

Ricochet Study Guide

Ricochet by Sandra Brown

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Contents

Ricochet Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	8
Chapter 3.....	10
Chapter 4.....	13
Chapter 5.....	15
Characters.....	17
Symbols and Symbolism.....	20
Settings.....	22
Themes and Motifs.....	23
Styles.....	25
Quotes.....	27



Plot Summary

“Ricochet” by Sandra Brown is the story of Duncan Hatcher, a Savannah homicide detective. The story opens with Duncan and his partner, DeeDee Bowen, sitting in the courtroom of Judge Cato Laird during the murder trial of Richard Savich who is accused of murdering Freddy Morris. Richard Savich is a powerful and dangerous crime boss who Hatcher has been after for years. He walked on another murder charge just a few years back. Duncan is nervous because the lawyers and judge have been out of the courtroom in a lengthy conference. When they return, Cato announces that because of the perceived bias of one of the jurors, he is forced to call a mistrial. He tells Savich’s attorney that his client is free to go. Duncan goes wild! The murderer is slipping through his hands again. He accuses the judge of being incompetent which results in Duncan spending 48 hours in jail for contempt of court.

The very evening that Duncan gets out of jail, he and DeeDee have to attend an awards ceremony. He is surprised and not very happy to see that Judge Cato is also in attendance. As Duncan gazes around the room, his eyes stop on a beautiful blonde. He tells DeeDee that he was struck by lightning – it was love at first sight for him. DeeDee informs him of the sad truth that the beautiful blonde is Elise Laird, Judge Laird’s young wife. Duncan approaches her later and out of a combination of resentment for her husband and disappointment that she’s taken, he says a few rude and inappropriate things to her.

Later that night when Duncan is sleeping off a few too many beers, the phone rings. It’s DeeDee who tells him that there’s been a homicide and that she’ll pick him up in a few minutes. On the way to the scene, Duncan is shocked to learn that the homicide occurred at Judge Laird’s house. Duncan has the silent hope that the victim wasn’t the beautiful Elise. As it turns out, Elise was the shooter. She shot an intruder who she claimed shot at her first. Duncan and DeeDee interview Elise and the Judge but they stick to their story even though things aren’t quite adding up for the detectives. Duncan is even more intrigued by the beautiful judge’s wife.

As the investigation gains momentum, more and more inconsistencies emerge ultimately making the detectives convinced that someone is lying – either Elise or the judge. Duncan is hoping that Elise is on the level but DeeDee is siding with the judge. Elise is aware of Duncan’s feelings for her and she gets him alone to ask for his help. He refuses – he’s a cop and she is part of his investigation. When Elise gets him alone the second time, they give into their temptations and fall into each other’s arms.

Things are further complicated when Elise is seen with crime boss Savich and the finger of guilt seems to turn toward her and she becomes the number one suspect in the case. But Elise goes missing and all signs point to her involvement in another murder and that she may very well be dead herself. Duncan is in despair but he doesn’t give up on the case or on Elise. Just after the department announces it has stopped searching for her, she shows up at Duncan’s door. He is preparing to turn her in when he learns that her



husband has just identified the dead body of a woman who popped up in the river. It seems that Cato has a lot of explaining to do.

In the end, Duncan solves the complicated case like the good homicide detective he is. Elise has a lot of things to work out in her life. One problem she doesn't have is finding a good man who really loves her.



Chapter 1

Summary

Chapter 1

Homicide Detective Duncan Hatcher of the Savannah Police Department was getting antsy. He was waiting for the murder trial of Robert Savich to resume but the defense attorney had called a meeting with the judge. Duncan wanted the trial over with and he wanted it to have no chance of appeal. What was the defense up to?! His partner, Detective DeeDee Bowen, kept a cooler head. Savich was the picture of composure. He'd been arrested for crimes before – including murder and drug trafficking – but was only indicted and tried twice before. He was acquitted of the first, a drug charge. The second was for murder; he had been accused of blowing up a house and killing a man inside. The prosecutor had been green and the evidence circumstantial resulting in a hung jury. Duncan had been in on that investigation and had taken the defeat hard.

The current indictment was for the murder of Freddy Morris, a drug dealer who worked for Savich. The evidence was stacked against Savich and his conviction was a sure thing. Duncan was a key prosecution witness and felt his testimony had gone well. There was also corroborating accounts from federal agents working on the case. Morris had ratted on Savich and was murdered in retaliation.

