some of whom worked with Charlie and some who had not.

Chapter 45

While interviewing Amy, Danny showed her the Pyxis printout from the night Gall died. Amy saw something on the printout that told her Charlie was guilty.

Chapter 46



Amy told the detectives the following day that Charlie was ordering way too many medications at the Pyxis and that he ordered more digoxin than she had probably ordered her entire time at Somerset. Amy then told them they should get the Cerner, the medical records, information. While the detectives were with Amy, she received a call from Lund telling her to have a hospital lawyer with her if she was approached by the police again. Amy decided to help the police get evidence against Charlie.

Chapter 47

Amy told the detectives everything she could think of that might be of value to the investigation. They told her that she might have to wear a wire at some point. When Amy told her kids about the situation, they told her to do what she had to do to keep people from dying.

Chapter 48

The detectives continued to struggle with the case because, among other things, they could not find a motive. Amy called Charlie and talked to him about the deaths and the investigation.

Chapter 49

The detectives, in an attempt to protect Amy from suspicion, began treating her like a suspect. A short time later, Amy was withdrawing a drug and she put in the wrong one. She canceled the order, but the drawer popped open anyway. Amy put this together with the multiple cancellations they had found under Charlie's name on the Pyxis records. The cancellations stop on Charlie's Pyxis records just a few days after Gall's death, leaving the detectives wondering if he found another way to get the drug.

Chapter 50

Amy talked to Charlie again. His girlfriend was apparently seeing someone else and Child Services was hounding him for not paying child support, causing him to fall into a depression. That night, Amy had a nightmare that she was the killer, not Charlie. It was after this dream Amy realized how Charlie was getting the medication he used to kill the patients.

Analysis

Charlie is fired from his job at Somerset. Amy is angry, at first, especially when the police come to the hospital and begin interviewing all the nurses. However, when Danny interviews her and shows her the Pyxis printout of Charlie's activity the night Gall died, she realizes something is wrong. The police have no idea what the Pyxis printout shows, but Amy is very aware. Danny decides to interview Amy again, but at her home this time. Amy tells the police what she saw on the Pyxis readout and what it means. Amy knows that Charlie is guilty of killing Reverend Gall.



Amy and Charlie are good friends. Amy has never doubted Charlie or his friendship. However, with the evidence the police have shown her, she has become aware that Charlie is not the person she thought that she knew. Amy needs to be in a position to help people. For this reason, she agrees to help the police stop Charlie. It is a difficult decision. However, without Amy, it would be impossible for the police to stop him.

Vocabulary

Unfiltered, encyclopedia, physical, changing, descriptions, administration, provide, reestablished, fundamental, unprecedented, consequences, narcotics, condition, medication, interviews, formality, curves, conspicuous, printout, detective, finishing, superpower, trusted, persona, armor, torturous, practically.



Part 2: Chapters 51-62 and Post Script

Summary

Part 2: Chapters 51-62 and Post Script

Chapter 51

Amy decided to steal Charlie's Cerner records. Amy also started thinking about Charlie's odd pattern of ordering unusual and benign medications from the Pyxis. Amy realized that Charlie was taken lethal medications that happened to be stored in the same drawer as the benign medications. For example, he often ordered Tylenol, which was stored in the same drawer as digoxin. Charlie also ordered frequent refills from the pharmacy and was always in a position to be the first available to help when the pharmacy tech arrived. Amy realized that Charlie was collected a large arsenal of drugs that he must have been combining into deadly cocktails.

Chapter 52

Amy discovered that Charlie's charts were not as well kept as she had assumed by the amount of time he spent on the computer. For this reason, she began to suspect he was outputting something on the computers. Amy realized that Charlie was using the nurse's notes in the Cerner to find the patients he had randomly poisoned and watch how the drug cocktails had impacted them.

Chapter 53: November 29, 2003

The toxicology report came back on Gall and his cause of death was officially changed to digoxin toxicity. Amy made another call to Charlie and listened to him complain about his termination from Somerset. Charlie also claimed to be depressed.

Chapter 54

Braun and Danny took Charlie in for questioning, but they got nothing from him. Charlie would not break.

Chapter 55

Charlie's house was searched and his girlfriend questioned, as well. Charlie called Amy afterward, full of excitement.

