

Safe Haven Study Guide

Safe Haven by Nicholas Sparks (author)

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Plot Summary

Safe Haven is a novel by best-selling author Nicholas Sparks. The story follows the main character, Katie, as she moves to Southport, North Carolina and establishes a new life. Katie works as a waitress at Ivan's, which is a local seafood restaurant in town. Even though Katie is new to the town, she seems to keep to herself, as if she is trying to hide something.

Katie rents a cottage in the woods off a gravel road. There is one other cottage there. Soon, Katie finds that she has a new neighbor, a woman in her mid-thirties whose name is Jo. As Jo and Katie get to know each other, Katie finds herself relishing the friendship she builds with Jo. Jo even suggests that Katie get to know the owner of the country store in town, who is Alex Wheatley.

Alex Wheatley is a single father of two kids and a widower. He's also a former investigator for the Army. As he gets to know Katie, he quickly realizes that she is a battered wife hiding from an abusive husband. By the time he confronts Katie about it, the two are already deeply in love with each other. In the meantime, Katie's real husband Kevin, who is a detective for the Boston Police Department, is searching for her. Kevin uncovers the identity his wife, Erin, is using, which is Katie's new identity. Once Kevin hits the town of Southport, things start to unravel quickly.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Katie is working at a restaurant as a waitress. She thinks about when the owner hired her, how she almost cried, grateful for the job. She also hadn't eaten in two days at that point. Ricky, the cook for the restaurant, had asked Katie out a few days ago but she said no. He is always offering to drive her home, too, but she always says that walking is good for her.

Melody points out that one of the guys in town scouting locations for a movie is looking at Katie. Katie says she didn't notice. Melody also says she heard Ricky asked Katie out and that Katie said no. Melody suggests she and Steve double date with Katie and Ricky. Katie says she doesn't date people from work because she had a previous bad experience.

After the dinner rush, Katie notices a couple who appear to be newlyweds. She's seen them before and she senses déjà vu. She thinks how happy she thought she was but that it had just been an illusion.

Katie spends most of her free time sprucing up her cottage. Her landlord pays for the supplies, as long as Katie does the work. Katie puts away all of her tips in a coffee can she hides behind the stairs. She breathes easier knowing the money is there because her past is prowling around her and could come back to haunt her at any time.

Katie meets the new tenant, Jo, who moved into the cottage next door. Jo says she is from Southport, but just recently moved back. Katie offers her a cup of coffee and asks about all of the people who still work at Ivan's—Melody, Big Dave and Ricky. Jo is surprised Katie moved to such an isolated place and asks what brought Katie to Southport. This is a question everyone asks Katie. Katie just tells the truth—to start over. After Jo returns to her cabin to start unpacking, Katie dresses and heads to the store.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

It seems as if Katie is hiding from something or someone. This is why she's living in a coastal town, working at a restaurant. Katie hiding away from someone or something explains why she doesn't want to get too close to anyone—such as chatting too much with the customers or dating the cook, Ricky.

There is foreshadowing that the movie guy is going to try to pursue Katie. Against her better judgment, Katie will relent and end up falling for the guy. Katie implies that she had an abusive relationship, likely with a former co-worker, or someone who started stalking her. This explains why she moved to Southport, changed the way she looks and keeps to herself. She doesn't want that person to find her.

Katie viewing the newlyweds suggests that she was in an abusive marriage. Her thinking her happiness had been an illusion implies that her husband had been loving before they married but then turned abusive after they were married. This is likely the man from whom Katie is hiding in Southport.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Alex Wheatley owns the old-fashioned country store where Katie shops for her groceries. He is a widower with two children. He was a military investigator in the Army, so he tends to notice things that a normal person might not. His wife, Carly, died over a year ago. Alex has noticed Katie coming and going over the past couple of months.

He's watched her transformation, from gaunt with big black circles under her eyes, to putting on a few pounds and looking more rested. Alex notices that Katie doesn't talk too much and that when he tries to engage her in conversation, she tends to be frightened and shy. Katie has formed a "friendship" with his five-year-old daughter, Kristen, who calls her "Miss Katie."

After meeting Jo, Katie comes into the store to buy some things. Kristen consults Katie about some outfits for her American Girl doll before Katie shops for her items. Alex starts to ring up Katie's purchases and tells her his favorite novel by Dickens', who is Katie's favorite author, and one tiny bit of information Alex has been able to get out of Katie. He introduces himself, since he says Katie already knows his daughter.

When he asks Katie another question, he sees the look of fright in her eyes as she stares at the monitor behind him. When Alex looks, he sees his son, Josh, flailing in the water by the boat dock where Josh was fishing. Alex runs to the dock, jumps into the water, pulls Josh out and starts CPR. Josh starts breathing again and the father and son embrace. Alex notices that Kristen is clinging to Katie and that Katie is comforting her.

Katie stays with Kristen while Josh and Alex go upstairs, to the apartment above the store, to change. As a way to say thank you to Katie, Alex gives her a bottle of Chardonnay.

April turns into May and Katie is happy that she has a little cushion of savings she can fall back on now. She spends the morning in the second hand store in town and splurges on some new clothes for herself. When she returns to the cabin, Jo is there hanging a wind chime on the porch. The two women have been so busy that they haven't talked much since their initial meeting.

Jo says she's a grief counselor. She also tells Katie she's there to talk, as a friend, if Katie wants. Katie tells Jo about being born and raised in Altoona and then living in Atlantic City for a while. Jo mentions the incident at the store. She also says that Kristen is a very perceptive little girl and that's why she clung to Katie at the time.

Katie asks if Alex is divorced. Jo says Katie should ask Alex. The two women make plans to share a bottle of wine the next night.



Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Alex thinks Katie is attractive and he wants to ask her out on a date. He feels self-conscious because besides his wife, Carly, he hasn't dated much. Alex is very observant, so he recognizes that Katie is in a fragile state. As Alex and Carly get to know each other, Katie is likely to reveal her past—her abusive ex-husband and why she is now in hiding.

Alex and Katie forming a bond will lead to a romance between the two. Because Alex has a background in law enforcement, it is likely that he will come to Katie's rescue when and if her ex finds her and tries to attack, or even kill, Katie.

Jo talks about Alex and the kids as if she has been grief counseling them. The counseling seems to be over now. Jo also seems to be implying that Katie and Alex would make a nice couple, and that the kids and Katie will get along as well. Jo infers that if Katie is asking about Alex that she must be thinking about Alex. Subconsciously, Katie is interested in Alex, but her fear is holding her back from admitting this to herself, let alone anyone else.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

When Katie enters the store, she has a conversation with Kristen about the picture Kristen is coloring. When Alex sees Katie, he says he set aside from vegetables from a local farm for her. When he mentions his wife, Katie questions him, and he says he should have said late wife. He tells Katie she died a couple years ago. Katie thinks about what Jo said about asking Alex about his situation. Katie also gets the impression that Jo is trying to fix her up with Alex but doesn't know why.

Alex points at the monitor. He's showing Katie that Josh is back to fishing, but now he is wearing a life jacket. Alex says a better father would have figured out the solution sooner, but Katie tells Alex she thinks he's a good father.

As Katie shops, Alex observes her. He notices her twisting a ring on her left ring finger that doesn't exist. He thinks of how he used to see the same behavior in battered women when he was in the Army. Alex also thinks about how Kristen reached for Katie like a child to a mother, and realizes his kids miss having a mother as much as he misses having a wife.

Alex rings up Katie's purchases. She says her total isn't different even though she buys the vegetables. Alex says he gave her the introductory price. It's raining and Katie walks to the store because she doesn't have a car. Alex offers to drive Katie home.

On the drive home, Katie and Alex talk about him being from Spokane. She also finds out he was in the Army and was married to Carly for five years. Alex finds out where she lives and is surprised at how far Katie walks. He drops Katie off at her house, brings in her groceries for her and tells her to keep the umbrella.

As Alex makes lunch for the kids, he thinks about what to do to entertain them since it's raining. He's also thinking about Katie. He thinks that in such a small town people are going to start to talk when they see Katie walks everywhere she goes. He thinks this will give Katie the opposite of what she came to Southport to find. He suggests to the kids that they do something for Miss Katie.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

It seems as if Jo might be more than just a counselor for Alex and his family. It's possible that Jo is Carly's sister, or otherwise related to Carly. Alex assumes Katie is a vegetarian because she never buys any meat as part of her shopping. He doesn't realize she doesn't buy meat because she can't afford it.

Alex is slowly putting the pieces of the puzzle together that make up Katie. He is realizing that she is a battered wife who is on the run from her abusive husband. This



also leads him to believe that Katie is afraid of Alex because he is a man. There is foreshadowing that Alex is going to buy a bicycle or a second-hand car for Katie to use. He wants to help her keep her privacy so she can overcome leaving her abusive husband.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Inside the cottage, Katie is preparing for Jo to come over. It's still raining and there is a leak in Katie's living room. As she cuts up snacks and takes out the cups, she thinks about how nice her old house and things were, and how raggedy everything she has is now. Katie thinks of her old nice things now as enemies.

When Jo arrives with a bottle of wine, she says she had a rough day. Katie and Jo drink wine, eat snacks and talk—just like girlfriends do. Katie even tells Jo that she thinks of her as a friend. Katie thinks back to her childhood, which was with alcoholic parents and an abusive father. This time, however, she thinks about some of the good times they had as a family.

As they continue to talk and share the wine, Jo mentions one of the reasons she had such a rough day is because she is frustrated that patients don't always tell her the truth, or that they lie by omission. She insists she can always do something to help. This gets Katie to tell a story about a friend of hers that had an abusive husband.

Katie says they met when he had saved her friend from being raped by two guys who tried to attack her after work. While the guy had been great before they married, he completely changed after their honeymoon. He had become very controlling, jealous, and wouldn't even allow her to get a driver's license. He would hit her and had even held a gun to her head a few times. She had tried to leave once but he hunted her down and dragged her back home.

She started stealing a little bit of money here and there and hiding it away so that she could escape. Eventually, she had enough to get away from him, and to get far enough away that she could start over.

As Katie walks Jo out, they find a bicycle on her front porch with a bow on it. Katie reads the card and says it's from Alex. The next morning, Katie rides the bike to the store. She tells Alex that he has to stop giving her things. He explains that the bike was his wife's bike and that he can't bear to look at it because it reminds him of her.

He says the kids helped him fix it and put the baskets on the back for her. Alex mentions that the last time Carly drove it she had a seizure and then got progressively worse after that. Alex tells Katie that sometimes you have to learn to take help from other people. He tells her about the 70-year-old woman who works in the store and watches the kids for him, Joyce.

The kids come outside where Alex and Katie are talking. They invite Katie to come to the beach with them for the day. To Alex's surprise, Katie says yes.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Even though Katie had a nicer home and nicer belongings when she married, these things didn't make her happy. In fact, she ended up having a miserable life from which she had to escape, which is why she thinks of everything she had before as enemies.

The friend Katie is telling about is Katie's own personal story. Even though Katie tells Jo it is about her friend, Jo knows that it is Katie's story. Katie gets so upset about Alex giving her things because she doesn't want another man to have control over her like her husband did. She doesn't want to rely on anyone but herself.