When Judge Cato Laird returned he announced that there was a conflict with one of the jurors. This woman's son was a recruit with the police department. The defense had argued that her bias could have unfairly swayed the outcome of the trial. Judge Laird declared a mistrial and stated that Mr. Savich was free to go. Duncan was angry and in disbelief. He came out of his chair and challenged the judge on his decision. The judge told Assistant District Attorney Mike Nelson that Savich could be tried again but that next time there should be better evidence and more credible testimony. The last comment sent Duncan reeling. He had to be restrained by DeeDee and Nelson. Savich taunted Duncan and blew him a kiss on parting and told him he'd "see him soon." Duncan and the judge had a back and forth. The Judge said he would ignore Duncan's accusations against him because he understood his frustration. He pointed out that he wasn't letting Savich go, the law was. DeeDee assured Duncan that they would reinvestigate. Duncan's final insult was that Judge Laird had crapped out on the people who elected him.

For his parting assault on Judge Laird, Duncan spent 48 hours in jail. DeeDee picked him up when he was released. She told him that their boss, Lieutenant Gerard, was very unhappy with his behavior. She also told him that the DA was not going to retry Savich unless they came up with more evidence. Duncan pointed out that they were up against the fear that Morris' murder had created. Nobody would dare squeal on Savich. Though Duncan tried to pretend he didn't care any longer, he was still angry and frustrated that Savich walked.



DeeDee drove Duncan to his house so they could get ready for the awards ceremony that night. Duncan didn't want to attend and run into Gerard so soon. But DeeDee told him he had no choice. She was receiving a commendation and he promised to go with her. She berated him about not having his house alarm set. Savich could be targeting him based on the not-so-veiled threat he made in the courtroom. DeeDee asked how Duncan's parents took his stint in jail. He wanted to avoid the uncomfortable subject of his relationship with his parents – especially his father who was a minister – and quickly changed the subject. DeeDee looked in Duncan's refrigerator. To her horror, she discovered Freddy Morris' tongue sitting in plain view.

Analysis

This chapter sets the premise of the story and serves to describe some of its principals. The protagonist homicide detective Duncan Hatcher is opinionated and speaks his mind no matter who he is dealing with – including the judge who sends him to jail for contempt of court. Duncan is frustrated that a murderer has gone free. He accuses the judge of being corrupt. DeeDee is the tempering force in their partnership. She is the cool-headed one while Duncan is the hot-headed partner.

Duncan is understandably frustrated when the judge tells the murdering Savich that he can go free. Duncan did his best to see that he would be found guilty and spend the rest of his life in jail. As far as reinvestigating the case, Duncan feels he is up against not only Savich and his gang but maybe even a corrupt judge.

It is obvious that Duncan is being threatened by Savich when the tongue shows up in his refrigerator. The scene is similar to the scene in "The Godfather" when the Hollywood director woke up with the head of his prize horse in his bed. It was a warning that he could be next just as the tongue is a warning to Duncan to keep his mouth shut or he could wind up like Morris. Also, the episode demonstrates Savich's brazenness in having his thugs break into the house of a police detective.

Discussion Question 1

How does Savich threaten Duncan after a mistrial is announced by the judge?

Discussion Question 2

Why was Duncan thrown in jail for two days?

Discussion Question 3

What was the significance of Morris' tongue being found in Duncan's frig?

Vocabulary

Abdicate, confiscate, voir dire.



Chapter 2

Summary

Chapter 2

Duncan placed the tongue in an evidence bag and planned to take it to the ME the next morning. He was upset that Savich's thugs had been in his house and that Savich was taunting and threatening him. When Duncan and DeeDee arrived at the commendation ceremony, they were shocked to see that Judge Laird was in attendance.

Judge Laird approached Duncan and expressed his hope that there were no hard feelings. Duncan, knowing that it was DeeDee's night, kept his comments non-argumentative. Duncan and DeeDee told a colleague, Detective Worley, about the tongue. Worley looked at the incident as a real warning and that Duncan should be careful. Later, Duncan looked around the room and was completely taken with a beautiful blonde woman. He couldn't take his eyes off of her. DeeDee told him he was making a fool of himself. Duncan said he'd been struck by lightning. He was about to walk over and make a move on the woman when DeeDee told him that she was Mrs. Cato Laird, the judge's wife.

Later, at home the Judge asked his wife, Elise, what Duncan had said to her. She responded that he had just asked her for change for the valet. Cato told her that Duncan had a master's degree and was a decorated detective with brains and brawn. He told her about the incident in the courtroom earlier that week. Cato was suspicious that Duncan was after more than change when he talked to Elise.