Chapter 56

With the prosecutor's office dragging their feet on the case Braun contacted the FBI. However, when he told them about his conversation with Charlie, and the threat he offered when they returned Charlie to his house, the FBI began to think that Braun had



ruined the case. That same day, Amy found a recording on her answering machine from Charlie that announced he had found a job.

Chapter 57

After receiving the news that Charlie had a new job, Braun called the hospital and advised the vice president to take their new nurse off the schedule. Braun and his team also decided they had to get Amy to speak to Charlie face to face.

Chapter 58

They put a wire on Amy and sent her to speak with Charlie at a New Jersey restaurant.

Chapter 59

The detectives listened as Amy greeted and spoke to Charlie. Charlie told Amy that he had heard the news on the radio. They were talking about him in connection with some suspicious deaths at Somerset. Charlie then began to tell Amy how he was involved in Gall's death. Charlie told her that Lund knew about his cancellations for digoxin the night of Gall's death. Charlie then showed Amy a copy of the New York Times and begins telling her about the problems he had in some of his previous jobs, such as Saint Barnabas and Warren. Amy tries everything she can to get Charlie to confess to Gall's murder. However, Charlie never does.

Chapter 60

Amy attended a Christmas party for Somerset Medical and listened as CEO Dennis Miller praised the hospital for reporting the suspicious deaths that were still under investigation. Amy called him a liar, but she danced with him when he asked.

Chapter 61

After speaking with Amy, Charlie was arrested and interrogated again. They interrogated him for nine hours, but Charlie did not crack.

Chapter 62

The police convinced Charlie that Amy had come to the police station to help him. They brought him to a room where Amy waited. Soon after, Charlie confessed to all the murders he committed, taking more than seven hours to do so.

Post Script

Charlie pleaded guilty to thirteen murders in connection to his employment at Somerset. However, it is possible that Charlie committed more than four hundred murders during the course of his nursing career.



After he was sentenced to life in prison, Charlie fought for the right to donate his kidney to the brother of his former girlfriend. There was a public dispute about this donation. Eventually Charlie donated the kidney anonymously.

Braun became a private investigator specializing in medical murder. Danny moved to a prosecutor's office as an investigator and has become an adjunct legal professor.

Amy married and quit her job as a nurse. She is now a hypnotist and past-life regression therapist. She has never told Charlie she was the confidential informant in his case. However, she did visit him in 2012 to ask for forgiveness.

Analysis

Amy begins to realize how Charlie stole the medication he needed to kill his patients. First, she realizes that when he ordered something benign, like Tylenol, it would often open a drawer that contained another, less benign drug. She also realized that he was making himself helpful with Pyxis refills because he could steal a few medications here and there without anyone realizing. She also realized from his Cerner activity that he was tracking the patients he was killing and watching them die via their medical records. This allowed Amy to realize that he was murdering patients randomly as well as picking specific patients to kill.

Amy's help with the investigation allowed the investigators to arrest Charlie. Charlie did the rest himself when he chose to confess. Charlie had wanted to get caught. Multiple times he had left a trail behind him so large and so wide that he should have been caught years ago. The hospitals chose to ignore the trail to save their own reputations. This was why Charlie thought he was invincible all those years.

Charlie had a chance to do something good after his arrest and sentencing. The public was not pleased, so it was done in secrecy. Charlie saved a man's life, giving back one against the many he took.

Vocabulary

Torturous, interstate, uncomfortable, controlled, overwhelm, records, canceling, absolutely, spooked, arrest, correct, websites, questioning, commotion, publicity, excuse, conference, scheduled, determined, mercy killing, profilers, categorize, questionnaire, friendship, evidence, deem, circumstantial, compiling, stealing.



Important People

Charlie Cullen

Charlie Cullen was a nurse who would randomly, sometimes intentionally, kill patients on his floor. Charlie had mental problems that stemmed from a difficult childhood filled with abuse. Charlie would often attempt suicide, though he always sought help in plenty of time.

Charlie used a combination of drugs to kill patients. Sometimes he would use high doses of insulin to make a patient have convulsions. Other times he would use digoxin to watch the patients go into cardiac arrest. Charlie also used a cocktail of drugs, sometimes injecting them randomly into IV bags. Charlie liked to watch on medical records how each patient responded to his random medications.

