

Murder List Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Regan Madison is the only daughter of a wealthy family. She and her three older brothers were raised by nannies and today run the family business, a chain of luxury hotels. Regan returns to her hometown of Chicago after an extended business trip and meets her two childhood friends, one of whom is a reporter, for lunch

To help gather information for a big story, Regan and her friends attend a seminar conducted by Dr. Laurence Shields, a self-help guru, whom they suspect of taking advantage of wealthy, vulnerable women. During the seminar, Shields asks the participants to make a list of people they'd be happy never to see again. Some of the participants jokingly call it a 'murder list.'

Regan halfheartedly makes a list, expecting to burn it in the fireplace after the exercise. But an ill-timed phone call leaves her still holding her list after the seminar is over. Returning to her car that night, Regan is accosted in the parking lot. In her haste to escape, she twists her knee and collapses, dropping her purse, cell phone and the contents of her seminar folder. Within days, Regan begins receiving emails and faxes containing photos of the people on her 'murder list.' They are all dead.

Alec Buchanan is a police detective who has recently resigned and is working out his three-week notice before joining the FBI. Having drawn the ire of his Lieutenant, who is hoping to curry favor with Regan's brothers, Alec is assigned to provide bodyguard services for Regan.

Thrown together all day, every day for an extended period of time, Alec and Regan discover they enjoy each other's company, and an attraction begins to grow between them. At first, neither of them acts on the attraction, both knowing Alec is leaving Chicago soon.

Just before Alec's three weeks have ended, he and Regan give in to the attraction and spend the night together. Afterwards, Alec tells Regan it can't happen again. He's going to Boston and starting the next phase of his life. Regan is heartbroken but determined not to let it show.

A man who is angry with Regan for denying his grant request makes a threatening phone call to her, and is arrested. At his house, police find evidence implicating him in the murders. Regan's security team is called off and Alec prepares to leave Chicago. After a sleepless night, however, he realizes he is in love with Regan and doesn't want to leave town unless she is with him.

He goes to her office to tell her about his change of heart. On the way, he receives information about the real killer. Regan's brother, Walker, had been involved in a serious car accident two years earlier. In the accident, the killer's wife was seriously injured, losing the use of both her legs.



Although Walker was absolved of any blame in the accident, the killer and his wife, Eric and Nina Gage, turned their anger and bitterness towards Walker and are now going after Regan in revenge. Alec rushes to Regan's office but she isn't there. He does, however, find another fax. It is a second murder list and, this time, Regan's name is on it.

At the local park, Regan is participating in a charity run. Due to her knee injury, she is unable to keep up and is quickly separated from her friends. Deciding to return to the parking lot, she takes a shortcut through the woods - and is confronted by the killer.

Alec arrives at the park just as the first shots are fired. He charges into the woods but Eric Gage hears Alec's approach and is waiting for him. Before the Gage can fire, Regan launches herself out of her hiding place in a tree and knocks him down. Alec finishes the job with one shot. At the Gage home, Nina commits suicide when she realizes her husband failed to carry out her wishes.

Alec finally gets a chance to tell Regan he loves her. Obviously, she returns his feelings. She turns her Chicago office over to her assistant and begins working out of her family's Boston hotel so Alec can begin his career with the FBI.



Prologue

Prologue Summary

Regan Hamilton Madison had a bad first day of kindergarten. Neither her mother nor her grandmother could be bothered to return from out of the country to accompany her. She knew her older brother would go with her if asked, but Regan decided she was a big girl now and didn't need anyone to go with her, just the chauffeur to drop her off.

By the end of the first day, however, Regan was a disheveled wreck, biting her lip to keep from crying. She tearfully tells her brothers, Aiden, Spencer and Walker, about a bully, a second grader, bent on tormenting Cordie, who, along with Sophie, was one of the new friends she'd made. Aiden tells her to stand up to the bully, while Spencer and Walker want to go to school with Regan to protect their sister and her young friends from the older girl.

The next day on the playground, Regan and her two friends are again confronted by the bully, who demands Cordie give up her hair barrettes. Cordie starts to do so, but Regan bravely tells the bully to leave her friend alone. Though her actions are brave, Regan's stomach is roiling and the milk she had at lunch is quickly turning sour. The bully turns on Regan and demands that she give something up instead. Regan's troubled stomach is quick to oblige.

Prologue Analysis

The prologue introduces the book's main characters, as well as the supporting cast, as children. This allows the reader to better understand why and how they became the people they are as adults. Aiden is a good deal older than Regan. In the absence of their parents, Aiden becomes a father figure to Regan, and she is anxious to please him.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The killer thinks he is a good man. He goes to church and pays his taxes. He also takes care of his invalid wife, Nina, whose legs were mangled in a car accident.

They moved to Chicago after her accident. He spends his free time modifying the house they purchased with the settlement money. Nina nearly died in the accident, but when she survived, he vowed to spend the rest of his life making her happy. As a result, he insists on pampering her by doing all the cooking and cleaning.

He believes he has a full and happy life. But for more than a year, he has been suffering from what he thinks are panic attacks. Heat radiates from within his body and anxiety overtakes him. Then he realizes they aren't anxiety attacks, after all. Instead, it is a beast living inside his body.

One night, he is unable to sleep. He retreats to the kitchen, realizing his anxiety is beginning to build. He picks up the newspaper, intending to read every page until he falls asleep. In the Metropolitan section, he sees *her* picture. *She* was photographed at the ribbon cutting of a new park and jogging path. As he reads the names under the picture, the attack hits him full force.

His skin begins to burn and itch, and he gouges long, bloody scratches into his arms and legs in an effort to relieve the pain. He tears at his hair and whimpers in terror. Suddenly, he realizes he had no control over his own body. He is not even breathing on his own. Something is breathing for him.

The next morning, he awakes on the kitchen floor. He finds the scissors neatly placed on top of the neatly folded newspaper...but he has no recollection of putting them there. In the center of the kitchen table, he also finds the photo from the newspaper, neatly clipped and waiting for him. He knows the beast placed it there. He knows the demon wants the woman in the photo, and wants him to get her. He tries to placate the beast with physical activity. He keeps himself in a permanent state of exhaustion from exercise, but even that isn't enough. The beast is slowly consuming him.

Then, one night, his wife suggests he might enjoy a night out with the boys. He reluctantly agrees, knowing he will not be heading to the city to meet friends for a drink. He is going to the city to hunt.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter introduces the enemy in the story: a seemingly normal man, devoted to his invalid wife, but suffering from some mental psychosis. His victim is a seemingly

random choice, picked from a photo in the newspaper, though this will later prove not to be the case.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

On her first morning home from a business trip, Regan awakes with a painful throbbing in her knee. She injured it months earlier, playing in a charity softball game, and her orthopedic surgeon has recommended surgery but Regan keeps putting it off.

'Home' for Regan is a suite at The Hamilton, a five-star hotel owned and operated by her family. She enjoys living there because her office is just downstairs, her gym just upstairs. In addition, she has known most of the staff all her life.

In her office, Regan fields calls from her best friends. Cordie mentions an unpleasant errand she ran for Sophie, but she refuses to give Regan the details until they meet for dinner later in the week.

Just minutes later, Regan takes a call from Sophie, who immediately asks for a favor. They agree to discuss it Friday at lunch. As she hangs up the phone, Sophie remembers to tell Regan she saw her picture in the paper and thought her hair looked great.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The chapter brings the reader to up to date on all the characters. Regan, Aiden and Spencer are all working at the family business, while black sheep Walker is driving racecars. Cordie and Sophie are still Regan's best friends and they see each other frequently. Sophie's mention of Regan's picture in the paper provides suspicion that Regan is the killer's target.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The killer waits outside Regan's building for more than two hours. When she doesn't appear, he returns to his Jeep, disappointed and ashamed. He sobs in terror, wondering what the beast will do to him now. As he drives home, he sees the entrance to the park she recently dedicated. The killer is sure the demon guided him here, and that Regan will be found on the jogging path. He finds a place to leave his car and begins scouting the jogging trail. He finds an area that is in the midst of being landscaped. There are large holes where old shrubs have been ripped out, and lots of dead and dying brush, just around a bend in the path. He also finds a shovel, hammer and tarp that were left behind by workers.

The killer breaks the closest streetlight with a rock, and then ducks into the bushes to wait. Soon, he hears the sound of pounding feet approaching. As the runner comes into view, he can see it is a woman but can't see her face well enough to tell if it is his chosen one. He feels certain it is she.

Rather than springing up from behind her, he comes from the front. Not only does his victim get a good look at him, she puts up a vicious fight, scratching and clawing his face and spraying him with pepper spray. The killer realizes he's attacking the wrong woman but it is too late to stop. He strikes her hard with the hammer and she collapses, but the demon insists he keep going, pounding on her legs, ankles and knees with the hammer until blood is running everywhere.

The rain washes the blood off the path and off the killer's face as he hides the body in the bushes and waits until he can be sure the park is deserted. After midnight, he buries the body and covers the hole with rotting foliage.

As he drives home, he is surprised to find himself relaxed, content, and guilt free. After all, he rationalizes, why should he feel guilt? It is the woman's fault. She tricked him.

When he arrives home, he hides several souvenirs in his garage, stashing the hammer, the pepper spray canister and the woman's driver's license in a wooden crate. He also disposes of his muddy clothes and shoes before entering the bathroom. Then he looks in the mirror and is horrified to see the condition of his face. His victim ripped deep gouges into his face and arms, and down his neck.

He stays in the house all weekend, watching the news and working up an excuse for his face. He finally tells Nina he slipped in the rain and fell into some thorny bushes. By Tuesday, when the body still has not been found, the killer decides he did pretty well for his first time.



Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter takes the reader back inside the killer's mind. He believes the beast arranged for the perfect killing spot and he blames the victim, not himself or the beast, when she turns out to be the wrong woman. In fact, he even insists he had not planned to kill her at all, just daze her. It is the beast that will not allow him to stop the assault until the woman is dead. He manages to blame everyone involved except himself. Instead of feeling remorse or horror at what he has done, he actually considers himself to be a very lucky man.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

By the end of the week, Regan is caught up on her paperwork and able to get back to doing the job she loves so well. She is the administrator of the Hamilton Foundation, a philanthropic trust set up by her grandmother. It is a small trust but one which supports many schools and community centers. She is hoping to convince Aiden to increase her funding for the coming year so that she can expand her programs even further.