After Cato was asleep, Elise went to the kitchen for a drink of milk. She hoped that she wouldn't be caught in the lie she told her husband. Duncan had known who she was – called her by name and he had made some very inappropriate remarks to her. DeeDee had broken the encounter up when she dragged Duncan away just when Cato was walking up to them. After her drink of milk, Elise went to the study. She checked the safe hidden behind a row of false books. The lock was still locked – Cato didn't trust her with the combination even after three years of marriage. She began looking at another row of books when she was startled by Cato. Elise told him that she was preparing to write him a note that her diamond brooch needed repairing and that she was just straightening up some of his books.

Analysis

Duncan is smitten with the judge's wife. Elise, the judge's wife, seems to not trust her husband any more than he trusts her. She is much younger than the judge and has only been married to him three years. She is a trophy wife and is closer in age to Duncan. She doesn't seem to be in love with her husband; perhaps she married him for his position and money. Why doesn't the judge trust his own wife with the safe



combination? What is he hiding? She is obviously suspicious of him and feels compelled to lie to him. Duncan was very aggressive with Elise and thoughts of him are lingering in her mind. The encounter between Duncan and Elise could foreshadow a potential relationship between them.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Elise lie about what Duncan said to her at the party?

Discussion Question 2

What was Elise looking for in her husband's study?

Discussion Question 3

Why doesn't the judge allow his own wife to have access to his safe?

Vocabulary

Aghast, vulnerable, cursory, countenance.



Chapter 3

Summary

Chapter 3

Duncan was a gifted piano player. He played by ear and had been playing since he was a small boy. He followed his mother's lead by learning to play hymnals but he went on to all kinds of music including jazz and rock. He also played sports as a teen and tried to hide his musical talents from the other boys because he didn't want them to think he was a sissy. At thirty-eight, he still couldn't read a note but could play anything and kept his talents from most of his peers. He played for himself – losing the problems and pressures of his day in the music.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation had confirmed that the tongue did indeed belong to Freddy Morris. But nothing linked it to Savich. Duncan knew he was being targeted by Savich and took care to be more vigilant. DeeDee called him in the middle of the night. There was a homicide. She told him to pick her up and she'd explain – he wouldn't believe it. When she got in the car, she directed him to the residence of Judge Laird. Somebody there was shot and killed. She didn't know who the victim was.

On the way to Judge Laird's house, Duncan assured DeeDee that he would treat this investigation the same as any other despite his feelings about the judge. The street in front of the Judge Laird's house was in chaos with police personnel along with the media and curious neighbors crowded all about. Inside, a cop led Duncan and DeeDee to the parlor where Judge Laird was speaking to Officer Crofton. He claimed that Elise suffered from insomnia and went downstairs while he remained in bed and drift off again. A short while later, shots from downstairs awoke him. Duncan was disturbed fearing that it was Elise who had been shot.

Dr. Dothan Brooks, who had already seen the deceased, met with Duncan and DeeDee. A .38 right through the heart had made death instantaneous. Brooks led them to the study where the victim had been killed. He was an intruder and had been shot by Mrs. Laird. As DeeDee began to question Elise, the Judge Laird interrupted and insisted that Elise did not need to be re-interviewed. She had already given her statement to officer Crofton.

At the scene, the forensics team told the detectives that the intruder had jimmied a window to gain entry. There was a tool outside by the window and muddy footprints inside which had been smeared when the judge walked into the room to see if the intruder was dead. There was a Ruger that had recently been fired in the dead man's hand. The forensics officers took multiple photos and dug an errant slug out of the wall. Neither the judge nor Elise recognized the intruder. There were no keys, ID or money in the man's pockets. How did he get to the house, Duncan wondered. The EMTs wheeled in a gurney to take the victim away. Duncan noted that he was wearing new but cheap



clothes – the kind a prison issues upon an inmate’s release. Duncan peppered Officer Shirley Beale with questions about what she and Crofton found when they first appeared on the scene. Teams of officers were canvassing the neighborhood; no one had seen a car leaving the scene and no one heard shots. Elise took a shower after the shooting because she felt dirty. It was obvious that the detectives didn’t believe in the intruder story.

Analysis

The reader gets some insight into the protagonist. He is bright and well educated. He is also artistic and a music lover which, in his view, is an anathema to those who would admire the sports hero he was in school and the tough homicide detective he had become. His music allows him to escape from the harshness of his job and perhaps the loneliness of his life.