In a way, Alex and Katie are living parallel lives. They have both suffered in the past and are trying to start over again. While neither one of them wants to take help or charity from others, it is a part of life that everyone needs a little help sometimes. Alex has already learned this and he is trying to convince Katie of it.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

As Katie rides to the beach with Alex and the kids in his jeep, she thinks about how the loneliness she sees in Alex matches her own loneliness. When they get to the beach, the kids want to go right into the water, so Katie watches them while Alex unloads everything. While the kids play, Alex and Katie talk. When Alex mentions his wife, he apologizes, saying he doesn't want Katie to think that's all he talks about.

Katie assures him he should talk about her. He loved her very much and she's the mother of his children. Katie gets Alex to tell her how he met his wife. He mentions to Katie that they're friends, which surprises Katie, but then Katie realizes that she and Alex are friends.

As Alex cooks, Katie sets the table. As she's bringing out all of the food Alex has brought, she also notices how attractive Alex is. Katie continues to talk with Alex, who mentions his in-laws moved to Florida after they sold him the store. He says his parents live in Spokane but have little interest in the kids, other than to send birthday and Christmas presents. As Alex tells Katie stories about his customers, she notices that he always tries to find the best in people. She also notices that she is starting to feel less nervous around Alex.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Katie, Alex and the kids are playing the role of a family. The kids are starting to see Katie as a motherly figure. Katie and Alex are starting to see each as more than just friends. All of this is at a subconscious level at this point.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Josh gets Katie to fly his kite with him. Josh mentions that his dad says Katie is his friend. Josh also tells Katie that his dad asked them if he minded Katie coming to the beach with them. Josh tells Katie that everyone needs friends. Josh also ends up telling Katie, inadvertently, that his dad doesn't yell or get mad.

When Katie goes back to Alex, she asks if he always spends time with the kids on the weekends and after work. He says always because he thinks it's important. She asks him about this since he mentions his parents never spent much time with him. He says he spends time with his kids because he enjoys it.

Further into the conversation, Alex tells Katie he was a detective in the Army. This makes Katie uncomfortable and Alex notices. He asks what he said or did wrong, but she says she can't tell him right now what's bothering her, but it's not that he did anything wrong. She assures him this is the best day, even weekend, that she's had in a long time.

Katie asks what happened to his wife. He says she had three brain tumors. He says as she got sicker, she started to pull away from the kids because she wanted them to remember her well, not sick. When he asks about Katie's parents, she says they died in a car accident when she was nineteen. As they make s'mores, Katie looks at Alex and the kids. She feels hopeful that even a family like this that has had so many tragedies can be happy.

Jo comes over to Katie's when she gets back from the beach. She tells Jo about their day. Katie also accuses Jo of wanting her day with Alex to be a date, and that it seems like Jo wants to get them together. Jo simply says she has instincts about people and she thinks that Katie and Alex would be good together.

Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Alex is indirectly preparing the kids for him and Katie to be a couple. Alex's behaviors are in direct contrast to those of Katie's husband, who was always mad, yelling and threatening her. Alex helps Katie to recognize that you don't have to live like your parents.

The fact that Katie's parents drank too much and died in a car accident suggests it was a drunk driving accident.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

After the beach, Alex and Katie are so busy that they don't see each other all week. Alex has to fight the urge to go to her house to see her because Katie doesn't have a phone to call her. Now that Katie has a bicycle, she is taking full advantage of getting around town and exploring areas that she didn't have time to explore before. She does find her thoughts drifting to Alex at times.

Katie realizes that she is attracted to Alex. She even thinks that he's the type of guy with whom she could fall in love.

Alex can't stop thinking about Katie either. He decides to keep the kids busy by taking them butterfly hunting. Then they go home to watch a movie. When the kids ask him what's for dinner, he takes them to Ivan's. Katie is thrilled to see them and they are thrilled to see her. As Alex is leaving, Katie senses that he is going to ask her out, but a customer at one of her tables spills a beer and she has to go.

The next morning, Katie goes to the store early. Alex asks her if she has to work a lot in the upcoming week. He also asks her about the following weekend. He asks Katie to go to dinner on Saturday night. She asks if she can make dinner for him instead, since he's already given her so much already. Alex agrees.

Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

After having a great time at the beach, Alex and Katie are both thinking about each other. Katie is exerting her independence, a feeling she hasn't felt in quite some time. On top of this, she is very busy with work. This is what prevents her from chasing after Alex.

Alex too is busy. He is trying to divert his attention from chasing after Katie by staying busy with the kids. When he needs to feed the kids and they are all tired from their busy day, he uses it as an excuse to take the kids to the restaurant where Katie works and asks to sit in her section.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

Katie stays up late the nights leading up to Saturday. She's cleaning and adding new accents to the décor. Jo wakes her up hammering something on nine o'clock Saturday morning. When Jo asks Katie what she's doing tonight, Katie tells her she's having someone over for dinner. Katie spends Saturday getting her hair done, buying a new outfit and new shoes. When she returns to the house, she starts getting everything ready for dinner that night.

While she's showering, she wonders if Alex is showering at the same time. Right on time, she hears him pull into the driveway and she greets him outside. He's brought a bottle of red and a bottle of white wine because he isn't sure what she's cooking. When they get inside, Alex opens a bottle of wine and they chat while sipping it.

As the conversation progresses, she mentions that the cottage is her home and that nobody can take it away. When Alex asks if she's okay, she says she's glad he's there. Alex starts talking about how her past doesn't matter to him, but she says her past is still her present. Alex mentions him finding her and Katie realizes that he knows about her past.

She insists on knowing how Alex knows. Alex says he's dealt with a lot of women like her in his career. He asks her if they can have dinner before she runs away. She assures him they can. Over dinner, Katie tells Alex everything about her parents and her life growing up.

Katie is trying to keep Alex from being hurt because they both realize they are falling in love with each other. They end up kissing. Katie admits that she can't be with him tonight and that she can never marry him because she already has a husband. Alex says he knows and that it doesn't matter to him. Then, she says she wants to tell him about herself.

Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Katie assumes Jo told Alex about her husband. She feels that Jo has betrayed her and their friendship. Once again, Alex and Katie are living parallel lives. They are both in a place where they have had to recently start their lives over again. For instance, neither of them has dated in a long time, so their dating each other is a journey that they are taking together. Additionally, they are both a bit vulnerable.

Katie thinks that Alex deserves better than what she is able to give him. Additionally, she wants him to know the real her. There is foreshadowing that she is about to divulge her entire past to him. For Katie, this is the first time she has ever told anyone everything about herself.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

Katie goes back to the three days before she left New England. Her husband, Kevin, drops her off to get her hair done. With about 12 minutes left after she gets her hair done and before it's time for Kevin to pick Katie up, she slips into the Radio Shack next door to the hair salon. She buys a disposable cell phone and adds some minutes to it.

Katie leaves Radio Shack and goes back into the salon. She tells the girl who did her hair that she forgot to get her card. Kevin pulls up in the parking lot at the same time. Katie goes out to meet him. Kevin pulls into the driveway and unloads the groceries, while Katie hands him the receipt from the hair salon and the change. Money is tight and Kevin keeps track of every penny Katie spends.

While Kevin is drinking his vodka and watching TV, she hides the cell phone in the bottom of an SOS scrubbing pad box under the sink. Then, Katie starts to prepare dinner. Kevin comes back into the kitchen and asks why Katie made him waste the entire afternoon running her to get her hair done and grocery shopping. He tells her how selfish she is, even though she had asked him about the hair appointment days ago and he agreed.

Kevin punches Katie in the kidney and she falls to the floor writhing in pain. Kevin returns to the living room. When dinner is almost done, Kevin comes back in the kitchen to apologize to Katie. He tells her how great she looks and starts to touch her and kiss her. He wants to have sex in the kitchen but Katie convinces him to go into the bedroom.

Katie changes her cries of pain into moans of pleasure while they are having sex. When they are done, she returns to the kitchen and he returns to the living room. Katie tries to focus on the few days from now when he won't be able to hit her ever again.

Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

Katie is telling Alex the story of how she left her abusive husband. In the story, Katie is still living with her husband. It is the three days leading up to the day she leaves Kevin. She's painting a picture of how controlling and abusive Kevin is. He accounts for every penny Katie spends. He wants her to always be sexy and pretty for him. He's very selfish, but he is the one who accuses Katie of being selfish. Katie is putting the final pieces of the puzzle together so that she can leave Kevin once and for all.



Chapters 19 and 20

Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

Alex assures Katie that she did the right thing by leaving Alex. He's trying to tell Katie how courageous she is. Katie mentions that her own father was a drunk, but that he wasn't violent. Alex ends up admitting that he loves Katie. As they continue to talk, Katie tells Alex that it wouldn't have done her any good to call the police because Kevin is a policeman with the Boston Police Department. She also admits that her real name is Erin.

Kevin is at a Memorial Day barbecue at his boss's house. He's lying to his co-workers, saying that Erin flew out again to New Hampshire to help her friend with cancer. He's explaining away Erin's absence. He watches as his boss loads the cooked burgers onto the dirty platter with grease and raw hamburger bits. Kevin's disgust increases as he watches flies swarm the plate when his boss puts it down on the table outside.

Kevin goes inside to wash his hands. He watches from inside as the burger platter empties so that he doesn't have to eat the dry and fly-ridden food. When his boss cooks up a new platter, the burger is dry and tasteless, so Kevin pretends to eat and dumps it in the trash when nobody is looking.

When Kevin arrives home, he resists the urge to call out for Erin. He looks around at the mess of a house that is usually pristine. He thinks about how it would be if Erin were here. In their bedroom, he can still smell her perfume and looks at the black dress she wore on New Year's hanging in the closet.

He's drinking way too much and not eating right. The house is a mess. Kevin's thoughts go back and forth on how great it was when Erin was here. He knows he treated her badly sometimes, but he thinks she is breaking their marriage vows by leaving him. He drinks until he passes out and then has more vodka with his toast the next morning before heading to work.

He gets called out from the precinct to investigate a murder. He questions the bystanders. Coffey, another detective, asks when Erin is coming back. Kevin says in a few days, but then they are heading to the Cape for some time away. When Coffey says his mom lives there, Kevin knows he needs to find a hotel and some restaurants to say they went to in case Coffey asks about their trip later.

Kevin returns to an empty house, where he watches the shows Erin used to like to watch while he drinks vodka on the couch. He thinks about how he threatened to kill any man that Erin slept with or that she cared about. He thinks about some of the time he hurt her, such as breaking two of her fingers in a drunken rage, but not letting her go to the hospital until days later when she could cover the bruises on her face with makeup.



Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

Kevin is abusive and controlling. Now that Erin is gone, he is starting to realize how badly he treated her and how she did everything for him. Now, it doesn't matter because it's too late. Kevin doesn't think that it's too late, however. He tells his co-worker that he and Erin are going away because Kevin intends on using his investigative skills to hunt Erin down. Kevin's previous threat to kill any man that Erin cares about or has sex with foreshadows Kevin attempting to kill Alex.

In addition to his abusive and controlling behavior, Kevin is also obsessive compulsive. He has a need for everything to be extremely neat and clean. Ironically, even with his compulsive behavior, he seems to be suffering from a bout of depression. The depression is what is causing him to continue to drink too much and allow the house to get cluttered with trash. Kevin is going through the motions because he is afraid that someone will find out that Erin has left him.



Chapters 21 and 22

Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

In the weeks following Katie telling Alex her story, they spend as much time together as possible. Sometimes they take the kids and sometimes Joyce forces Alex to leave the kids with her and go out alone. They end up spending more time at Katie's cottage than at Alex's house. Even in all the time they've spent together, they have not made love yet.