Henry Portman, Regan's assistant, is waiting in her office. He tells her he has been receiving calls from a man named Peter Morris. The Hamilton Foundation gave him a grant a year earlier but denied his re-application because he misused the original funds.

Morris has called Henry numerous times, insisting there must be a mistake and that his renewal should be granted. Having gotten nowhere by dealing with Henry, Morris is now insisting to speak with Regan. Henry tells Regan he doesn't trust this man and she shouldn't waste her time talking to him.

When Regan meets her friends for lunch, Sophie tells her that their dinner plans for the evening have changed. Before dinner, they are going to a reception which kicks off a weekend seminar they will all be attending. Regan protests giving up an entire weekend for a seminar, but Sophie insists, saying they are going to catch a murderer.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 introduces the first possible suspect: Peter Morris, who Regan's assistant turned down for a second grant. While Morris has not yet made threats of any kind, Regan's assistant is concerned and believes the man is desperate and dangerous.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Sophie begins to tell the story of Dr. Lawrence Shields: "He's a doctor of psychology who uses his mail-order credentials to fleece rich but lonely, vulnerable women, both young and old....His self-help, let-me-show-you-how-to-turn-your-miserable-life-around seminars draw hundreds of unsuspecting men and women. It's so sad, really. The young are looking for a guru for guidance in figuring out what they should do with their futures, and the older men and women are looking for ways to change the paths they've taken (pg. 40)."

Sophie shows Regan photocopies of a diary written by Mary Coolidge. Her husband passed away and Mary spent two years trapped in a deep depression. She heard about Dr. Shields' seminars, however, and registered for the \$1,000, two-day seminar.

Dr. Shields recognized her loneliness and wormed his way into her heart. Within three months, he proposed but asked Mary to keep their engagement a secret until he could buy her an engagement ring, as he was experiencing temporary cash-flow problems. Upon hearing this, Mary was eager to help her new fiancy and willingly transferred all her savings, more than two million dollars, over to him.

Once the money was his, he broke off the engagement and refused to return the money. Sophie finishes the story with the news that Mary committed suicide. While Sophie excuses herself to use the restroom, Cordie admits she has already read the diary and reveals that Sophie got her involved in the story more than a month ago.

Sophie returns to the table and Regan asks her how she got copies of the diary. She answers that Mary's daughter found the diary while going through her mother's things. She immediately took the diary to the police. When that went nowhere, she hired an attorney, who told her Shields might be a con but he hadn't technically done anything illegal.

As a last resort, the daughter mailed copies of the diary to the Chicago Tribune. The reporter who originally received them made a few calls but decided the story wasn't going anywhere. Sophie overheard him talking about the diary and dug the copies out of his trashcan.

As a favor to Sophie, Cordie went to the police with what they knew, and she was encouraged to find there was an active file on Shields. It turns out other women had filed complaints against the man, but there was no hard evidence. Cordie followed up a month later but found the case had been passed to a lazy detective named Sweeney, and nothing more had been done.



Chapter 5 Analysis

This chapter sets up the storyline of Dr. Shields. His nefarious ways are reprehensible and they quickly enrage the friends. Their involvement with Shields will eventually prove critical to the storyline.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Detective Alec Buchanan is hiding in a smelly dumpster in a smelly alley. It's the middle of the night and he's waiting for a deal to go down. Seven detectives are on the case, trying to bust Chicago's biggest drug dealers, twin brothers who masquerade as good-'ole-boy lawyers.

Another detective, acting as a lookout, whispers in Alec's earpiece that the twins have arrived. Barely a minute later, the same detective says there's a problem. A uniformed officer is talking to the twins, who have parked in a No Parking zone. But instead of giving them a ticket, the uniformed officer accompanies them into the warehouse. Alec and the other detective scramble to warn the undercover detective inside, but they're too late. The officer recognizes the detective and blows his cover. One of the twins pulls a gun, and the operation ends in an exchange of gunfire.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Six chapters into the book, the lead male character is finally introduced. Not much is revealed about him other than his profession. He is an experienced detective on the Chicago police force, respected by most of his co-workers.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Regan tells Sophie and Cordie she's willing to take part in their scheme. Sophie asks Regan to go to the police station and find out what's been happening since Cordie made her last inquiry.

Sophie claims she can't go herself because she's a reporter and they don't tell reporters anything. Then she admits, she doesn't want any of the other reporters who might be hanging around at the police station to see her and wonder what she's doing there. If they got wind of her story and beat her to the punch, her chance at getting promoted off the advice column could be ruined.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Sophie's real reason for getting involved in the Shields affair is revealed. She's a wanna-be investigative reporter, looking for the big story to get her off the advice column and into real news.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Detective Sweeney is having a bad day. A hangover, a root canal, pouring rain and a partner who hates him (although the feeling is mutual) are just some of his problems. He's also under investigation by Internal Affairs for getting paid to look the other way while a drug dealer was murdered. Sweeney is guilty but he knows IA has no concrete proof. His wife left him, taking his son with her. Before she drove off, he threatened to kill her if she ever tried to collect alimony or child support. He hasn't heard from her since.

Despite office gossip, Sweeney denies being a drunk. Not yet, anyway. He says he's just tired of dealing with all the scum littering the streets of Chicago. Privately, he admits using the booze to dull his night terrors. When that doesn't work, he dreams of early retirement. If he can just make one more big score, he won't need his pension and can walk away.

His new boss enters the department and heads to his office. Lieutenant Lewis has only been Sweeney's supervisor for three weeks, but Sweeney already knows the boss doesn't like him. In fact, Lewis is keeping track of Sweeney's infractions, waiting for an opportunity to fire him without bringing the police union down on his head.

Sweeney doesn't mind. He knows Lewis has secrets of his own. He is cheating on his rich society wife. If Lewis starts to make trouble for him, Sweeney will simply mail a few photographs to Mrs. Lewis.

Alec Buchanan and the young, uniformed detective who blew the undercover operation are the next to enter the department. They head straight for Lewis's office, and almost immediately an argument begins. The detective who was in charge of the blown operation soon joins the others in Lewis's office, and the yelling begins anew.

Sweeney heard about the busted operation. He also heard Alec single-handedly managed to get the uniformed officer out of harm's way when the bullets started flying.

All the other detectives in the room are watching the shouting match in Lewis's office, as well. Someone reveals that Alec is trying to save the young officer's job, while everyone else wants him fired.

Sweeney thinks about sneaking out early. He takes the folder he was reading and shoves it into a drawer officially called his 'pending file.' Secretly, he refers to it as the who-gives-a-damn drawer. He looks up just in time to see Regan enter the room. Another detective directs her to Sweeney. When he realizes she is headed his way, he sucks in his gut and tries to cover the ketchup stain on his tie. However, before she can make her way to him, he admits it's pointless. Classy, pretty and reeking of money, Regan is way out of his league. Sweeney knows it and resents it.



Regan introduces herself and explains why she is there. Sweeney can barely look away from her chest long enough to reply. He clearly doesn't recall the case and Regan has to refresh his memory. When he finally does remember, he claims he's working on it.

Regan presses him for more details as to what has happened since their last inquiry and what his next steps are. He replies that the case is in his pending file. When Regan tries to press farther, he tells her he's off duty and suggests she return the next day.

Instead, Regan asks if Lieutenant Lewis is available. Sweeney's resentment immediately turns to outright hostility when Regan tries to go over his head. He tells her Lewis is busy and he would only send her right back to him anyway. He reminds her that he just told her he had nothing to report. He tells her Shields did nothing illegal. Mary Coolidge willingly signed all her money over to him, and then killed herself. Case closed. When Regan demands to know if the investigation is really pending, he simply shrugs and replies it's pending on getting some real evidence.

Regan looks around and notices the argument in Lewis's office. Lewis is furious and pounding on the desk while another man, dressed in filthy clothing, calmly leans against a wall, completely unfazed by Lewis's tantrum. She decides it is pointless to interrupt. Clearly, Lewis is no better than Sweeney, and she wants nothing to do with him or his tantrums.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Sweeney resents the fact Regan is so clearly above him and retaliates by refusing to even speak politely to her. The only thing he has going for him is that she wants information from him. He doesn't have answers for her and is blatant about the fact he's completely uninterested in her questions.

This chapter also reveals more about Alec Buchanan. He became the hero of the botched undercover job by saving the young cop's life. Additionally, he is fighting to save the man's job, as well, while everyone else wants the young man to be the fall guy. During the argument with Lewis and Tanner, Alec is the only one who manages to remain calm.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Regan makes several stops on her way back to the office, including one to pick up a birthday present for Cordie. The sales clerk is extremely rude and angers Regan to the point of leaving without making her purchase.

At six-fifteen, she meets Cordie at the hotel's entrance. Together, they pick up Sophie and drive to the reception. On the way, making idle chitchat, Sophie offers to join Regan on a run at the new jogging trail. Regan explains that she doesn't run there anymore, not since they finished the track at the hotel.

When they arrive, the receptionist tells them Dr. Shields is holding court in the living room and plans to conduct some exercises - 'mental challenges,' she calls them. "He helps you pull out all the anger and bitterness and hostility that's eating away at your creativity, and once you've gotten all that poison out, you can move in a more positive direction (pg. 72)."

Regan, Sophie and Cordie enter the living room. Sophie, who has a recorder hidden in her purse, takes a seat up front, while Regan and Cordie find seats in the rear. Regan watches Shields and wonders exactly what Mary Coolidge saw in him. Shields motions for everyone to take a seat, and the program begins.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Regan reveals she no longer uses the newly dedicated jogging path. This tells the reader, the killer's initial plan was doomed to fail from the start.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Shields starts his program by outlining what the attendees can expect over the course of the weekend. Regan quickly loses interest and begins making a to-do list on the back of her program. It includes talking to security about Peter Morris. She looks around the room and realizes Shields captivates most of the women. He tells them they deserve to have everything they want, but first they must rid themselves of the poison inside themselves.

A woman, whom Regan suspects is a plant, stands up and asks what he means by poison. Shields explains that everyone has been hurt at one time or another. They carry that hurt around and it festers inside them. He tells everyone to pull out their notebooks and pens, and then asks them to make a list of people the world would be better off without. If they could wave a magic wand, he explains, and make certain people disappear, who would they have vanish into thin air.