Knowing his attraction to Elise, Duncan fears that she may be the murder victim. He is relieved when it’s not Elise who had been shot and killed. But there are many questions about the “intruder” scenario put forth by the Lairds. The reader knows something that the detectives don’t know – the Lairds are lying. It is obvious that the judge doesn’t want his wife questioned by the detectives. Perhaps he fears his wife is guilty of murder. As a judge in the criminal court surely he knows the police will be thorough and investigate the homicide regardless of his protests. Perhaps he thinks that he can intimidate the detectives because of his judicial authority and the recent incident with Duncan. But neither detective seems to be the type to be easily intimidated.

Elise seems to be in a trance more than upset after having just killed someone. Things aren’t adding up and the detectives have a lot of unanswered questions which promise to be answered in subsequent chapters.

Discussion Question 1

What questions were raised by the mysterious murder of an intruder in Judge Laird’s house?

Discussion Question 2

Why do the detectives ask where the victim’s car was?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Judge Laird insist that his wife not be questioned by the detectives?

Vocabulary

Melodramatic, annotation, pallor.



Chapter 4

Summary

Chapter 4

Duncan decided that they should question the Lairds together. The Judge remained reluctant for him and his wife to have to repeat their accounts but Duncan persisted. Elise told the detectives that she suffered from insomnia and went downstairs to the kitchen around 12:30. She heard a noise – like footfalls – coming from the study. Earlier, Elise had been distracted and hadn't set the alarm system. She retrieved a handgun from a drawer and moved slowly to the study. She turned the wrong light on, illuminating herself instead of the intruder. The man stood frozen at the desk in the dark study. The man fired his gun then she fired at him. She felt bad that she had killed a man. Judge Laird ended the interview. They had all they needed to prove self-defense, he proclaimed.

Duncan reminded the judge that this was his investigation. One more word out of him and he would throw him out of the interview. Elise continued... she stepped into the study to see if the intruder had a pulse. Judge Laird entered and carried Elise from the room and then called 911. The interview ended with Duncan reminding the Lairds that the study was a crime scene and to not remove anything from it. They both confirmed that they did not know or recognize the victim. Duncan caught Elise alone in the parlor. He half-way apologized to her for the way he talked to her at the ceremony. He told her it wasn't about her. She looked intensely at him and asked, "It wasn't?"

Analysis

Elise gives the detectives a statement about the shooting. It is in great detail, but the reader knows that it's all untrue. What the reader doesn't know is how the scene progresses from the time Laird came downstairs and found Elise snooping around in the study. It is unknown where the man came from and how quickly he appeared after Laird found Elise in the study. The detectives are dubious about her story but curiosity and skepticism is a natural state for investigators. Elise's comment at the conclusion of the chapter indicates that she is aware of Duncan's attraction for her. Is she possibly attracted to him as well or will she exploit the obvious feelings that he is beginning to have for her?

Discussion Question 1

How does the reader know that the Lairds are lying?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Duncan insist that Judge Laird remain silent while Elise is being questioned?

Discussion Question 3

What meaning is behind Elise makes to Duncan at the end of the chapter?

Vocabulary

Inquisitively, austere, copious.



Chapter 5

Summary

Chapter 5

Robert Savich was part Jamaican and part white. His maternal grandmother was a prostitute. His blue eyes came from his father's side. He knew he'd never be fully accepted by either blacks or whites and therefore driven felt compelled to create his own world. He was smart and enterprising. By the time he was twelve he was dealing in crack cocaine. He established himself as a criminal lord when he slit the throat of his mentor in front of his competition. He was ruthless and savage but effective. Ultimately, Savich gained wealth beyond his imagination. He took care of those who chose to betray him – Freddy Morris was one example. Savich's front was a machine shop.

Duncan had started out just as a pebble in Savich's shoe. But the detective's relentless quest and tenacity to nail him to crimes and send him away for life had become a real annoyance to the crime boss. Duncan was a threat to the world Savich had created. His expansion into the methamphetamine market while highly profitable but was demanding and required constant vigilance. Savich wasn't going to let Duncan ruin his new enterprise.

As Duncan entered his plush office suite located above the dirty noisy machine shop, Kenny, his gay assistant, told him he had a visitor. Duncan entered his personal office and was pleased to see that Elise was waiting for him. She told he him she needed a favor.

As Duncan, who was a detective sergeant, headed for his private office, he passed DeeDee in the outer office who told him that the homicide victim's name was Gary Ray Trotter. He was a repeat offender from Baltimore with a long record of petty crime. DeeDee didn't think his record matched the type of criminal who would attempt a burglary in a well-to-do neighborhood. He'd never been arrested for burglary before and came to the scene with no burglary tools and no getaway car. Duncan suggested that since Trotter was also a drug addict he may have been desperate and in need of a fix compelling him to try to burglarize the Laird estate. They both wondered what he was doing in the area without a car or a means of escape. Both detectives doubted Elise's story. Duncan told DeeDee to do some digging and see what she can find out about the judge's wife.