Alex thinks about the one time that he has killed a man. The man was strung out on drugs and dangerous. Alex pulled the trigger without any hesitation. Alex also thinks about Carly on her deathbed, telling him that she wants him to find someone who loves him and will make him happy.

Katie knows that she might be putting Alex in danger by falling for him. In spite of this, she can't help but push her nervous feelings aside. One night when she and Alex are talking, she tells him that she almost didn't make it out of New Hampshire and to Southport.

The morning after the hair salon, Kevin had awakened with a hangover. Erin had already been downstairs preparing his breakfast. He had said that he slept like a log and asked what time they went to bed. Erin had said around ten. When Kevin had asked what she'd be doing today, she had said the windows and laundry. Erin had gotten Kevin to talk about one of his cases for which he had to prep on Tuesday night. Erin had already known all of this.

The only relationship Katie had had was with the Feldmans, who live across the street. She had secretly visited them when she knew Kevin was at work and the other neighbors would not be watching. After Kevin had left for work, Katie called the phone company and lowering her voice to sound like a man added call forwarding to the house phone. She had tested it by forwarding the house line to the movie theater and then using her cell phone to call the land line. It had worked.

When Kevin left Monday, Katie had gone to the bathroom, cut off and dyed her hair dark brown. She added mascara to darken her eyebrows and bronzer to her skin. She cleaned the bathroom and packed her bag. She packed the cell phone and stolen identification—from someone who trusted her. She stuffed the duffel bag under her clothes and jacket to make it look like she is pregnant.

Katie then walked to the diner a few miles away to meet the Super Shuttle she had scheduled the day before. Kevin called.

At the bus terminal, she bought a ticket to Philadelphia. Kevin called again when she was on the bus. When she arrived in Philadelphia, she rented a room for three nights in Chinatown. Kevin called again that night. The next morning, Katie went out to look for a



job. On the third day in town, she had found work as a cocktail waitress. She had worked for the tip money and quit after finding another job at a diner, where she tells the manager her name is Erica, and renting another room.

One morning, she had seen a suspicious car with someone sitting in the driver's seat in front of her work. She had realized it's Kevin. She had returned to the motel, packed her things and bought a bus ticket to New York. She had gotten another ticket to Omaha and then Ohio. From Ohio, she had hitched a ride with a truck driver to North Carolina, rolled into Southport, rented the cottage and had no money left for food.

Katie had added call forwarding to the house phone because Kevin had constantly called to check up on her. This way, when she left, she could forward the house phone to her cell phone and still answer his calls. This would give her some lead time before he realized she had left.

Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

Alex too has killed someone. This foreshadows Alex and Kevin coming to blows with one another. It is going to be quite a battle between the two men—fighting over Erin/Katie. While it has been difficult for Alex to move on after Carly died, he has some peace of mind in the thought that him finding Katie and loving her is exactly what Carly wanted him to do.

Katie saying she almost didn't escape Kevin foreshadows her picking her story back up where she left off. Because Kevin is such a good detective, it is likely that he found clues that could have led him to believe that Erin had been plotting her escape. Obviously, this isn't the case, however.

Part of Kevin's problem is the alcohol. He is drinking too much prior to Katie leaving him. He seems as if he is a functioning alcoholic. He gets drunk all of the time, but he still manages to work and keep up appearances to others.

Erin plans to escape while Kevin is occupied with prepping for a trial on Tuesday. Since the trial has been moved to Marlborough because of the publicity, it will take up even more of Kevin's time and give Katie more time to escape. When Katie thinks about stealing the identification from someone who trusted her, she implies she stole Mrs. Feldman's identity.

Chapter 23 and 24

Chapter 23 and 24 Summary

In mid-June, Katie is leaving work when she spots Jo waiting outside for her. The two women haven't seen a lot of each other. Jo asks Katie to have a drink. When Jo steers the conversation to Alex, Jo warns Katie that if she doesn't want a commitment that she should leave Alex and the kids alone.

The weekend Kevin had told Coffey he and Erin would be going to Provincetown, Kevin takes off work to hunt for Erin. He goes to the bus station with her picture. When one of the workers says she had short brown hair, Kevin uses Photoshop to change the picture to show around to the bus drivers. He finally finds a bus driver who says he dropped her off in Philadelphia.

When Kevin gets to Philadelphia, he starts to think like Erin would. This is how he figures out that she rents a room in Chinatown. The guy at the first place she rented says he doesn't know where she went when she left there. Kevin ends up meeting a waitress at the diner where Erin worked, who tells him she was calling herself Erica. He waits for Erica to show up at work, but when she doesn't, he questions the people at the bus station in Philadelphia. Kevin finds out she went to New York, but from there, he can't figure out where she went.

Chapter 23 and 24 Analysis

Katie figures out that Jo was Alex and the kids' therapist after his wife died. Kevin thinks in very religious terms. For example, when he realizes that Erin stole money from him, he thinks how he knows it is wrong because the Bible says it is. Additionally, when Kevin looks into the eyes of murderers, he knows he's coming face-to-face with evil because the Bible says to kill a man is to do so in God's image.

Kevin has a very distorted view of reality. He thinks that he gave Erin a great life by buying her the house she wanted and never making her work. In spite of knowing that he beat her sometimes, he thinks that Erin loved him and that they had a great life together.



Chapters 25 and 26

Chapters 25 and 26 Summary

In spite of not seeing Jo since their conversation, Katie doesn't know what she should say to Jo. Katie understands that Jo cares about Alex and the kids. Katie is expecting Alex later that day because his visits are like a routine now. Katie thinks about how she feels loved for the first time in years.