Charlie thought he was invincible because he was caught practically red-handed on several occasions, but no charges were ever filed. Charlie left a trail intentionally at some of the hospitals where he worked, but nothing came of it. Eventually, Charlie simply confessed.

Amy Loughren

Amy Loughren was a loud, outspoken nurse at Somerset Medical Center the same time Charlie worked there. Amy and Charlie became fast friends, finding in each other something similar. Amy had a difficult childhood, like Charlie, and many failed relationships. Amy also struggled with panic attacks and an infection that had left her heart compromised. Not long after meeting Charlie, Amy had to have a pacemaker put into her chest.

Amy was Charlie's biggest fan. That changed when she saw the Pyxis data from the night Reverend Gall died and she realized that Charlie could have done it. Amy became the police's confidential informant and helped them get information on Charlie. Amy showed them how Charlie stole the drugs without anyone realizing and how he chose his victims often at random and watched their demise through nurse's records on the computerized chart. If not for Amy, Charlie might not have been charged.

Tim Braun

Tim Braun was a Newark Police detective who became burned out when he could not solve a case that had haunted him since it began. Braun moved out of Newark to find a better job with a different sort of criminal element. Braun was the co-lead on the Charlie Cullen case. Braun worked closely with Danny Baldwin and Amy Loughren to find a way to prove Charlie had been killing patients at Somerset Medical Center.



Danny Baldwin

Danny Baldwin was a detective with the Somerset Police Department. Danny was the lead detective on the Charlie Cullen case. Danny worked with Tim Braun to figure out what evidence they would need to prove that Charlie Cullen had killed several of his patients at Somerset Medical Center. They were diligent, working against the hospital to find the truth. It was Danny who first interviewed Amy and realized that she could be an asset to their investigation.

Adrienne Cullen

Adrienne was Charlie's wife. Adrienne noticed something odd about Charlie from the beginning of their marriage. Charlie acted excited about new things in the beginning, but would soon grow bored of them and feel nothing. This included family pets and their two daughters. Charlie was also a heavy drinker, often attempting to hide the drink from Adrienne. When Charlie was confronted on his drinking, he began making a big show of being suicidal. Adrienne eventually tired of Charlie's behavior and filed for divorce, but she allowed him to stay in their home. Adrienne called the police on Charlie several times, accusing him of domestic violence. Charlie passed a lie detector test denying this, but Adrienne was granted an order of protection against him and Charlie lost custody of their children.

Michelle Tomlinson

Michelle was a nurse whom Charlie worked with at Warren Hospital. Michelle was nice to Charlie, visiting him in the hospital after his fourth suicide attempt. Charlie asked Michelle out and, in a moment of weakness, she agreed. Charlie thought they were soul mates and did not appreciate being told to stay away from Michelle by her on-again, off-again husband. Charlie broke into Michelle's house one night and then confessed to her that he had done it. Charlie was arrested and charged with the break in. Before his arrest, he took an overdose of pills in hopes of dying in a holding cell. Instead, he was released and went to a hospital on his own.

Cathy Westerfer

Cathy Westerfer was a nurse at Sacred Heart Hospital where Charlie worked briefly after leaving Saint Luke's. Cathy and Charlie began dating and he eventually moved in with her and her teenage children. Charlie would remain with Cathy throughout his time at Somerset and through the police investigation. Cathy gave birth to Charlie's third child after his arrest for the murder of Reverend Gall. It was Cathy's brother to whom Charlie was requested to give a kidney after his sentencing for murder. The idea became public and caused an uproar. Charlie eventually donated the kidney anonymously.



Reverend Florian Gall

Reverend Florian Gall was admitted to Somerset Medical Center for liver and kidney failure. Reverend Gall was injected with insulin by Charlie Cullen who watched his reaction to the medication with fascination. Gall did not die from the insulin, however. Instead, Charlie Cullen injected Gall with an extremely high level of digoxin, a medication that ended his life. Gall's death set off an investigation at Somerset and Charlie was interviewed by an attorney because of irregularities on his Pyxis records the night of Gall's death. However, no charges were brought. Months later, the police investigated. Gall's body was exhumed and it was found to contain large amounts of digoxin. Charlie was eventually arrested for Gall's murder.

Matthew Mattern

Matthew Mattern was a burn patient at Lehigh Valley Hospital. Mattern had been in a bad car accident and was caught inside the car as it burned. Mattern was so badly burned that he had already lost all his limbs and was not expected to live. Mattern was one of Charlie Cullen's victims, though no suspicion was ever raised because of the severity of this wounds.