The medical examiner autopsied the victim's body. Death was due to a bullet through the heart. The shooter was 15 feet away from the victim and there was no struggle. They discussed different scenarios as to why the intruder's bullet had missed Elise so badly even though she was standing in the light.



Duncan and DeeDee came to see Elise. She thought back to the morning when she went to see Savich. She had sought him out because she was worried about the police finding discrepancies in her story. She decided to do one thing before she went downstairs to meet with them. After greeting with them, she was glad that she had taken the time to do that one thing before meeting with them. Cato stormed into the room angry that he hadn't been notified about their visit.

Analysis

The reader learns more about Savich and what drives him. He had a very rugged childhood and being from mixed parentage, Savich felt he had no real support from either race. He probably suffered from feelings of discrimination and abandonment. It made him turn to drug trafficking as a young boy and catapulted him to a crime lord as a young man. His climb to crime boss was one wrought with brutality and murder. It is a surprise when the judge's wife, Elise, meets with Savich. What could these two have in common? Why would she need the help of a criminal? Elise turning to the man that her husband set free is at this point a complete mystery and the author's successful strategy to keep the reader engaged.

The detectives don't believe Elise's account of the shooting and she is feeling the pressure of their continued presence in her life. There is a cliff hanger when Elise does something before she meets with the detectives but there is no indication as to what that something is.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it surprising that Elise pays a visit to Savich?

Discussion Question 2

What impact did Savich's childhood have on his current life?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Elise feeling pressure from the detectives?

Vocabulary

Café au lait, lineage, vigilance, smithereens, lucrative, veracity.



Characters

Duncan Hatcher

Duncan Hatcher is a young, handsome and rugged homicide detective for the Savannah Police Department. To him there are no lines in the sand that he won't step over. When Judge Cato Laird lets a vicious murderer walk on a lame technicality, Hatcher loses it and accuses the judge of incompetency. The incident lands him in jail for a few days for contempt of court. The judge's house is the scene of a murder a few days later. Duncan is in charge of the murder and learns that Elise Laird shot and killed an intruder. Duncan tries hard but can't hide his feelings for the beautiful Elise.

Duncan is the son of a minister and his upbringing taught him that falling for a married woman was a sin. He was a boy of the south where football rules and hid from his buddies his incredible musical talent because he feared he would be ridiculed because it was too girly. Later, he mimics that same behavior when, as a rough tough homicide detective, he doesn't let his fellow cops know that he's a musical genius. But he loses himself in his music. He allows him to forget the stresses and strains that are inherent in his position as homicide detective.

The investigation into the Laird shooting grows into one that includes several other murders, the crime boss Savich and a corrupt judge. It proves to have a lot of twists and turns but Duncan stays with it and eventually solves the case and in the end even wins the girl he could never get out of his mind.

Elise Laird

Elise Laird is the beautiful much younger wife of Judge Cato Laird. She is often referred to as a trophy wife. Ostensibly she has a great life. Her husband is wealthy and spoils her. She lives in a beautiful home and seems to have everything any woman would want. But she is not in love with her husband and she only married him to avenge her brother's death.

Elise was from a poor and dysfunctional family. She helped raise her half-brother and was close to him. He ran away as a teenager and got involved in drug dealing, working under crime boss Robert Savich. He landed in prison and ratted out Savich who retaliated against him by having someone on the inside force a bar of soap down his throat causing him to choke to death. After Elise learned of his horrific death, she set out to get revenge on Savich. She got a job in his club and soon came to his attention. She learned that he was involved with Judge Cato Laird who she seduced and eventually married. All the time, her only goal was to get the goods on both men and land them behind bars.

However, these two corrupt men became suspicious of her and plotted to have her killed. When she shot and killed an intruder she encountered in her house, homicide



detective Duncan Hatcher entered her life. Although she was a murder suspect for a while, she eventually convinced Duncan that her husband was corrupt and in cahoots with Savich. In a second attempt on her life, she was able to escape. Everyone, except Duncan, thought she was dead. She showed up again at Duncan's house and together they were able to bring Cato and Savich to justice.

DeeDee Bowen

DeeDee Bowen is a homicide detective with the Savannah Police Department and is Duncan Hatcher's partner. She proves over and over again her dedication to the law and her loyalty to her partner.