Katie goes to the store and tells Alex that she wants to learn how to drive, so he starts giving her lessons. She tells Alex she wants to get her license. She also admits that her real color is blonde. Katie says she's sharing more information with him because he said she could trust him and she feels like she can tell him anything. At the end of her lesson, Alex has Katie park on a downtown street so they can celebrate with a coffee. Over coffee, Katie finishes her story of her escape from Kevin. Alex whispers to Katie that he loves her and she says she loves him too.

It's late June in Dorchester. Kevin continues to lie to everyone about Erin. Kevin uses one of the police officers he knows is having an affair with his underage babysitter to trace Erin's social security number. Kevin knows the police officer won't say anything because Kevin can turn him in and have him arrested. Kevin assumes Erin is using someone else's name and social security number.

Kevin goes to the library, just like Erin used to do. He's searching for the identity of the person Erin might have taken. He knows she would have been looking for someone about her same age who died. What he can't figure out is how she got the identification.

After a shift, Kevin goes to a bar with Coffey. A woman named Amber starts talking to Kevin. Even though Amber knows he's married, she admits to hitting on Kevin. They end back at Amber's place. While Kevin is with Amber, all he can think about is Erin, and how different Amber is from Erin.

When he gets home, he feels ashamed. He knows he's broken a commandment by cheating on his wife. He knows the Feldmans will figure out what he's done because he thinks the Feldmans are evil and birds of a feather flock together. Kevin starts to clean the house because he attributes his cheating with being dirty. When he's done, he goes to the grocery store to buy food and flowers. He sets the table, complete with flowers and lit candles.

Chapters 25 and 26 Analysis

Katie/Erin, is starting to let her guard down with Alex. This is an indication that she trusts him and that she does want to make a commitment to him, Josh and Kristen. Katie is setting down roots in Southport. She intends to stay there because she thinks that Kevin

would have found her by now if he was going to find her. Katie believes she is safe from Kevin now.

There is foreshadowing that Kevin is going to figure out the name and social security number Erin is using. Once he does this and Katie gets her driver's license, Kevin is going to be able to find her.

Kevin thinks about religion again after cheating on Erin. He thinks he broke a commandment by cheating on her. He correlates the dirty house with cheating because cheating is dirty. This propels him to start cleaning up the house until the wee hours of the morning.



Chapters 27 and 28

Chapters 27 and 28 Summary

In the second week of July, Katie gets her driver's license. She and Alex go to dinner that night in Wilmington. Alex says she needs a car. At the end of July, Alex takes a vacation. He spends the lazy days of summer with Katie and the kids. Kristen and Katie have a very close relationship, but Alex can't tell how Josh feels about Katie.

While Katie and Kristen are shopping, Alex takes Josh fishing. Josh asks Alex if he ever thinks about his mother. Alex admits he does and Josh admits he does too. They also talk about Katie thinking Josh is great. Josh says Katie is pretty great too.

Later, Josh asks Katie if she will take him shopping too. Over Chinese takeout, Katie gives Josh a present she bought for him while she and Kristen were shopping at the mall. After Katie leaves and the kids are sleeping, Alex is finding it hard to sleep. He gets up to pull out and go through some envelopes Carly gave to him with letters she wrote for him before her death. In addition to the letters Carly has written to Alex, she has included a letter to the woman Alex will be with in the future.

When Kevin arrives at work, his boss, Bill, calls him into his office. Bill says there had been a complaint about Kevin and now there is an Internal Affairs investigation about a recent murder investigation. The mother of the boy who was killed says Kevin cited from the Bible, saying she should take matters into her own hands because the killer is a sinner and that he's probably only going to get probation. Kevin denies saying any of that to the mother.

Bill questions Kevin about his drinking. Kevin denies it. Bill asks about Erin. Bill says he checked up on things and knows nobody has seen Erin in months. Bill says he knows Kevin has been drinking so he suspends Kevin from duty. Bill says several other people at the crime scene heard Kevin say those things to the mother of the dead boy. Kevin thinks in his head that this is all Erin's fault.

Chapters 27 and 28 Analysis

There is foreshadowing that Alex is going to buy Katie a car. Katie is slowly replacing Carly in the lives of Alex, Kristen and Josh. Josh and Alex are feeling some guilt over this. They don't want to forget Carly. They don't want to replace her. They simply want to love Katie for who she is and remember Carly for who she was when she was alive.

Alex takes out the letters and reads the one Carly wrote to him. He is doing this because he feels strongly enough about Katie that he plans to give the letter from Carly to Katie. He has some doubts about whether or not Katie is ready to receive the letter, however.

Kevin is obviously blacking out because he doesn't remember telling the mother of the dead boy anything about sin or the Bible.



Chapters 29 and 30

Chapters 29 and 30 Summary

Late in the summer, Alex takes Katie and the kids to see rodeo monkeys—monkeys riding dogs. The following week, Alex says the carnival is in town and he invites Katie to go with them on Saturday. He also asks Katie to watch the kids that night so that he can drive Joyce to pick up her daughter at the airport. Alex says it has to be at his place though so the kids can go to bed at a decent hour.

Alex asks Katie if she ever wants to have kids, but she says she's not sure. He asks Katie what she wants to do with her life. She says she doesn't want to be defined by what she does but rather by who she is. She admits that she would like to be a wife and mother.

When Alex drops off Katie, she says she has to go talk to Jo. As Katie approaches Jo's house, Jo waves, which makes Katie feel better. Jo apologizes to Katie. Katie tells Jo it's okay. She also says she's planning to stay in Southport for a while. Jo says she saw Katie driving the other day and then the two women joke around with each other a little bit.

Jo says she's happy for all of them. She says Katie and Alex look like they're in love. Katie admits she is. Katie asks Jo about what Carly was like.

Back in Boston, Mrs. Feldman dies. Kevin is only drinking. He's not eating and he hasn't talked to any of his co-workers. Kevin watches as a young woman emerges from the Feldman house and approaches Kevin's house. She asks if he's Kevin Tierney and introduces herself as Karen Feldman, the Feldman's daughter. Karen asks if Erin plans to attend the funeral and mentions Erin visiting the Feldmans.