Mary Lund

Mary Lund was an administrator at Somerset Medical Center during the investigation into the death of Reverend Gall. Lund was also in direct contact with the police during their investigation. Lund lied to the police and told them that the Pyxis only kept data for thirty days when, in truth, it kept data for the life of the machine. This held up the investigation for a time period as the police struggled to find evidence against Charlie Cullen.



Objects/Places

Pacemaker

Amy had a pacemaker placed in her chest after collapsing as a result of heart failure. The pacemaker was designed to help regulate the beat of Amy's heart.

Wiretap

The detectives put a wiretap on Amy and sent her to visit with Charlie face to face. Amy encouraged Charlie to talk to her about the death of Reverend Gall, but he refused. However, he did reveal that Somerset Medical Center had his Pyxis records within days of Gall's death and knew there was something suspicious on it. Charlie continued to work for Somerset for several months after Gall's death.

Sharps Container

At Saint Luke's it was discovered that Charlie was throwing away large amounts of unused medication and vials that had contained non-reconstituted paralytic medication. Rather than charging him with anything, Saint Luke's asked Charlie to resign.

Chairs

At Saint Luke's, Charlie was constantly moving chairs from the nurse's station to a storage room. Supervisors thought it was just a quirky game he was playing. However, it turned out Charlie was using them to gain secret access to the medicine room.

Insulin

Insulin is a hormone produced normally in the pancreas. When a patient has impaired pancreatic function, the pancreas does not produce insulin and it must be injected artificially to lower a patient's blood glucose levels. Charlie used insulin to remove all glucose from a patient's body, leading to convulsions and death.

Digoxin

Digoxin is a medication used to treat heart rhythm irregularities and heart failure. Charlie used this drug to kill some of his patients.



Cerner

Cerner was the name of the computer system by which Somerset Medical Center had their nurses enter information into patient records. Charlie used this system to track the conditions of patients to whom he had injected medication or placed medication in their IV bags.

Pyxis

Pyxis is the computer that dispenses medications via a file cabinet-like apparatus. Charlie used a Pyxis at several of the hospitals he worked in, most notably at Somerset Medical Center. The reports from Charlie's use of Pyxis led Amy to realize that Charlie was responsible for the death of Reverend Gall.

Center for Poison Control

In order to report the suspicious deaths, a pharmacy employee at Somerset Medical Center called the Center for Poison Control while working on the investigation into Reverend Galls' death. The head of the Center for Poison Control advised the hospital to call in the police, but the police would not become involved until five months later.

Department of Health

The Department of Health, DOH, is an organization that oversees most health related organizations, including hospitals. Somerset Medical Center and the Center for Poison Control reported the suspicious death of Reverend Gall, plus three other cases to the DOH, but nothing was done.



Themes

Murder

Charlie Cullen was a nurse who was charged with caring for the sick and dying. Charlie did this, but he also found it exciting to kill those under his care. Charlie would randomly add medications to IV bags that could lead to convulsions, illness, and death. Charlie would then watch from the sidelines as these events took place, taking some kind of enjoyment out of watching others suffer.

As a nurse, Charlie was in charge of administering medication to patients. This is a position of trust that many do not think twice about. Charlie, however, took that trust and crushed it. However, it was nearly impossible for hospital administrators and police to prove that what was happening was an act of intentional murder on Charlie's part. People often die in hospitals. Sometimes the cause is not clear.

Charlie was smart. He changed the way he was taking medication when he realized that he had nearly been caught. Sometimes Charlie wanted to leave a trail, he wanted to laugh in the faces of those who were supposed to stop him, but chose not to. At other times, he wanted to show them how smart he was by hiding his trail in plain sight. Charlie thought that he was invincible and would never be caught. However, thanks to two tenacious cops and a friend, he was wrong. He was caught.

Madness

Charlie had a difficult childhood. Charlie was an unwanted child who grew up with a tired mother and too many sister, with too many violent boyfriends. When Charlie's mother died, he joined the Navy to get away from his sisters and their boyfriends. The Navy, however, was no better for Charlie. He spent six years being treated badly by his fellow sailors.