The audience is shocked. Someone calls out a question. "You want us to make a...murder list?" Shields says they can call it whatever they like, perhaps just a list of people they never wish to see again. He gives them ten minutes to complete the exercise and says he will ask everyone to hold up their lists at the end so he can see that everyone has participated. Regan notices one of the bodyguards watching her, so she reluctantly begins writing.

Dr. Shields himself, as well as his two bodyguards, top her list. The rude salesclerk from that afternoon rates, as well. Detective Sweeney gets a mention, and Regan is about to add Lt. Lewis to the list when Shields calls out that time is up. He asks everyone to tear the paper out of their pad and invites them up to the fireplace to burn their lists in a symbolic cleansing ritual.

Cordie and Regan are about to get in line when Regan's cell phone rings. She goes out to the hallway and takes a call from Aiden's assistant, Emily. Regan dislikes the woman and knows the feeling is mutual. She ends the call and wishes she had thought to include Emily on the list.

Finally, it's time to leave. Since it has started to rain, Regan offers to get her car and pick her friends up at the door. Between the rain and the poor lighting at the facility, she can barely see.

As she makes her way to the parking lot, her knee begins to throb once again. She is within a few yards of her car when she hears someone call her name. Without thinking, she pivots towards the sound, and her knee painfully gives way. She crashes to the pavement, the contents of her purse scattering everywhere. The pain in her knee is unbearable.



Regan fights the pain and begins gathering up her belongings. As she does, she thinks again she hears someone call her name. Or is it just the wind? She decides it is just her imagination and struggles to her feet.

Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter reveals the meaning behind the title of the book. The 'murder list' Regan creates at Shields' request is a cleverly disguised piece of foreshadowing.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

A week has passed since he killed his first victim. The beast inside him whispers they have gotten away with murder. Now it is Friday and the beast is stirring again. The killer is determined to be better prepared this time. He disguises himself as a runner and adds a wig, glasses and a beard. Though he doesn't think he will need it, he puts a knife in his pocket.

Just as he rounds the corner at the hotel, Regan walks out and meets Cordie. As they wait for her car to be brought around, the killer hears one parking attendant call out to another, asking for the quickest route to the conference center. So the killer knows where Regan is headed and doesn't worry when he is unable to follow her. He simply drives on to the conference center, parks some distance from the center, and walks back. He spends some time scouting the area, and then checks the parking lot to ensure that Regan is indeed there.

Relieved at finding her car in the lot, he returns to the building just in time to see Regan walk out by herself. As she exits, the overhead light shines on her for just a moment in such a way that the killer is reminded of his wife, Nina. But he blinks and the resemblance is gone.

He watches her walk toward her car and admires her long, confident stride. "She had such beautiful, strong legs. She was so like his Nina before the accident. Yes, just like her. Like his wife, she moved with elegant grace, her head held high, her hips gently swaying (pg.85)"

The killer shakes his head to clear his thoughts. The chosen one cannot possibly compare to his Nina. He slips his hand into his pocket and fingers the knife. There is work to be done. Quid pro quo. He calls out to her and watches in horror as her leg collapses beneath her. The look of pain on her face reminds him of Nina's as he recalls the accident in slow motion. He doesn't understand what is happening. Regan is in pain, her leg useless, just like Nina. Why does he want so badly to help her, when his intention is to destroy her? He simply stands there, staring at her, until he realizes she has gotten up and is heading for her car. The demon begins chanting in his ear. "Get her. Get her. Get her." He has almost reached her when the headlights of another car in the parking lot suddenly blind him. He ducks out of the light, wanting to hide himself in the darkness. As he does, he slips on what turns out to be a file folder, its papers spilling out. Regan must have dropped it when she fell, he realizes. He snatches it up and takes off after her again. But it is too late. She is already backing her car out of the parking space. As he makes his retreat, he finds a cell phone lying on the ground and wonders if it is Regan's.



Chapter 11 Analysis

It's only through an amazing coincidence the killer is able to find out where Regan is going. He was unable to keep up with her as she drove and would have lost her had he not overheard the valet mention where she was going.

This amazing stroke of luck is negated, however, by the killer's confusion over Regan's resemblance to his wife; her dark hair, the way she walked, the pain and horror on her face as she collapsed in the parking lot. This stuns him into inaction, allowing Regan to escape.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Regan makes her escape from the killer but is unsure exactly what has happened. Was he chasing her or just out jogging in the rain? Her instincts are screaming that he is dangerous. She makes it to her car unharmed, but as she backs out of her parking space, Regan sees a man standing in the parking lot, staring directly at her. Then he is gone.

Regan reaches for her cell phone to call the police but can't find it. She realizes it must have fallen out of her purse when she fell. Regan returns to the conference center to pick up Cordie and Sophie. She explains what happened to her friends and uses Sophie's cell phone to call the police.

Chapter 12 Analysis

This chapter confirms that the cell phone found by the killer is, indeed, Regan's. It also provides insight into Regan's view of the near attack. She is not completely confident it was an attack at all. Her instincts sent her scrambling for cover, but in the aftermath she is not as sure of what happened.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

The killer is furious. He's worked so hard and it isn't fair she's gotten away. She tricked him, he believes. He pounds the dashboard in his car until his knuckles bleed. He returns home and, once in the safety of his garage, begins to panic. It is only a matter of time before they find 'the accident,' his other victim. When they do, will they be able to connect it to what happened tonight? How will Nina survive if he goes to prison? Finally, he calms down, and assures himself the beast will not let that happen. There will be other chances to catch Regan.

As he cleans himself and his clothes, he is torn between feeling sorry for Regan, whose pain looked so much like Nina's, and raging at her for getting away. He knows he cannot have it both ways. The beast will demand to be appeased.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The killer again blames someone else for his failures. The fact that she got away was Regan's fault, not his own. She tricked him into feeling confused and sympathetic by falling in the parking lot.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Alec Buchanan spends the weekend in Boston with his family. While he is there, he also interviews for a job with the FBI. They have been recruiting him for over a year now and say the job is his if he wants it, with a guarantee he will be based in Boston. His brothers, one a lawyer with the Justice Department and the other an FBI agent, try to convince him to take the job.

Alec returns home and gets a call from Gil Hutton, his ex-partner. Gil tells Alec that Lt. Lewis is planning to get even with Alec for standing up for the young officer who'd gotten in the way of the undercover bust. Gil says Lt. Lewis is going to block Alec's request for a transfer out of the unit. Alec replies he's not planning to request a transfer, but doesn't admit he will be resigning soon.

Gil wants to get together with Alec for a drink so they can talk about what happened to Sweeney. When Gil realizes Alec's been out of town and hasn't heard the news, he tells him Detective Sweeney was murdered, the night before.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Chapter 14 reveals a little more about Alec Buchanan. His family is in Boston and he'd like to be closer to them. He is also contemplating leaving the Chicago Police Department for a job with the FBI. The news that Lt. Lewis is out to sabotage him at the Department will only add fuel to that fire. The news about Detective Sweeney is a sudden, unexpected twist.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Regan finally admits she needs the surgery on her knee. Fortunately, her surgeon has an opening the next day. She doesn't tell anyone about the surgery except her assistant, which angers her friends when they find out after the fact. Sophie proposes the three girls take a vacation to the Cayman Islands to stay at her father's condo. She admits Dr. Shields also has a vacation home there and has been spotted in residence.

Unfortunately, Regan cannot go. In addition to the rehab on her knee, she has an art auction coming up, as well as the annual family meeting. She needs to work on her proposal for increased funding to present at the meeting.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Regan's failure to tell anyone about her surgery beforehand reveals an independent streak that could land her in trouble.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

On Regan's first day back at work after her surgery, she sends Henry on some errands, which include stopping by the parking garage and retrieving her cell phone from her car.

She works fast while he's gone, determined to get through her email before he returns. While doing so, she notices an unusual email from him. It has an attachment but no subject line and no text message. Regan clicks on the attachment just as Henry walks back into her office to say he was unable to find her cell phone.

He sees the expression on Regan's face and hurriedly runs around the desk to see what she is looking at. It's a picture of a dead man hanging from a rope. He denies sending the picture to her and Regan believes him. Someone must have gotten access to their email accounts.

Henry thinks the picture is a fake and tells her to delete it. Regan refuses, saying she knows the man. Henry tells her to call the police but Regan replies that the man in the picture is the police.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Regan is still unaware the killer is in possession of her cell phone. Despite evidence the email came from Henry, Regan doesn't for a minute believe he would send such a thing to her. Her revelation that the man in the photo is a policeman hints that it is probably the recently deceased Detective Sweeney.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Regan calls the police and reports the photo. Alec is the detective assigned to speak with her. When he arrives at her office, they show Alec the emailed photo and Henry asks if it's real or fake. Alec answers it is most definitely real. He calls for a computer tech from the police department. While they wait, he asks Regan about her relationship with Sweeney. She explains about Mary Coolidge and the case against Dr. Shields.

The computer tech arrives and quickly accesses the security built into the email. She announces the picture was sent from a cell phone. She reads the number and Regan gasps. It's her cell phone number.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The news that the photo was sent from Regan's cell phone connects Regan's attacker with Sweeney's murder for the first time.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Regan explains to Alec that her cell phone is lost, but she is unable to remember the last time she used it and where she might have lost it. Alec notices how beautiful Regan is. He's tempted to ask her out but doesn't. He's leaving Chicago in a few months, so there is no point in starting a relationship now. He's certain Regan Madison is not the type to engage in casual sex.

While he's checking out her legs, Alec notices the fresh scar on Madison's knee. He inquires about it and that's when Regan remembers where she lost her phone. She explains to Alec how the man was chasing her through the parking lot and she dropped her purse when she fell and re-injured her knee. She must have left the phone lying on the pavement as she limped away.

Chapter 18 Analysis

In this chapter, Regan realizes the man who chased her and the man who sent the photo of Sweeney to her are one in the same. Alec admits to himself that he is attracted to Regan, but decides against asking her out, deciding the timing is wrong because he is leaving Chicago soon. This sets up a conflict between his attraction and his honorable intentions.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Alec is on his way back to the station when his contact at the FBI calls and officially offers him the job. Before going to see Lewis, Alec stops at Human Resources and gives his notice. By the time he makes it to Lewis's office, Lewis has already heard the news and is furious that Alec didn't tell him first. He says it makes him look bad that he had to hear it from his supervisor, who wants Lewis to try to talk Alec into staying.