Cato Laird

Judge Cato Laird is married to Elise Laird. He is a well-respected superior court judge who Hatcher tangles with when Cato releases a dangerous murderer when he declares a mistrial.

Robert Savich

Robert Savich is a crime boss and is responsible for the murders of a string of people who have crossed his path. Hatcher's number one goal is to put Savich behind bars.

Jimmy Morris

Jimmy Morris made the mistake of ratting out his boss, Robert Savich. To send a point home to others who would dare do the same, Savich orders that Morris' tongue be cut out before he is shot to death.

Meyer Napoli

Meyer Napoli was a shady private detective who Cato hired to follow Elise. But he got greedy and decided to blackmail her, Savich and Cato which ultimately led to his demise.

Gary Ray Trotter

Gary Ray Trotter was a drug dealer who worked for Savich. He was hired to break into the Laird residence and kill Elise. But, she was a better shot than he was, and she shot and killed him instead.

Bill Gerard

Lieutenant Bill Gerard is Duncan and DeeDee's supervisor in the Homicide Division. Although he had to discipline Duncan a few times, in the end he supported him in his investigation of the Laird shooting.

Coleman Greer

Coleman Greer was an all-star baseball player with the Atlanta Braves. Cato hired Napoli to follow Elise because he thought she was having an affair with Greer.



Symbols and Symbolism

Guns

Guns are symbols of power.

Police Officer

A police officer is a symbol of authority.

Judge

A judge is a symbol of fairness and justice.

Music

Music is a symbol of the abstract, an expression of emotions.

Severed tongue

Severed tongue is a warning to remain silent.

Baseball players

Baseball players represent masculinity.

Drug trafficking

Drug trafficking represents misery and death.

Blonde hair

Blonde hair symbolizes purity and innocence.

Profanity

Profanity represents machismo.

Topless bar

Topless bar represents sexism and female repression.



Settings

Judge Cato's Court Room

Judge Cato's Court Room was a superior court located within the Savannah Judicial Center.

Talmadge Bridge

The Talmadge Bridge is the scene of Napoli's murder and where Elise was last seen before she went missing.

Laird Residence

Judge Cato Laird and his wife Elise lived in an upscale home in Savannah. It was the scene of the shooting of an intruder by Elise.

Silver Tide Country Club

Judge Cato Laird was a member of the Silver Tide Country Club. He played golf and poker there. It was also where he first met Elise when she worked there as a cocktail waitress.

White Tie and Tails Club

Elise worked at the White Tie and Tails Club as a topless waitress. It was where she first met Robert Savich.



Themes and Motifs

Revenge

The theme of revenge runs throughout this story of deceit, lies, murder, and mayhem. When Freddy Morris, a low-level thug in the Savich crime organization, dares to rat out his boss, Savich decides to send a message to others who would dare do the same thing. Morris' tongue is cut out before he is shot to death. And never one to waste an opportunity, Savich has one of his minions leave the tongue in Detective Hatcher's refrigerator to avenge the cop's relentless pursuit of him and to warn him to back off.

Elise Laird is a complicated person. She is married to a respected judge but all is not what it seems. While she appears to be a stylish and spoiled and vapid woman, underneath she is a woman obsessed with avenging the death of her brother who was also killed by Savich. Her brother made the same mistake as Morris. He provided the cops with damaging information on Savich. Through his prison contacts, Savich had him murdered by shoving a bar of soap down his throat – a way of “washing his mouth out with soap” for ratting out the boss.

When Cato and Savich, who are in a secret alliance together, suspect that Elise is getting too nosy and might expose them, they both seek revenge against the judge's beautiful young wife. Their plot to have her killed for her snooping around on them is thwarted several times. In the end, Elise realizes the revenge she seeks for her brother's horrific murder. It seems that her determination to have revenge was stronger than either that of a judge or a murdering crime boss.

Trust

One of the main themes of “Ricochet” is trust – or more accurately the lack of trust. When Judge Cato Laird proclaimed the murder trial of crime lord Robert Savich as a mistrial and allowed the criminal to walk, Detective Duncan Hatcher who had dedicated himself to put Savich behind bars, completely lost trust in the judge and, in fact, in the entire justice system. After all his work and effort to make a viable case against the notorious murdering criminal, the judge just allowed freed him to murder again. How could anyone trust a system that allows such a travesty of justice?!

Elise Laird was raised in a dysfunctional family and from a young age had to fend for herself. Trusting in people had never been a part of her life since her own family had basically abandoned her at least in spirit. Her brother was imprisoned on drug charges – he was a dealer for Savich. He tried to do the right thing by supplying the authorities with incriminating information against Savich. He trusted that he would be protected by law enforcement but that trust was broken when Savich used an internal source in the prison to have him killed.