After the Navy, Charlie went to nursing school and was the only man in his class. It seemed to be just the thing for him. Charlie suffered dark bouts of depression and had tried to kill himself three times before he graduated nursing school. Charlie liked the way people responded to him in a medical emergency. Charlie also had darker moods and the only thing that seemed to relieve those was to watch other people suffer. For this reason, Charlie would often inject random IV bags with a cocktail of dangerous drugs and watch what happened to the patients.

Charlie had mental problems. He was in and out of psychiatric hospitals during his early years in nursing, but no one ever stuck with him long enough to try to help him. None of his employers ever questioned his mental history. Charlie was allowed to continue working even after attempting suicide nearly twenty times.



Friendship

Charlie had trouble making friends and sustaining relationships. Charlie's first marriage ended when he refused to stop drinking and he treated the family pets harshly. Charlie was arrested when he broke into the house of a co-worker, after dating her once and coming to believe she was his soul mate.

Charlie never had any real friends. He was always something of an outsider. However, when he began work at Somerset, he and Amy Loughren became quick friends. Amy was the closest thing Charlie ever had to a best friend. Even after he was fired and came under suspicion in the deaths of several patients, Amy stood by him. At least, Charlie thought she did. In the end, however, it was his one good friend that helped put Charlie in jail.

Styles

Structure

The book is divided into two parts. The first part of the book deals with Charlie Cullen's life from the time he was a child until he began working at Somerset Medical Center. The second part follows the investigation into Charlie's actions at Somerset and some of his previous jobs. The novel ends with a post script that talks about Charlie's sentence and his desire to become a kidney donor for the brother of his former girlfriend.

The book tells the story in linear fashion and focuses on one story, the murders committed by Charlie Cullen during his career as a nurse. The author uses interviews with Charlie, his family, and other involved parties to fill in large parts of the story. The author also reveals the woman who helped put Charlie away for the first time since the story broke in 2003. The author gives the story a satisfying ending, telling the reader about Charlie's sentence, his experience as a kidney donor, and his visit from Amy Loughren. Charlie remains unaware of Amy's role in his arrest.

Perspective

Tone



Quotes

Charlie considered himself lucky. The career had found him, by accident or fate he couldn't say.

-- Narrator (1, Part 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote discusses Charlie's state of mind shortly before he lost his final nursing job before his arrest.

The bag came back positive for insulin. A microscopic analysis of the exterior revealed a peculiar landscape studded by tiny needle sticks, including three on the edges of the bag.

-- Narrator (4, Part 1 paragraph 7)

Importance: This quote describes an IV bag found at Saint Barnabas that would eventually lead to Charlie's termination of employment from the hospital.

He was a hero to her, Charlie knew that, even if Michelle had forgotten.

-- Narrator (9, Part 1 paragraph 7)

Importance: This quote shows Charlie's odd way of thinking when he begins to stalk Michelle Tomlinson. It also shows his need to be a hero to the women in his life.

People die, that's what happens in a hospital, especially the CCU, and sometimes those deaths seem to come in clusters, but something seemed to have changed.

-- Narrator (19, Part 1 paragraph 5)

Importance: This quote illustrates the concern that began almost immediately when Charlie began working at Saint Luke's but the reason why the change was initially ignored.

The hospital would later assert that Laughlin's investigation, the chart reviews by Risk Manager Rader and Nursing Supervisor Koehler, and additional inquiries by Saint Luke's general counsel Sy Traub all failed to identify any suspicious deaths related to the empty bottles of vec, or any other actions by Charles Cullen in their hospital.

-- Narrator (23, Part 1 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote illustrates how the hospitals often hid their findings from the police and press after the arrest of Charlie Cullen. Although Saint Luke's reportedly found no wrong doing on Charlie's part, they asked him to resign and then began a campaign to be sure he was never hired by one of their, or other nearby, hospitals.

When Charlie was in nursing school, the foreign insulin, the drug diabetics used, all came from animals, pigs, or cows, usually, as if it were a by-product of hot dogs. They'd all laugh about that in class, letting out a collective view after they'd been so tough about so much else.



-- Narrator (27, Part 1 paragraph 7)

Importance: This quote not only talks about the origin of insulin, one of the drugs Charlie used to kill, but shows the mentality that went on in his nursing school. It all seems so normal, yet Charlie is far from normal.

This guy's first nursing job just so happened to be at the same place Tim Braun had his first security job.