Alec says his mind is made up. He asks Lewis if he should work out his three-week notice or leave now. Lewis angrily tells him to stay. However, he wants all of Alec's pending cases turned over immediately. He tells Alec he can spend the next three weeks chained to his desk, doing phone work for Detective Wincott, who is heading up the Sweeney murder.

Alec talks to Wincott, who tells him that a lot of people might have wanted Sweeney dead, including Lt. Lewis. Wincott has discovered Sweeney kept a diary which listed people he wanted to blackmail and the amounts he wanted to ask for. Lewis was on that list.

Wincott also tells Alec they found Regan's cell phone in the bushes behind Sweeney's house. They theorize the killer somehow fixated on Regan and killed Sweeney to show off for her.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Chapter 19 reveals more about the angry Lt. Lewis. He could care less about Alec leaving, but is furious because he believes it makes him look bad to have found out about it second-hand. Obviously, this is a man to whom appearances and control are everything. Rather than tell Alec to make his resignation effective immediately, Lt. Lewis decides to punish him by chaining him to a desk for three weeks.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

To Alec's surprise, Lewis does an about-face and suddenly announces Alec is back on the case. Lewis has just realized who Regan is - or, more specifically, who her brother Aiden is. Aiden is a member of the country club Lewis has been trying to get into for more than five years. Aiden just called the Superintendent of Police, demanding that Regan get 24/7 police protection.

Lewis sees an opportunity to suck up to Aiden and make Alec miserable at the same time. He assigns him bodyguard duty. "...I want someone from this office with her at all times, and I want Aiden Madison to be beholden. Got that? ...This is my ticket into the Clairmont. Don't screw it up. (pg. 132)"

Chapter 20 Analysis

This chapter sets up the inevitable contact between Alec and Regan. Being assigned to guard duty means that, despite Alec's reasonable desire to stay away from Regan, he is instead going to be in constant contact with her for the next three weeks.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

A break in the rain finally allows a maintenance crew a chance to clear the piles of dead shrubbery along the jogging path. They're nearly finished before one of them spots a human toe sticking up out of the mud.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Finally, there is some resolution to the first killing. The killer's safety clock is now ticking.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Regan is not happy when she hears about Alec's new assignment. But, although she will not admit it out loud, she is scared, so she resigns herself to his presence in her office.

Regan's phone rings; it is Peter Morris, the man who is upset about his grant not being renewed. He seems to think it is all a misunderstanding and that, now that he has Regan on the phone, she will issue him a check. Regan quickly sets him straight, telling him she personally denied his grant and he would be wasting his time to apply again.

After hanging up, she tells Alec about the conversation. He assures her he will make sure Wincott checks out Morris. Then he explains they need to meet with the sketch artist at the station.

However, before they can leave, a fax comes in. Regan stops to look at it. She's shocked to see the subject line read "your murder list." A note at the bottom says "Sorry, I can't take credit for this one. I was too late. She was already in the mortuary. Had herself a fatal heart attack, but I went ahead and marked her off your list anyway. (pg. 138)"

The second page comes through and Regan is stunned and horrified to realize it is a picture of an obviously dead Ms. Patsy, the rude sales clerk she had put on her list at Shields' seminar.

Chapter 22 Analysis

The mysterious fax confirms Sweeney was killed on Regan's behalf. And while, the salesclerk died of natural causes, the killer insinuates he was about to kill her, as well. The heading on the fax reveals that the killer is working his way down Regan's list.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Regan accompanies Alec back to the station. Along the way, she explains the strange exercise that resulted in her murder list. She tells him that, in addition to Sweeney and the sales clerk, Dr. Shields and his two bodyguards were also on her list.

Regan also tells Alec that she had made notes on the back of one of the papers in the folder she'd been given. She remembers jotting down a reminder to talk to Aiden about his assistant, and to talk to security about Peter Morris. She is unable to remember anything else.

While she is concentrating on trying to remember what else there may have been, Regan glances at Alec and loses her concentration. She notices what a contradiction he is- disheveled but well mannered and educated but with a keen sense of humor.

Regan admits to Alec that she considered adding Lt. Lewis to her list as well, but was interrupted before she could write down his name.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Regan's revelation that her folder contained names other than those on her murder list foreshadows the possibility that there are additional people at risk. Her notes regarding Aiden's assistant and Peter Morris were not complimentary, and could lead the killer in their direction, as well.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Alec introduces Regan to Detective Wincott, the man in charge of the investigation into Sweeney's death. He leaves them and runs into Wincott's partner, who says he's heard Regan is a stunner. Alec is surprised to realize he's angry and wants to tell the newly divorced detective to stay away from Regan. Instead, he tells him Regan's scared and to go easy on her.

After Regan finishes her interview with Wincott, she spends several hours with the sketch artist. She's finally ready to go home when Alec finds her and says she can't leave just yet. Her brother and her attorney are waiting for her in Lt. Lewis's office.

Chapter 24 Analysis

The first spark of jealousy is apparent from Alec when the handsome detective assisting the investigation is so anxious to meet Regan. Alec recognizes the emotion as anger and wonders at it, but doesn't realize it is jealousy at this point.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

The Madisons' attorney immediately tells Regan she is not a suspect. Regan asks Aiden who told him about what was happening and Aiden replies that the attorney called him. Besides that, he'd found copies of the photos on his desk when he arrived at the office. He demands to know what she was thinking when she created her murder list. Regan doesn't bother to defend herself. She knows it won't do any good.

In addition, Aiden tells her someone also faxed the photos to her other brothers, all of whom are on their way to Chicago and want Regan under lock and key until the suspect is captured.

Aiden tells her to cancel everything on her schedule and remain secluded inside the hotel. He turns to Detective Wincott and begins discussing plans for Regan's protection.

Regan walks out of the still-in-progress meeting, with Alec right on her heels. On the way back to the hotel, they have their first personal discussion. They each admit to believing the other is more softhearted than they like to let on, and they establish that neither of them is married.

As they reach the hotel, Alec's cell phone rings. He and Wincott briefly discuss the schedule for Regan's protection and Wincott reveals that the staff psychiatrist is reviewing the case file. His initial impression is that the killer will contact Regan again, this time in a more personal way than via fax or email.

Henry meets them in Regan's office. He informs them Aiden has arranged for security to be posted at the elevators and stairwells leading to Regan's office and suite. He also tells Regan that Aiden had her car towed and junked.

In exchange, he left her a set of keys to a brand-new BMW. Regan is furious. She tries to remain calm in front of Henry and Alec, but they both know she is seething inside. She can't believe the extents to which her brothers will go to run her life.

Alec is surprised, as well. He reminds himself again that he is leaving town in a few weeks. How her brothers treat her and why she allows it is not his problem.

Instead, he asks her how long she's been living at the hotel. She explains that, when her mother was ill, Regan gave up her apartment and moved in with her. When her mother passed away, eleven months ago, Regan moved out of the house and into the hotel so her stepfather could live in the house for the next year, per her mother's request. Almost immediately, her stepfather moved his mistress into the house, married her three days after the funeral, and consulted an attorney about breaking the prenuptial agreement.



Regan assumes Alec is asking questions about her family because he's been assigned to protect her. Alec replies that is part of it, but admits to some personal curiosity as well. He mentions he is surprised Aiden agreed to allow her stepfather to live in the family home because Aiden seems to enjoy throwing his weight around. Regan agrees but says she wishes she knew why Aiden feels he can run her life. Alec replies it is because Regan lets him.

Chapter 25 Analysis

While the characters don't seem to give it much thought, the reader is left to wonder who left copies of the photos on Aiden's desk and who faxed them to her other brothers.

There is more personal talk between Regan and Alec, which is as expected if they're going to spend the next three weeks in constant contact, but Alec admits his questions go beyond the scope of professional curiosity.

Alec again has to remind himself he's leaving town in a few weeks and that whatever happens between Regan and her brothers is none of his business. However, the argument is beginning to lose some of its luster.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Regan is worried about the situation. She's afraid, but even more afraid to admit it. She worries that, if something happens, she will not have the courage to do what needs to be done.

She finally gets a call from Cordie in the Caymans. They've made significant progress in their investigation. They have the names of two other women involved with, and fleeced by, Shields. They also have hotel employees who can confirm the women stayed in the Caymans with Shields and bank records that prove the women wrote large checks to Shields.

When Regan fills Cordie in on what's been happening in Chicago, Cordie wants to fly home immediately to be with Regan. Regan refuses, thinking that Sophie and Cordie will be safer if they stay away from her.

Chapter 26 Analysis

It's interesting to note that Regan, who has had her brothers taking up for her at every turn for her entire life, is concerned about the fact she is afraid. One imagines that someone who had others to take care of every problem she's ever encountered would become complacent and assume others would protect her from this problem as well. It's a testament to Regan's character that she has not.



Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Over the next two weeks, Regan's brothers nearly drive her crazy with their phone calls and constant hovering. Aiden checks up on her a dozen times a day but never manages to find the time to sit down and talk with her. In addition, she definitely wants to talk to him. She is going to put her foot down regarding his interference in her life. She knows that if Aiden will stop interfering, Spencer and Walker will follow his lead.

Aiden is avoiding talking with her because he knows Regan is still furious over what he did to her car. He also knows, from past experiences, that if he gives her enough time to cool down, she'll get over her anger and accept his interference.

Regan is in the midst of a love/hate relationship with Alec. They have been practically inseparable over the past two weeks, with Alec even refusing to take a day off. And he only leaves her after she is safely inside her suite for the night, with a policeman posted outside her door.

While she hates the circumstances that require it, Regan enjoys being with him and is growing more attached to him every day. She can't help wondering what things would be like under different circumstances. Would he have asked her out?

Regan tries to simplify her schedule as much as possible, but there are a couple of events she refuses to cancel: one is an art auction at the hotel, and the other is a fundraiser at the country club.

The auction goes well, but there is an uninvited guest who tries, without success, to get close to Regan. Every time he draws near her, she is whisked away to talk to someone or to make an appearance on stage. He decides he will have to wait for another time, and leaves.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Regan is beginning to fall for Alec but is confused about the circumstances surrounding their relationship. Although he has been assigned to protect her, the information that he refused to take a day off hints that her feelings are reciprocated.



Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

Alec and Regan begin spending evenings together in Regan's suite. They take turns picking movies and poking fun at each other's choices. They also share childhood stories and discuss how differently they grew up. Alec is one of eight children in a close-knit, loving family. By contrast, Regan's father died when she was very young, and she usually said good night to her mother over the phone.

Alec accuses Regan of not trusting men and she admits she doesn't want to make her mother's mistakes. Alec tells her it's just a matter of finding the right person. He then describes his perfect woman, and she bears an uncanny resemblance to Regan. As he describes her, Alec leans in closer and closer to Regan, until she is certain he is about to kiss her for the first time. She closes her eyes in anticipation, only to have Alec tweak her nose and tell her he has to leave.

Chapter 28 Analysis

Regan and Alec continue to learn more and more about each other. Despite the differences highlighted whenever they talk about their childhoods and families, their attraction is growing rapidly.



Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

The day of the country club fundraiser, Regan receives phone messages from Sophie and Cordie, confirming they made it back to town in time for the evening's events. She also learns from Detective Wincott that Shields and his bodyguards have been placed in protective custody.

Chapter 29 Analysis

The anticipation of the event at the country club is palpable to the reader for several reasons. The reader knows, even if the characters do not, that a stranger tried to make contact with Regan at the last event she attended, so the possibility of a confrontation exists.

In addition, the growing attraction between Regan and Alec has nearly reached the boiling point and, aided by the very sexy dress she has decided to wear, will very likely boil over after the event.



Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

Alec and Regan drive to the country club. Along the way, Alec realizes they are being followed. He informs Regan they are being tailed by more security guards hired by Aiden. Regan asks Alec to talk to the bodyguards to ensure they don't interfere with the evening's activities.

Regan also tells Alec her brother Spencer has arrived in Chicago and he and Aiden have ganged up to try to convince her to go into hiding. She has refused, however, wanting to do everything possible to help catch the killer. Alec tells her to leave the investigation to the police.

Chapter 30 Analysis

In contrast to Alec's initial reactions to Aiden, he is now agreeing with Aiden's desires to protect Regan. He goes as far as telling Regan that he would probably do the same thing, if one of his sisters were similarly threatened. This is revealing in that it highlights his growing feelings for Regan.

Meanwhile, the increasing security, initiated by Aiden and resented by Regan, is setting up a major conflict between the siblings.



Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

Regan and Alec meet up with Sophie and Cordie at the banquet. Regan realizes she's been seated at a table with her stepfather and his new wife. Refusing to sit with him, she gathers up her place card and finds another table. Sophie sends her date to get their cards, as well as Cordie's, so the friends can all sit at the same table. Sophie and Cordie are astonished by how handsome Alec is, and Cordie says she can tell Alec is interested in Regan.

Chapter 31 Analysis

Introducing a new boyfriend to your girlfriends is always a big deal, and this is no exception. Despite the fact that Regan and Alec aren't 'officially' dating, Regan relishes her friends' positive opinions of Alec.



Chapter 32

Chapter 32 Summary

Regan's brother, Spencer, arrives at the event. She points him out to Alec and mentions how rare it is for all of her siblings to be in town at the same time. She says the only time it seems to happen is when there's funeral or a crisis.

This sparks an idea in Alec. When Regan excuses herself to say hello to Spencer, Alec quickly uses his cell phone to call Detective Wincott. He asks him to check out Regan's brothers and proffers a theory the killer might be using Regan as a means to get all her brothers together in the same city.

Regan makes a speech soliciting money for the hospital. She's very good and Alec is impressed with yet another side of Regan he hasn't seen before.

Regan works the room for more donations. Alec uses the time to make another phone call. He watches as Regan works her magic with everyone in the room--everyone except her brothers. He watches as she has a conversation with Aiden and Spencer. He can tell the two brothers are arguing a point with which Regan vehemently disagrees.

She returns to the table angry and upset. However, she suddenly notices the way Alec is looking at her and it stops her in her tracks. She musters up the courage and asks the question which has been plaguing her for two weeks.

"She took a step closer and whispered so she wouldn't be overheard.

'I was wondering...'

He didn't say a word. He simply waited until she continued.

She could feel herself blushing now.

'If we had met in a different place...at a different time...would you...?'

She didn't go on. She didn't have to. He nodded and quietly said,

'Oh yeah, I would.'" (p. 230)

Chapter 32 Analysis

For the first time, the possibility is raised that the killer may not be after Regan after all, but using her as a pawn to get to one of her brothers. This puts a new light on some of the previous events. For the first time, Regan and Alec admit their burgeoning attraction

out loud to each other, drawing nearer to the time when they, inevitably, will consummate their relationship.



Chapter 33

Chapter 33 Summary

Alec and Regan return to the hotel. Regan recognizes the policeman stationed outside her door but can't place him. Alec tells her it is the young cop she saw getting reamed out in Lt. Lewis's office, the first day she visited the station. Alec got him the security job to help him earn some extra money.

Alec asks what Aiden and Spencer were discussing at the fundraiser that had Regan so upset. She's surprised Alec noticed because she had been sure her feelings were well hidden. Alec laughs and tells Regan her emotions are almost always visible, right on her sleeve.

Regan shares with him that Aiden and Spencer are in favor of giving her stepfather a 'go away' settlement. Sure that Regan would disagree with their plan, they brought it up at the banquet, knowing she wouldn't make a scene at a public gathering.

Regan thanks Alec for attending the event with her and he tells her it was part of his job. But, he adds, locking the door behind Regan, he's not on duty now. He leans in close but stops just short of kissing Regan, letting her know the next move is up to her and promising himself, he'll just walk away if she's not interested. But she is interested. She lifts her face to him, letting him know the ball is in his court. Finally, they kiss.

Chapter 33 Analysis

Aiden and Spencer's ambush at the party is yet another example of how they manipulate their sister. Just like Aiden's sudden disappearances whenever Regan tries to talk to him about her car, purposefully bringing up a sensitive subject at public gathering is their way of avoiding dealing with anything unpleasant in regards to their sister.

Finally, 238 pages into the book, the main characters share a kiss. The prolonged abstinence has created a tension nearly as intense as the mystery aspect of the novel.



Chapter 34

Chapter 34 Summary

One kiss turns to another, and neither Alec nor Regan want to stop there. Before they go on, Alec warns Regan that, as much as he wants her, he's leaving Chicago and nothing will convince him to stay. He says the last thing he wants or needs is to leave behind a mess.

Regan takes offense and coldly agrees that getting involved would complicate things. She moves into her bedroom and turns to tell him good night. Alec looks past her, at her king-sized bed, and decides things are already a mess anyway.

Chapter 34 Analysis

To Alec's credit, he doesn't simply take Regan straight to bed and damn the consequences. He gives her a chance to back out by warning that he's leaving Chicago regardless of what happens between them. Unfortunately, his poor choice of words puts a damper on the mood and hurts Regan's feelings.



Chapter 35

Chapter 35 Summary

Afterwards, both Alec and Regan are stunned by the heights of pleasure they reached with each other. Alec gets up to use the bathroom and Regan assumes he is leaving. She is devastated to think what just happened was only about lust to Alec. Instead of leaving, Alec returns to her bed and tells her it was every bit as good as his fantasy. She teases him and tells him it was just so-so. A look of insecurity crosses his face and she rushes to assure him it was wonderful for her as well.

Chapter 35 Analysis

To this point, Regan has only seen Alec in his 'cop' role. She sees him as the protector of the weak, prosecutor of the guilty. Therefore, it's quite a shock for her to realize insecurity can be found among his strong and arrogant ways.



Chapter 36

Chapter 36 Summary

Regan asks Alec to spend the night but he refuses, citing the risk to her reputation. As he dresses, he tells Regan it can never happen again. She agrees and Alec is surprised to find himself disappointed she capitulated so quickly. After he leaves, Regan collapses upon her bed in tears. She finally admits to herself she loves him.

Chapter 36 Analysis

Alec's disappointment in Regan's lack of fight puts him one step closer to admitting what Regan does immediately thereafter. He loves her but isn't ready to accept it just yet. Regan, on the other hand, accepts it and all the heartbreak she expects will come with it.



Chapter 37

Chapter 37 Summary

The next morning, Regan has a new attitude. She's a big girl, she assures herself. She can handle Alec leaving and she will make sure he never knows how she feels about him.

She meets Aiden and Spencer in her office. They want to hire additional security guards but she refuses. Spencer offers to take her to Melbourne to hide out until the killer is caught but Regan refuses to go.

When Aiden tells her they have other things to talk about, Regan assumes he wants to hold the annual meeting. Instead, her brothers tell her they had the meeting that morning while she slept. They decided not to increase her budget, to give Emerson the payoff and to expand the company by building a new hotel in Sydney. All they need from Regan is her signature on the papers.

Regan is incredulous that these decisions have been made without her input. She's had enough, she tells them. "All I'm trying to say is that I've spent my life trying to please you, and it's wearing me out. I grew up worrying that you'd stop loving me...but I don't feel that way any longer. I'm your sister, and as far as I'm concerned, you have to love me, no matter how angry I make you (pg. 260)"

She asks if anything she says will change their minds about the payoff to their stepfather. They tell her they're going to play hardball on that one.

She replies, "You need my signature to go forward, and you know what? I need you to triple my budget for next year. When that happens, I'll sign. And that, boys, is playing hardball (pg. 262)."

Chapter 37 Analysis

To the surprise of her brothers, Regan's resolve to stand strong where Alec is concerned has carried over to her dealings with them. She is furious they didn't bother to include her in the annual family meeting and responds by standing up to them for the first time.

Her demand that her budget be tripled before she'll agree to pay off Emerson represents not only shows a new, stronger Regan, but a smarter one as well. She's picked the battle most important to her and will compromise on the other issue only if this one is concluded to her satisfaction



Chapter 38

Chapter 38 Summary

Henry finds another letter from the killer in the mail and summons Regan and Alec to her office. The letter is on hotel stationery, which means the killer has been in the hotel. The heading on the top of the page reads "Our Murder List" and 'our' is underlined several times.