Duncan fell hard for Elise Laird. She was married and a suspect in a homicide and he struggled to resist her. Once he gave into his temptations, he fell deeply and irretrievably in love with her. But as a homicide detective, he learned not to trust too easily. His cynicism sent up barriers of distrust between Elise and him. Even after she came to him and swore her love for him, it was difficult for him to trust her. Finally, he allowed himself to open up and let her in. They were fortunate enough to eventually arrive at a place of mutual trust and enjoy the love they had for each other.

Greed

Greed and all the resultant pain and misery it causes have a strong presence in “Ricochet”. The main characters – the hero and heroine of the story – are driven by that pain and misery but not by greed or self-aggrandizement. But that cannot be said about the antagonists – Cato and Savich. There is nothing noble or redeeming about their quest for more – more riches and what often goes hand in hand with wealth, more power.

Savich rates human life much lower scale than he does than the millions of dollars he amasses in his drug trafficking operation. One of the main reasons he was concerned about Hatcher’s relentless pursuit of him was that he might interrupt his newest venture – an aggressive move to capture a big portion of the lucrative methamphetamine market. While his drug trafficking operation yields Savich a personal fortune, he doesn’t give a thought to what does it do to the millions of addicts whose lives are destroyed by the drugs. That is not even a consideration to a crime lord like Savich. What matters is his bottom line that results from his malevolent dealings. The pain and suffering are just collateral damage. The quest for money and power is something that for Savich has no limits. And when someone gets in the way of his goals, they are snuffed out: witness Freddy Morris whose tongue was cut out before he was shot to death and Chet Rollins who choked to death on a bar of soap that was shoved down his throat.

And it was greed that tainted the once esteemed superior court judge, Cato Laird. Even though he was leading the good life and had no money worries, he was corrupted by the allure of more. He made a deal with the devil when he formed a quid quo pro relationship with Savich. Cato agreed to go light on Savich’s drug dealers in exchange for a generous compensation that was transferred by wire to off shore accounts so the judge wouldn’t have to explain where all those millions came from.

In the end, their greed did both men in. They didn’t know where to stop so society finally caught up with them and ended their love affair with greed.



Styles

Point of View

“Ricochet” by Sandra Brown is written in the third person limited omniscient. From this perspective, the reader is privy to the thoughts and motivations of the characters, in particular the main characters, Duncan Hatcher and Elise Laird. For example, the reader learns that despite Duncan’s tough-guy exterior, he is vulnerable and is easily hurt. He immediately falls for the beautiful Elise Laird but when he actually talks to her he is harsh and abrupt with her.

Duncan’s background reveals he was a sensitive boy who grew up in the south where sports – especially football – ruled. But Duncan was gifted in music. He could play any song he heard by ear on the piano but could not read a note. But he kept that talent hidden from his peers because he didn’t want to appear soft or girly. He was a star football player who relieved the stresses of his sport when he played the piano in the secrecy of his home.

Duncan mimicked this behavior as an adult. While he was a rugged homicide detective, he would lose himself in the classical music he played in the privacy of his home far away from the murderers and dead bodies that he dealt with in his job. Just as Duncan did as a child, he would never admit to his fellow police officers that he played the piano.

Duncan’s father was a minister and becoming involved with a married woman was verboten in his family. The guilt he experienced from the feelings he had for Elise, who was married when they met, were generated from his upbringing.

Understanding Duncan as more than just a bold and smart homicide detective gives his character and therefore the book a deeper and richer perspective.

Language and Meaning

“Ricochet” by Sandra Brown is a story about crime, murder and law enforcement. It is interspersed with rugged language that lends authenticity to story. There are some graphic descriptions of murder victims that are not for the faint of heart. For example, when Duncan and DeeDee discover a human tongue in Duncan’s refrigerator it sends up images of what had to be quite a horrific crime scene. Another man whom Savich had killed was a prisoner who choked to death on a bar of soap that was forced down his throat.

Duncan and his fellow officers frequently use profanity and blunt expressions that are part and parcel of a cop’s world. Even when Duncan first speaks with Elise who he is extremely attracted to, he spices up his language with a few expletives that don’t impress her. However, they do get her attention.



Organized crime is also part of this story. Robert Savich is a vicious crime boss who deals with low lifes and the seedier side of humanity. He is a major drug trafficker and has scores of dealers working for him. His latest venture is carving out a portion of the lucrative methamphetamine market for his organization. He and the judge are in cahoots and their relationship is referred to a quid quo pro arrangement which means that the relationship only survives because they each do something for each other. The judge is corrupt and is paid well in wire transfers to off-shore accounts.