Kevin says Erin isn't there, that she's helping a sick friend in Manchester. He tells Karen he's sorry for her loss and asks if they received the flowers. Karen says Mrs. Feldman said Erin reminded her of Katie, Karen's younger sister who passed away. Kevin dresses in a black suit and then walks into the Feldman house. He goes to the file cabinet where he finds a folder labeled Katie. He sees that in her graduation folder, Katie looks like Erin. He obtains Katie's social security number. He uses the police officer having an affair with his babysitter. The officer tracks down Katie Feldman from her newly issued driver's license.

Chapters 29 and 30 Analysis

Alex's insinuation that Katie can get married foreshadows Alex asking Katie to marry him. Katie is telling Alex that she does want to be his wife and that she does want to be the mother to his kids. Jo draws a line between the way that Carly was and the way Katie is.

Kevin is going to figure out that Erin assumed Katie Feldman's identity. Kevin is going to head to Southport to catch Katie and Alex by surprise.



Chapters 31 and 32

Chapters 31 and 32 Summary

Katie feels uneasy. At the library earlier, she had seen Gladys Feldman's obituary. She thinks about stealing the identification from the Feldman's file. She had stolen the birth certificate and the social security card from the file.

At dinner that night, Alex asks if Katie is okay. Katie says a friend of hers passed away. They talk about it taking five hours for Alex to drive Joyce to the airport and back. Alex asks Katie if she's thought about them getting married. She says she doesn't want to get married again. Katie admits to stealing her identity from people she cared about. She gets angry—accusing Alex of pushing her.

Katie asks him what he's going to do about it, hit her. He says he doesn't know what's going on with her. He says he was just trying to have a conversation. He thanks her for dinner, gets the kids and goes home.

Kevin is drinking on his drive to where Erin is living. He also has his gun, duct tape and other items in a duffel bag. He has her new address on a piece of paper on the seat beside him. He starts thinking about Erin and a new man that she must be with by now. Kevin thinks about them laughing at him. Kevin even knows that Erin works at Ivan's. Kevin drives all night until he reaches North Carolina.

Chapters 31 and 32 Analysis

Katie feels uneasy because her intuition tells her that Kevin is going to find her and that everything in her life that has been going so well is about to fall apart.

There is foreshadowing that Kevin will show up in Southport while Alex is driving Joyce to Raleigh. Since it will take about five hours to drive back and forth, this is plenty of time for Kevin to torment Katie and the kids.



Chapters 33 and 34

Chapters 33 and 34 Summary

Katie wakes up exhausted from tossing and turning all night after her argument with Alex the night before. Katie's intuition is telling her something is wrong, but she doesn't know what it is. Katie goes to Jo's house and tells Jo she and Alex had a fight last night. Jo urges Katie to go to Alex and apologize, assuring her it's never too late to apologize.

Katie goes into her house and gets ready. She gets on her bicycle and heads toward Alex's store. When Katie sees Alex, she apologizes. Alex accepts her apology. Alex is being exceptionally quiet, but when she tries to leave, he stops her.

Kevin hopes Erin is at home when he arrives. He drives through Wilmington and then reaches Southport. He detours around the fair, which is the fair Katie, Alex and the kids are heading to today. Kevin stops at Alex's store to get gas and buy a Red Bull, but he doesn't know whose store it is. Kevin parks his car at the store, packs his duffel bag and heads toward Erin's cottage.

Kevin walks into the cottage he assumes is Erin's. When he finds a utility bill in the name of Katie Feldman, Kevin knows he's in the right place.

Chapters 33 and 34 Analysis

Katie's intuition is that Kevin is barreling toward her. She just doesn't know it yet. Katie insinuates that tonight after Alex gets back from the airport might be the night that they have sex for the first time. There is some foreshadowing that Jo will spot Kevin and that he will be forced to kill her to keep her from telling Erin that he is there looking for her.

Katie might see Kevin's car in the parking lot of the store and realize he is in town. This could prevent Kevin from getting to Katie.



Chapters 35 and 36

Chapters 35 and 36 Summary

Alex, Katie and the kids ride their bikes to the carnival. They ride the rides, play some games, eat lunch and hear a country band. Kevin wakes up a few hours later in Katie's bed with a hangover. He makes the bed and eats some of the leftover tuna casserole in the fridge. He doesn't eat too much because he doesn't want her to know that he's been there.

He leaves the house and walks back to his car at the store. Kevin heads to Ivan's looking for Katie. He doesn't see Erin there, so he asks the hostess if Erin's working today. The hostess asks who, so Kevin corrects himself and says Katie, Katie Feldman. The hostess says she's not working but that she thinks she saw Katie walk by earlier. The hostess suggests Katie might be at the fair.

Kevin is walking through the fair with the gun in the waistband of his pants. He pulls the hat he bought down on his head. Kevin assumes Erin is at the fair with another man, which makes him angry. Then he decides he loves her. Kevin reaches the swings ride, which is where the kids are riding and Alex and Katie are waiting on the side. Kevin spots Erin standing there with a gray-haired man who has his arm around her waist.

Katie, Alex and the kids get back to their bikes to head home. In her head, Katie is looking forward to watching a movie with the kids tonight and then hopefully sleeping with Alex when he returns from the airport tonight. They don't notice the man in sunglasses and a hat, which is Kevin, watching them.

Kevin follows them. He reaches for his gun and slides it under his shirt. He takes off the hat. His thoughts are ricocheting in his head. He continues to imagine Erin and the gray haired man laughing at him and making fun of him as Kevin gets to his car to continue to follow them. Kevin assumes they are going to the gray haired man's house. Kevin loses them in the crowd because of the barricades.