Sweeney and the sales clerk's names have been crossed off the list. There are question marks next to Shields and his bodyguards. But a new name has been added to the list and already crossed off. The name is Haley Cross, and under it the killer wrote, "You owe me for this one, too."

Alec gets on the phone and confirms a Haley Cross is in the morgue. She was killed running on the jogging path at the park. Alec looks at a framed newspaper article about the park dedication above Henry's desk. In addition to the photo of Regan, she is quoted in the article as saying she runs at the park three times a week.

Alec suddenly understands. Anyone reading the article wouldn't know the track at the hotel had been finished shortly afterwards and Regan quit running at the park. He asks for a physical description of Haley Cross and isn't surprised when it nearly matches Regan.

Chapter 38 Analysis

After weeks of waiting, the killer has finally made another move. Putting his newest message on hotel stationery is meant to let Regan know that, despite the extensive security measures, he has gotten closer to her than anyone imagined.

Also, the note at the bottom of the letter telling Regan she 'owed' him for the killing indicates, once again, that he is misplacing the blame for the act. He seems to imply it is Regan's fault this woman was killed.



Chapter 39

Chapter 39 Summary

Aiden rushes in when he hears about the latest letter. He vows he and Spencer aren't going anywhere until the killer is caught. Regan manages to talk him out of summoning Walker home, as well.

While Regan has his attention, she tells him it's time for her to take care of her own problems, and that includes her business. She lectures him on the importance of her programs to the family business and, in the end, he agrees to double her budget for the following year.

The next days are difficult for Regan. There are only five more days until Alec leaves Chicago and, while he's been reporting for work every day, he's become distant and reluctant to discuss anything of a personal nature with her.

Alec does report that the investigation has gone from looking at Peter Morris to looking for Peter Morris. Apparently, he's gone into hiding. But despite Regan's prediction that finding him could take forever, Morris is apprehended just one hour later.

Chapter 39 Analysis

Regan takes standing up to her brothers one step farther. Moving beyond their typical screaming matches, she corners Aiden and rationally states the case for increasing her operating budget. Impressed and convinced, he acknowledges that her function in the company is important to the business and agrees to her demands.

The news that Peter Morris has gone into hiding again raises the possibility that he is the killer.



Chapter 40

Chapter 40 Summary

Peter Morris calls Regan from a bar. He is well past being drunk or rational. He tells Regan this is her last chance to save herself and that he spent weeks trying to get her to listen to him. He reveals he waited for her outside Shields's seminar, and that if Regan had just taken a minute to hear him out, she could have stopped it. But he doesn't specify exactly what she could have stopped. He also reveals Aiden's assistant had told him where Regan would be that night.

Morris demands the grant money and says he wants it in cash by the following day or someone will get hurt. When the line goes dead, Wincott, who jumped on his cell phone the minute he'd realized who was on the phone, turns to Regan triumphantly. They managed to trace the call.

Chapter 40 Analysis

While the dialog between Regan and Morris seems to imply his guilt in the killings, the fact that Emily told him where Regan would be that evening lets the astute reader know that it's not the case. The actual killer knew where Regan would be that night because he heard her ask the valet for directions.

This indicates the police are focusing on the wrong man and foreshadows the danger Regan will be in once Morris is mistakenly incarcerated and the real killer still walks free.



Chapter 41

Chapter 41 Summary

Peter Morris is taken into custody but refuses to admit his guilt. The police, however, don't find his confession necessary. Hidden in his attic, they found a bloody hammer, Haley Cross' driver's license and Detective Sweeney's wallet.

This doesn't satisfy Alec. He wants Morris to confess and worries the evidence could have been planted. But he is in the minority. Wincott believes Morris is the man and Lt. Lewis considers the case closed. He insists on personally notifying the Madisons of the evidence against Morris.

When Alec says goodbye to Regan for the final time, he reminds her she knew all along he was leaving. She says she understands and wishes him luck with his new career and with his life.

Chapter 41 Analysis

The news that evidence was found hidden in Morris's house is surprising and leads readers to doubt their conclusion the cops have the wrong man. But Alec's suspicions of planted evidence quickly foreshadow another possibility.



Chapter 42

Chapter 42 Summary

Eric Gage knows it is going to be an extraordinary day as soon as he wakes up, but he doesn't quite know why. As he pours himself a glass of orange juice, he hears the demon's whisper--hears it but doesn't understand the message.

He waits for several minutes but it doesn't come again. He goes about his day and dresses in a running suit with zippered pockets. He puts a gun in one pocket and extra rounds in the other. He takes a second gun and carries it into the kitchen with him, where he places it on the kitchen table.

He knows the demon is trying to take him over once again, and he tries to prevent it, determined to stop it once and for all. But as he walks back down the hallway, he hears the whisper again, and knows it is over.

The demon tells him it is time and that Eric knows what he must do. He cries out that he can't do it, but the demon insists he can.

"Turn around and look at me. Open your eyes and look."

He did as he was told, his movements wooden now.

His acquiescence complete.

He stood there rigid as he waited for the demon's next command.

It wasn't long in coming.

Nina's eyes bored into his. "Kill her for me." (pg. 288)

Chapter 42 Analysis

Finally, the killer is revealed to be Eric Gage. This confirms that the police have the wrong man and that Regan is still in danger, especially given that the demon has decided today is the day Eric must act to kill Regan.

It comes as a surprise that the demon haunting Eric Gage is not a product of mental illness, ...at least not his own. His wife, Nina, paralyzed in an accident, is the source of the violent voice in Gage's head.



Chapter 43

Chapter 43 Summary

Alec is trying to stay busy in order to keep Regan off his mind. He packs up his clothes and personal items and loads them in his car. As he does, his old partner, whom Alec had asked to quietly look into the Madisons' backgrounds, shows up. He tells Alec that Regan's brother, Walker, the racecar driver, has had some trouble in the past. Apparently, he was involved in two bad car accidents, one in Wisconsin and one in Florida. Neither were his fault but, while Walker was not injured, one accident had a fatality and both resulted in some serious injuries.

Alec tells his old partner to keep looking into the accidents and see if he finds anything interesting.

Chapter 43 Analysis

News that Walker was involved in a serious car accident in Florida seems innocuous enough unless the reader remembers the killer's wife, Nina, was also in a serious car accident in Florida, an accident that left her wheelchair-bound.



Chapter 44

Chapter 44 Summary

Regan meets Cordie and Sophie at the park for a charity walk/run. They relish the details of Sophie's expose on Dr. Shields. After it came out in the paper, the phone lit up with women wanting to testify against him. The prosecutor told Sophie they have enough evidence to put Shields away for a long time. As a result, Sophie has finally been promoted off the advice column.

They discuss the resolution of Regan's case and ask her about Alec. She confesses she's fallen in love with him and now he is gone. Her friends are livid with Alec on Regan's behalf.

The race gets ready to start. Because of her knee, Regan is only going to walk part of the way, so she hangs back when the starting gun sounds. She's quickly separated from Cordie and Sophie.

Chapter 44 Analysis

This chapter gives resolution in the case against Dr. Shields. Thanks to the ladies' efforts, he'll be in jail for a long time. Regan finally admits to her friends that she's fallen in love with Alec--something, to her surprise, they already knew. And as loyal friends, they are incensed to think Alec has left their friend behind. Regan's knee injury and the resulting fact she can't keep up with her friends during the race will provide the opportunity for the killer to catch her alone.



Chapter 45

Chapter 45 Summary

Alec spends a sleepless night, thinking about Regan. By morning, he knows he isn't going anywhere without her. All he needs to do is convince Regan.

In the morning, he heads to the hotel. There he again encounters into his ex-partner, who has more information on the crash in Florida. According to the deputy on the scene at the crash, Walker was driving a sports car with a lot of power. He pulled out to pass a truck, and a sedan pulled out behind him. Walker passed the truck and returned to his lane without problem but the sedan clipped the truck when it tried to pull back in front of it.

Walker and the driver of the sedan, Eric Gage, weren't injured. But the truck driver died and Gage's wife, Nina, had to be cut out of the wreckage, her legs crushed. Though Walker was cleared of any culpability, Eric Gage was convinced the accident was Walker's fault. He had to be physically restrained at the accident scene to prevent him from going after Walker.

It all falls into place for Alec when he thinks about the damage done to Haley Cross's legs. He doesn't need his ex-partner to tell him Gage is now living in Chicago, He already knows.

Alec races to Regan's office and finds it empty. He picks up the phone to call Wincott. As he does, Regan's fax machine turns on and a single sheet slides out. It reads "My Murder List: Regan Madison."

Chapter 45 Analysis

The information about the accident in Florida clears up the mystery behind why Nina Gage is targeting Regan. It is in revenge for the accident that destroyed Nina's legs. They are trying to kill Regan to punish Walker.

The arrival of the new murder list tells Alec he is running out of time. This time, the killer is going directly after Regan.



Chapter 46

Chapter 46 Summary

Lost in her thoughts of Alec, Regan misses the mile marker where she planned to turn around. Not wanting to walk the two miles back to the start or the three miles to the finish line, she flags down a volunteer and asks if there is a shortcut to the parking lot.

The volunteer points out a path through the woods and tells her it leads directly back. Regan follows his directions and stops along the way to tie her shoe. As she straightens up, she looks across a ravine and sees the killer standing on the other side, waiting for her to notice him. Regan recognizes him from the parking lot at the seminar and immediately understands why he is there now. The killer shouts something at her and she realizes he is telling her to run.

Chapter 46 Analysis

It's very interesting that the killer would tell Regan to run. Is he simply teasing her, or trying to give her a chance to get away from him? Eric Gage does not want to commit this crime and is only participating at his wife's insistence, so it's possible he genuinely wants Regan to escape and is trying to give her that opportunity before he tries to carry out his wife's bidding.



Chapter 47

Chapter 47 Summary

Eric Gage almost wishes Regan would get away. But he knows he can't let her. She must suffer the way his wife has suffered. And more. But he wants to give her a fighting chance. And he wants a chance to tell her, before he kills her, why she has to die.

Regan is frozen in place until she sees the killer raise a gun and fire twice at her. The first bullet strikes the stonewall separating her from the ravine; the second hits a tree behind her.

Finally, she turns and runs, with the killer close behind her. She strays from the path and quickly loses her bearings. She can't believe no one heard the shots fired, and she wonders where all the runners have gone.