“Ricochet” is a book about crime. The rough language adds realism to the story and engages the reader with its sometimes jarring descriptions and expressions.

Structure

“Ricochet” by Sandra Brown is told over thirty medium-sized chapters that allow for an easy ready and good pace. There is a prologue that borrows a portion of one of the latter chapters and an epilogue that winds up the loose ends of this story of murder and corruption that still manages to be a compelling love story.

Throughout the story, Brown sets up the reader with a number of straw men and red herrings that never prove out. But what they accomplish is they serve to place doubt in the reader’s mind just when the reader has it all figured out. Playing thusly with the reader keeps her engaged and determined to figure this complicated story out and sort out the ambiguity that is rife throughout its pages.

Many chapters end with surprising twists and cliff hangers that compel the reader to read on. The structure of the story while it leans forward and moves toward a neat conclusion is enriched with the complexity of the smoke and mirrors and the most unexpected turns of events that are interspersed throughout. In the end, expository writing cleans up any lingering questions that still exist from the stories many running threads and subplots.



Quotes

So, when I'm looking down at Freddy's corpse, I see that not only is his brain an oozing mush, his tongue has been cut out.

-- Duncan (chapter 1 paragraph Page 7, Paragraph 1)

Importance: The quote is a peek into Duncan's world as a homicide detective.

He was rubbing Duncan's nose in his defeat.

-- Narrator (chapter 2 paragraph Page 20, Paragraph 6)

Importance: This was Savtich's way of taunting Duncan about the mistrial.

We've told the other officers everything we know. They took copious notes. I don't know what more we could possibly add.

-- Judge Laird (chapter 4 paragraph Page 49, paragraph 8)

Importance: The statement underscores that Judge Laird does not want his wife or himself to be interviewed by the detectives and that he could be hiding something.

But he knew that neither pure blacks nor pure whites would ever wholly accept his mingled blood and embrace him as one of their own.

-- Narrator (chapter 5 paragraph Page 59, paragraph 4)

Importance: This sentence explains in part what drove Savitch to create his own criminal world.

It's a bad idea for us to meet alone. In fact, this meeting just concluded.

-- Duncan (chapter 8 paragraph Page 100, paragraph 10)

Importance: Elise is attempting to meet with Duncan alone. His statement reflects that it's against policy for a detective to meet alone with one of the principals in a case that he is investigating.

Savich hadn't sent the woman to plant any bugs, but to send a message: Savich could get to him whenever he was good and ready, and, as Duncan had feared, he probably wouldn't see it coming.

-- Narrator (chapter 13 paragraph Page 155, paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote emphasizes the threat of retaliation from Savich that constantly looms over Duncan.

I don't believe we get to choose who we fall in love with. Do you?

-- Elise (chapter 16 paragraph Page 203, paragraph 3)

Importance: Elise recalls how she had asked Duncan that question a few hours before.



This statement indicates that she knew that he had fallen for her and vice versa even under the most trying of circumstances.

Was she an innocent victim? Or guilty of double murder?

-- Duncan's thoughts (chapter 19 paragraph Page 238, paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote shows how confounded Duncan is about the murders of Trotter and Napoli and Elise's role in them.

Elise was leading a double life. It culminated with her killing Napoli. Then she jumped from the bridge.

-- Cato (chapter 21 paragraph Page 270, paragraph 7)

Importance: The statement was Cato's conclusion about his missing wife.

He had compromised their investigation and violated his personal codes of morality and ethics, and he would never forgive himself for those transgressions.

-- Narrator (chapter 22 paragraph Page 279, paragraph 14)

Importance: These are DeeDee's thoughts after Duncan confessed that he had been involved with Elise.

He and Savich would be ruthless against anyone who exposed them. I didn't want to die. More importantly I didn't want to fail. I send that I was running out of time. When Trotter appears I knew that Cato had struck preemptively.

-- Elise (chapter 25 paragraph Page 320, paragraph 4)

Importance: Elise was explaining that Cato began to worry that she was onto his partnership with Savich and arranged for Trotter to break in and kill her.

You see to Cato's destruction. In return, I didn't see you kill Napoli.

-- Elise (chapter 29 paragraph Page 363, paragraph 7)

Importance: Elise is making a deal with Savich. She will deny that she saw him kill Napoli if he will destroy Cato. The entire case against Savich rests on her testimony.