-- Narrator (33, Part 2 paragraph 2)

Importance: This is a connection between Charlie and Braun. It is an odd connection since their experiences were so drastically different.

Danny said that with Lucile's signed permission, they could stop her brother's murderer from killing anyone else. But Danny was wrong.

-- Narrator (38, Part 2 paragraph 15)

Importance: This quote illustrates how hard Danny and Braun worked to stop Charlie. They needed evidence that was difficult to find. They wanted to stop him, but they were unaware that he continued to kill at Somerset even as they struggled to find evidence against him.

Tim couldn't simply trace a drug back to a syringe and find its owner, the way he could with a bullet to a gun.

-- Narrator (43, Part 2 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote illustrates the trouble the detectives had with this case. The evidence was not easy to find.

He wasn't always ordering dig; he didn't have to. He could order Tylenol. The dig was in the same drawer.

-- Amy (51, Part 2 paragraph 10)

Importance: Amy discovered how Charlie was getting digoxin out of the Pyxis without the digoxin being marked on his Pyxis records.

She saw only a little boy, frightened and alone. She had sent this boy to prison and yet there he was, waiting for her, honestly believing that she had come as his friend.

-- Narrator (62, Part 2 paragraph 18)

Importance: This is Amy's reaction to seeing Charlie after his arrest. Despite all the help she gave to police, she still cared for him.

Experts with an intimate knowledge of the case say that the real number of his total victims is likely closer to four hundred. Charlie has heard this number, and while he does not like it, he does not deny it, either. Nor does he acknowledge that this number, if accurate, gives him the ignominious distinction as the most prolific serial killer in



American history.

-- Narrator (Post Script paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote tells the reader how many people Charlie probably killed, making it clear that Charlie, as a nurse, had the capability of killing far more people than serial killers like Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacy.



Topics for Discussion

Serial Killer

Define "serial killer." What does it mean to be a serial killer? How are serial killers created? What do they do? Why? How are they caught?

Nursing

Discuss nursing. What does it mean to be a nurse? What do nurses do? How are nurses regulated? Why is it so easy for nurses to kill? Why is it hard to find evidence of murder when a person dies in a nurse's care?

Madness

Discuss madness. Why did Charlie's wife think there was something wrong with Charlie? Why did she think he was abusing the animals in their home and the neighbor's home? Why would this be of importance later? What did this abuse of animals signify about Charlie's frame of mind?

Insulin

Discuss insulin. What is insulin? How is it used by the human body? Why is it given to diabetics? What happens when it is given to non-diabetics? Why did Charlie Cullen use insulin to harm his patients? What did it do to his patients? How was he nearly caught using insulin against his patients?

Digoxin

Discuss digoxin. What is digoxin? What is it used for? Why did Charlie Cullen use it against his patients? What did it do to his patients? How did the use of digoxin help police finally find evidence against Charlie Cullen?

Role of Hospitals

Discuss the role of the hospitals in Charlie Cullen's killing spree. How many hospitals did Charlie Cullen work in during his career? How many of those hospitals were aware that Charlie Cullen was behaving irregularly in his duties as a nurse? How many of those hospitals caught Charlie doing something that could potentially harm his patients? How many of those hospitals called the police to have Charlie Cullen arrested? Why?



Police Investigation

Discuss the police investigation against Charlie Cullen. Why was it so difficult for the police to find evidence against Charlie Cullen? Why did the hospitals not help with the investigation? Would Charlie have been caught if Amy Loughren did not help the police? Would Charlie Cullen have been convicted if he had not confessed? Explain.

Friendship

Discuss friendship. How many friends did Charlie Cullen have in his life? Why did Amy turn on Charlie during the investigation into Reverend Gall's death? What does this say about Amy? What does it say about Charlie? How might the investigation have ended if Amy had not helped the police?

Charlie's Need to Be a Hero

Discuss Charlie's need to be a hero. Why did Charlie need to be a hero? In what ways did he try to be a hero? What role might this drive have affected Charlie's need to kill?

Suicide

Discuss suicide. What is suicide? Why do people commit suicide? How many times did Charlie Cullen attempt suicide? Were his attempts real? Why did Charlie always arrange to have someone save him? How many times did Charlie go to the psychiatric hospital? What impact did this have on his career? What might have changed had someone noticed Charlie's cries for help?