The killer fires again, this time striking Regan in the leg. It doesn't bring her down but she knows she can't outrun him now. She will have to outsmart him.

Chapter 47 Analysis

Gage's desire to please his wife is battling with his sense of right and wrong. He wants to appease the demon but also realizes Regan is innocent in this matter.



Chapter 48

Chapter 48 Summary

Gage loses Regan in the woods and begins to get angry. If she doesn't show herself soon, he thinks, he won't have time to explain why he's going to kill her. He hears someone calling Regan's name and realizes he must hurry. He listens closely and hears the faint sound of rocks sliding down the ravine and concludes Regan must have hopped the wall and is hiding down there. He peers over the wall and fires into the ravine, hoping to scare her into showing herself. The shots echo through the ravine and he knows the police will hear them. He again hears someone calling Regan's name. He turns around and fires at the approaching person.

Chapter 48 Analysis

Gage again blames Regan for the situation he's in. She's the one wasting valuable time so that he will not be able to explain his actions to her. Of course, at this point, the reader understands his misplaced blame. He doesn't feel responsible himself because the killings are not his idea, and he can't place the blame on Nina (where it belongs), so he is forced to place blame on the victims.



Chapter 49

Chapter 49 Summary

Alec pulls into the parking lot just as the first shots are fired. Wincott is right behind him. Alec sees Sophie and Cordie. Cordie tells her they can't find Regan and, just then, another shot rings out. Alec and Wincott take off in the direction of the gunshot, but not before Cordie sees the look on Alec's face. She knows that if Alec catches the killer, he will not live to be tried. More shots are fired and Alec, ignoring Wincott's pleas to let him go ahead, runs in that direction.

Chapter 49 Analysis

The tension builds as Alec races to save Regan. The questions are numerous at this point. Will Alec reach her in time? Who did Gage turn and fire at? Was it Alec? Did he hit him? Will Regan live, only to lose Alec? Has Alec finally realized he loves Regan, only to lose her before he has a chance to tell her?

Obviously, this is a love story, presumably with the requisite happy ending, so the reader can assume everyone will live happily ever after, but the suspense is craftily built.



Chapter 50

Chapter 50 Summary

Eric Gage is getting frustrated. Regan is much harder to kill than he expected. He calls her ungrateful. After everything he's done for her, she is now trying to make things difficult for him.

Gage hears Alec calling Regan's name, and then hears his approach through the woods. Gage turns and aims at the spot where Alec emerges. But before he can fire, Regan screams and drops out of a tree onto Gage, knocking him to the ground. She immediately rolls off and tries to scramble away. Gage latches onto her ankle, but Alec has a clear shot and fires once, directly into Gage's skull.

Regan is hysterical over how close Alec came to getting killed. Alec is astounded that, after everything Regan has just been through, she is worried about him. Finally, she gathers herself enough to ask, "Who was that man, and why was he trying to kill me?"

Chapter 50 Analysis

As is to be expected in this type of book, both the hero and the heroine escape from the ordeal relatively unscathed. In an interesting twist, however, it is Regan who ends up saving Alec from the killer's gun, instead of the other way around.



Chapter 51

Chapter 51 Summary

Nina Gage watches as the television news bulletin shows paramedics loading her husband's body into the ambulance, but she feels no emotion as she waits to hear whether his mission was successful. Then the camera focuses on a still-living Regan, and Nina erupts in a scream. She hears a knock on the front door but, rather than answer, she picks up a gun, places it to her temple and fires.

Chapter 51 Analysis

There will be no trial for Regan to endure, as both guilty parties are now dead. Without their side of the story, however, it's unclear whether she will ever have a clear understanding of the reasoning behind the Gage's plans.



Chapter 52

Chapter 52 Summary

They all gather in Regan's suite, and Wincott fills in what is known of the details of Eric Gage's plans. Regan is confused because Alec keeps trying to hold her hand and put his arm around her. She keeps pulling away and wondering what is wrong with him.

Wincott tells them that, while the truck driver's insurance company settled with the families involved, Eric Gage was also cited for reckless driving. It stands to reason, he explains, that Gage felt some guilt over his wife's injuries, which pressured him to submit to his wife's demands.

Wincott also tells them he went through Nina's medical records and found she had been a very difficult patient. Numerous medical personnel had made notes about her bitterness and mentioned she didn't want to get better. She just wanted to get even.

Wincott also expresses his belief that Eric Gage was conflicted about killing Regan. They theorize the letters and faxes were sent because he hoped someone would stop him before he succeeded in his wife's mission.

As everyone prepares to leave, Aiden corners Alec and asks what his plans are. Alec replies he is planning to marry Aiden's sister. Aiden approves, as does Spencer, who joins them before leaving with Aiden.

Alec returns to Regan's suite. They thank each other for saving one another's life and Regan tells Alec she's assuming he'll be leaving Chicago soon. Alec reaches for her but she pulls away, declaring she will not let him break her heart again. Go, she tells him, reminding him of his plans to 'move forward with his life.' But he doesn't leave. Instead, he tells her he loves her and he's not leaving Chicago without her.

Chapter 52 Analysis

This chapter wraps up several loose ends in the case against Eric and Nina Gage.

Considering the role Regan's brothers play in her life, it is significant that Alec received their approval concerning his plan to marry her. Had they disapproved, they could have made things very difficult for the couple.

It's interesting that Regan reveals to Alec that he has broken her heart. In an earlier chapter, she resolved he would never know how she felt about his leaving. The traumatic events of the day have led her to reveal more than she originally intended.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

Regan and Alec fly to Boston to meet Alec's family. On the flight, they discuss their future plans. Regan will be working out of the family's hotel in Boston, setting up the same kind of charity program she ran in Chicago. Henry will be taking over her job in Chicago.

Epilogue Analysis

The Epilogue wraps up the final details of how Alec and Regan will make their relationship work when he's already committed to moving to Boston and she's living in Chicago. Fortunately, the family owns a hotel in Boston where Regan can base her work, and Alec can move forward with his FBI career as planned.



Characters

Regan Madison

Regan Madison, a child of privilege, is being stalked by a crazed killer. This a situation would test the mettle of anyone, yet the majority of Regan's growth in the novel is completely unrelated to the threats against her.

On a professional basis, Regan is very good at what she does. She runs a charitable foundation started by her grandmother. She is a talented speaker and is able to open wallets with her charm and her sincere belief in her cause.

Yet, on a personal level, she allows her three older brothers to ride roughshod over her. Her privileged upbringing provided her with everything but a sense of security. Her father passed away when she was very young. Her mother was largely absent, busy traveling and collecting husbands.

As a result, Regan grew up fearing the loss of the only love she knew--that of her brothers. Now, as adults, her brothers, continue to treat Regan as if she is still a child, making decisions for her, shielding her from unpleasant situations.

While she is understandably frustrated with her brothers (with the eldest, Aiden, in particular), Regan has done nothing about their interference. But it all comes to a head when Aiden and Spencer have the annual family meeting without her. They assume she has too many things on her mind to be bothered with business details and so they make several important decisions without her input. Among those is a decision not to increase Regan's budget for the following year, and to pay off their step-father.

Regan finally realizes her brothers' love is non-negotiable, but everything else is. She puts her foot down and refuses to sign the paperwork necessary to payoff her stepfather unless her budget is tripled for the coming year.

The personal growth Regan demonstrates stems from two areas. One is that the threat on her life brings her brothers' love for her into sharp focus. While she has always been aware of their love, she suddenly realizes it is strong enough to sustain an argument or two.

Also, Alec's influence on her is unmistakable. His outsider's perspective on the situation allows her to clearly see, for the first time, that her brothers' interference is, at least partially, a result of her failure to stop it.



Alec Buchanan

Like Regan, Alec Buchanan is professionally successful. As the story begins, he's just giving up his respected career with the Chicago Police Department and has finally accepted an offer from the FBI.

Unlike Regan, however, Alec has no problem getting along with his large family. In fact, one of the benefits of the job with the FBI is a promise he will be based in Boston, where most of his family lives.

Alec is excited about his upcoming move and is determined nothing will put a damper on it or stand in his way, not Lt. Lewis, who is determined to punish Alec for imagined slights, or even the beautiful woman Lewis has assigned him to baby-sit.

But Alec quickly learns about the old adage, 'the best laid plans....' Despite his early vows not to get involved with Regan, Alec surrenders to the attraction between them. And despite his belief he can simply walk away from Regan and move on with his new life in Boston, one sleepless night is all it takes for him to realize that, while he could walk away from Regan, he doesn't want to.

Aiden Madison

Regan's oldest brother, used to taking on the role of her protector as a teenager, hasn't let go of the role now that both are adults. Two incidents in the novel (Aiden buying her a new car, and then leaving her out of a family meeting) finally give her the courage to stand up to him. When she threatens the proposed expansion of their hotel chain if her budget is not increased, Aiden and Spencer are shocked.

Later, after a calmer discussion with Regan, he finally accepts that she is a fully capable adult and that her contribution to the family business is just as important as his own or that of their brothers.

Walker Madison

Regan's youngest brother makes only a single, brief appearance in the novel, yet he is vital to the plot. An auto accident he was involved in several years earlier is the catalyst that sends Eric and Nina Gage after Regan in revenge.

Lt. Lewis

Alec's superior is an image-conscious, politically motivated tyrant. Imagined slights by Alec, including not informing Lewis in advance of his plans to resign, send Lewis on a mission to punish and humiliate Alec by chaining him to a desk for the duration of his tenure with the Chicago PD.



Only when Lewis realizes what's in it for him--a possible invitation to join a posh country club--does he relent and allow Alec back on the case.

Detective Wincott

Assigned to head up the investigation into Detective Sweeney's murder, Wincott is drawn into Regan's case when it is revealed Sweeney was killed because he was on Regan's 'murder list.' Wincott hates Lewis and goes behind his back to keep Alec in the loop regarding the case.

Detective Sweeney

Sweeney is a corrupt cop, hanging onto his job by a thread. Lewis is waiting for the chance to fire him and Internal Affairs is investigating him but can't find any concrete evidence against him. He's a violent, contemptuous man, resentful of almost everyone. His complete disdain of Regan and the case against Dr. Shields anger Regan enough to include him on her 'murder list,' which leads to his death at the hands of Eric Gage.

Sophie and Cordie

Regan's best friends from kindergarten both have roles in the novel. It is Sophie's investigation into Dr. Lawrence Shields that directly leads to the creation of Regan's 'murder list.' Sophie's successful expose leads to his prosecution and finally gets her promoted off the advice column.

Cordie functions in somewhat of a sidekick role in the novel. She assists Sophie on the investigation but has no individual role in the plot. In some possible foreshadowing into a future novel, Cordie seems to be attracted to Regan's brother, Aiden.

Eric Gage

To all appearances, Gage is a good man and a devoted husband. But his wife's bitterness, combined with his own guilt over the accident, make him vulnerable to her hideous demands for justice. He is seriously conflicted over Nina's insistence on Regan's death and uses the emails and faxes to Regan as a means of warning and perhaps in hopes of being stopped before he actually carries out Nina's wishes.



Objects/Places

The Hamilton Hotel

The Chicago headquarters of the Madison family plays a strong role in the story line. Regan's office is located here, as is her temporary living quarters. She's making use of a hotel suite while her stepfather lives in the family home. The new running track in the hotel's gym also plays a prominent role in the story. Its completion is unknown to the killer, who incorrectly assumes Regan is still using the public jogging path in the park.

The Jogging Path

A photograph taken at the dedication of the jogging path is what draws the killer's attention to Regan. The photo appears in the newspaper, along with an article in which Regan is quoted as saying she jogs at the park several times a week.

This gives the killer an idea as to how to reach Regan. But he doesn't realize that the new track at the hotel was finished shortly after the article was published. Regan no longer jogs at the park, but the killer lies in wait for her there and kills another woman by mistake.

The jogging path is also where Regan and the killer have their final confrontation. Regan is at the park for a charity walk/run. Quickly separated from her friends due to her knee injury, Regan is alone on the path and, thinking her attacker is safely behind bars, takes a shortcut through the woods.

Regan's Cell Phone

When she is accosted in the parking lot outside Shields' reception, Regan spills her purse and inadvertently leaves her cell phone lying on the pavement for her stalker to find. With her injury that evening and her subsequent surgery, she doesn't realize it is gone until much later.

When the photo of Detective Sweeney is revealed to have come from a camera-phone bearing Regan's cell phone number, the two incidents are linked together.

Regan's Car

Despite being a wealthy woman, and much to her brothers' dismay, Regan drives an old car. It represents a means by which she can be independent from their influence, and she keeps it mostly to spite them.



After the attack in the parking lot, Regan admits to Alec that her spitefulness could have cost her life, as her car did not have an alarm or remote locks. She decides to replace the old car but, before she is able, she discovers Aiden has taken matters into his own hands once again. He has her car towed, junked and replaced with a new BMW.

This is the final straw, as far as Regan is concerned. Her anger over this act, combined with having been excluded from the family meeting, finally gives her the courage to stand up to Aiden and put a stop to his interference.



Themes

Family

Family plays a prominent role in the story lines. First and foremost, of course, are Regan and her relationship with her brothers. Growing up, raised by the household help, they formed unusual bonds early on.

Regan's father died when she was very young, and so her brothers, all quite a bit older than she, stepped in and became surrogate father-figures in her life. These early roles set the tone for their adult relationships.

Alec's family also plays a strong, if small, role. Alec is following in the footsteps of two of his brothers when he agrees to join the FBI. In addition, a primary consideration in his decision is a desire to be closer to his family.

The familial relationship between Eric and Nina Gage is also vitally important to the storyline. The accident that paralyzed Nina is widely believed to be at least partially Eric's fault, a fact which he must realize. His guilt makes him extremely vulnerable to the demands of his bitter wife. When she demands revenge, he realizes the wrongness of it, but succumbs to her demands regardless.

Fear

The story begins with kindergarten-aged Regan taking on the school bully, despite a fear so intense it makes her physically ill. And it ends with adult Regan's concern for Alec's safety overpowering her own fears, resulting in her catapulting herself out of a tree and onto an armed killer.

In between these two events, Regan is scared throughout most of the book. Yet she refuses to admit the depth of that fear to anyone, including Alec, her family, and her friends.

Alec, on the other hand, appears to be afraid of nothing except Regan. He takes on dangerous undercover assignments, challenges his superior at work in order to save another cop's job, and is unafraid of whatever danger may be involved in his new job at the FBI.

Yet, from the moment he meets Regan, he appears afraid of falling in love with her. He spends much of the book reminding himself of the reasons he should not get involved. And, once he does get involved, he remains afraid a relationship will interfere with his plans to leave Chicago. It is only after a lonely night of soul-searching that Alec gives up that fear and admits he wants a relationship with Regan. Almost immediately, however, a new fear arises when he realizes Regan is still in immediate danger.



In addition, Eric Gage's constant reference to his wife as the 'beast' who has taken over him reveals the depth of his fear of her. It is a fear so profound he is able to ignore the horror of his actions, so as to not invoke her rage against him.

Following Your Instincts

There are several instances in the novel of a character trusting their instincts and getting positive results from that trust. For instance, the novel starts with Sophie trusting her reporter's instincts regarding Dr. Lawrence Shields. Although another reporter tossed the story, Sophie seems to know there is something to the tale. As a result of her subsequent investigation and story, Shields will be prosecuted and his victims reimbursed.

The next instance of a character trusting their instincts is when Regan is alone in the parking lot. After hearing someone call her name, she turns and collapses when her knee gives out. This is the first time Regan comes face to face with the killer. At this point in the story, Regan has no idea she is in danger, and there is nothing overtly threatening about the man in the parking lot. Yet she instinctively knows something is off about the man and is able to escape this encounter unharmed.

The most dramatic example is, of course, Alec's gut feeling about the man arrested for stalking Regan. Peter Morris is arrested in the midst of making a threatening phone call to Regan, and a search of his house reveals a trove of incriminating evidence. Yet something about the situation doesn't sit well with Alec.

Following his instincts, honed by years on the police department, he continues the investigation into Walker's car accident. When the probing pays off and reveals another suspect, Alec is able to act quickly, saving Regan's life.



Style

Point of View

Murder List is told in the third person by an omniscient narrator.

Setting

Written in 2004, this story takes place in modern-day Chicago, with the exception of the Prologue. The Prologue flashes back about 25 years to the main character's first day of kindergarten.

Language and Meaning

Set in modern times, the language is modern and simple. It is mostly conversational in tone, as if someone is telling the story aloud.

The language is occasionally ambiguous so the identity of the killer is not revealed too early in the book.

Structure

This book is very simply divided into 52 chapters with both a prologue and an epilogue. The prologue is set about 25 years earlier than the main body of the novel.

Chapter breaks are often arranged to tell two sides of the same story. For instance, Chapters 10 and 12 tell Regan's version of the incident in the parking lot. But each chapter breaks off so that Chapters 11 and 13 can tell the same story from the killer's perspective.



Quotes

"I hate school and I'm never going back, not ever, 'cause they didn't let us have snacks and I had to sit still for too long and there was this girl and the other big girl made her cry and the big girl said if we told teacher, she'd get us too and I didn't know what to do so I went by the building with the girl at recess and I helped her cry and now I'm never going back to that bad school again 'cause tomorrow the big girl said she was going to get the girl again (prologue, pg. 6)."

"He likened the sensation to wrapping his arms around a hot stone to warm his freezing body, but as the day progressed, the stone began to get hotter and hotter, until it radiated unbearable heat. Anxiety would come over him then, horrific anxiety that would make his skin crawl and his lungs burn with the need to scream and scream and scream, (chapter 1, pg. 13)"

"The young are looking for a guru for guidance in figuring out what to do with their futures, and older men and woman are looking for ways to change the paths they've taken (chapter 5, pg. 40.)"

"The alley smelled like wet dog hair and puke (chapter 6, pg. 47)."

"She crashed to the pavement and cried out in pain. He put his hands over his ears to block the sound. It all seemed to transpire in slow motion, just like the car accident of years past. Exactly like that. The tortured look on her beautiful face before the metal imploded on her legs (chapter 11, pg. 86)."

"He kept picturing her, his beautiful angel with the broken wing, falling, so gracefully tumbling down. Had he heard her cry out, or had he only imagined she had? His chosen one, his perfect angel, was innocent, as innocent as his beloved Nina....He was so confused, torn between worrying about her and raging because she had gotten away (chapter 13, pg. 93)."

"It might have been my imagination. I was in pain because of my knee and soaked from the rain, but when I was inside the car, I looked and he was standing under the streetlight, still staring at me. I was crying...and I think he could see me crying. His expression changed....sympathy. I think he felt sorry for me (chapter 18, pg. 121)."

"Regan was a little surprised he didn't put handcuffs on her and read her her rights (chapter 23, pg. 140)."

"She didn't bother to explain because she knew that no matter what she said, she would still be put on the defensive. And be found guilty (chapter 25, pg. 156)."

"She wasn't going to tell him the truth - that she worried she wouldn't have enough courage when she needed it - or admit that she was afraid of being afraid....(chapter 26, pg. 171)."



"He did have flaws, but at the moment she could not remember any. She let out a loud groan. Don't think about the future, she told herself. Don't think about the day he leaves (chapter 37, pg. 253)."

"Sometimes extraordinary things can happen on the most ordinary of days (chapter 42, pg. 285)."

"She wasn't as easy to kill as he had anticipated. The ingrate. After all the trouble he had gone to for her (chapter 50, pg. 310)."



Topics for Discussion

Would Regan ever have stood up to her brothers without Alec's influence? Would she ever have stood up to her brothers if her life weren't in danger?

Assuming they were not caught, would Nina and Eric Gage have been satisfied with Regan's death or would they have continued to exact revenge against Walker's family?

Given Julie Garwood's tendency to take minor characters in one book and turn them into main characters in a later book, which characters would you most like to see in their own story?

How much of a role does Eric Gage's own guilt over the accident play in his willingness to go along with his wife's plan? Is it guilt or love that motivates him?

If Detective Sweeney had not been murdered, would he have remained on the force until retirement or would he have self-destructed before that?

Is Regan's obsession with older man/younger woman relationships important to the story line or would the novel have progressed well without it?

Despite how it would have impacted the story line, do you think Regan should have taken her brothers' advice and gone into hiding until the killer was caught?