Chapters 35 and 36 Analysis

Katie is scrutinizing the crowd. Even though Kevin is wearing a hat to try to disguise himself, she might spot Kevin before he is able to reach her. Kevin is having a hard time keeping it straight in his head as to whether he loves Erin or he hates her for being with another man. Kevin is going to cause a scene at the fair. He might even pull the gun and make a scene in public; not only will this put Katie in danger but it will put everyone else in danger too.

Kevin is taking in all of the touching between Alex and Erin, which is causing him to get angrier and angrier. Kevin's thoughts are ricocheting in his head because he is mentally unstable.



Chapters 37 and 38

Chapters 37 and 38 Summary

Katie, Alex and the kids return to Alex's house above the store. Kristen and Alex go over what to give the kids for dinner and what time to put them to bed. Alex says he has to leave in about an hour. When Alex is showering, Katie starts to think about scanning the crowds back at the fair. She realizes she had been searching for Kevin. After his shower, Alex has a sandwich, kisses them all goodbye and leaves. Katie thinks it's going to be a long night.

Kevin stops to buy four more bottles of vodka. With the fair, traffic and barricades, he's been driving around for hours looking for Katie. Everything is blurry because Kevin is drunk. He goes by Katie's cottage but she isn't there. Kevin hears Coffey and Ramirez, his coworkers, in his head laughing at him. They're saying how they both slept with Erin. They're also saying that she slept with half of the station behind Kevin's back.

Kevin sees a store up ahead with a sign announcing gas and food. As he bends over to vomit, when he stands back up, he sees four bicycles parked there.

Chapters 37 and 38 Analysis

Katie subconsciously knows she was being followed at the fair. She could sense that Kevin was there, even though she never officially saw him. The alcohol, combined with his mental instability, is severely affecting Kevin's thought process. He actually imagines scenarios in his head, but these scenarios are very real to Kevin, instead of being illusions or made up.

Kevin has made his way to the back of the store, where the four bicycles are parked. Kevin now knows where Alex, Katie and the kids are. The man hunting his prey is a metaphor for Kevin hunting Erin.



Chapters 39 and 40

Chapters 39 and 40 Summary

Katie is dreaming that she is back at the fair. She sees a man with a baseball cap and sunglasses in the crowd. She recognizes his walk. The man looks as if he is a hunter hunting in the brush for his prey.

Katie and the kids are in the house, watching a movie and eating dinner. Then, Katie puts the kids to bed. Katie drifts off to sleep on the couch and images start floating through her head. Kevin is standing outside, drinking his vodka and watching the window upstairs in the apartment. Kevin thinks about a man that he sees smoking and gets an idea. He thinks of how fire purifies things in the Bible.

Kevin goes into the store to buy something flammable. When there isn't enough lighter fluid on the shelf, he buys two gas cans and fills them up with gas. Kevin waits for Roger to close up the store and leave. He grabs another bottle of vodka to drink while he waits. At the same time, Alex is already heading back and is in Wilmington with Joyce and her daughter.

After Roger locks up the store and leaves, Kevin pours the gas all around the perimeter of the building. Then, Kevin breaks one of the windows in the store and he lets himself in. He looks around until he sees the big propane grill in the back. Kevin turns on the gas and then throws Roger's apron on it so that the flames will start.

Upstairs, Katie is dreaming. She and Jo are at the fair riding the Ferris wheel. Jo warns Katie that he's here. When Katie asks who, Jo says Katie knows. Then, Jo asks Katie if she smells smoke. Katie wakes up realizing that there's a fire. Katie gets the kids out of their beds and ends up dropping them out of Josh's bedroom window to the ledge about four feet below, where they can then jump to the ground.

Katie jumps down after them, but hurts her ankle. When she looks up, she sees Kevin standing over her holding a gun on her. As Alex is driving into town, he can see the orange glow in the sky. He has a bad feeling.

Katie is able to get up. She tells the kids to run and then she makes a run for it as well. Kevin pulls the trigger, but Erin doesn't fall. Instead, Kevin feels fire burning in his stomach. He falls on the porch. He begs Erin to come home with him. Kevin is gone.

Chapters 39 and 40 Analysis

Kevin is gone because he is dead.



Chapters 41 and 42

Chapters 41 and 42 Summary

The hospital keeps Katie most of the night under observation. Katie waits in the waiting room because Alex's skull is almost broken all the way open. Joyce takes the kids home. When Katie goes back to see Alex in the ICU, he has a bandaged wrapped around his head and his eyes only half open.

He asks how the kids are. He asks how she is and they tell each other they love each other. He asks her what happened and she tells him about the last twelve hours. The next morning, the kids come to visit for a few minutes. Later in the afternoon, his headache is gone and he's more coherent. The following day, Alex is released. The cops question them. The sheriff also tells her how high the alcohol content was in Kevin's blood.

Katie doesn't tell Alex or the sheriff that she wept for both Kevin and Alex after Kevin was dead. She somehow remembers their rare happy moments together. Later, as they stand looking at the burned store, Alex asks the firemen to try to find his safe. Alex is able to save one of Josh's fishing poles. Katie says she's sorry. Alex says that they survived and that's all that matters.

When Alex says he's sorry for her loss, Katie says she never wanted Kevin to die; she just wanted to be left alone. Alex says he still loves Katie but she needs to figure out if her feelings have changed. She says her feelings haven't changed either. A fireman yells out that he found the safe.

Katie drives home. She walks toward Jo's with the letter in her hand that Alex had given to her. The cottage is in disarray. There is no wind chime, the windows are dirty, and the doorknob is rusted. The closer Katie gets to the cottage, the more the cottage seems to decay. When Katie peers inside one of the windows, everything is dirty, the furniture is broken. It's as if none of the work Katie remembers having done had ever been done. It's as if Jo never existed.

Chapters 41 and 42 Analysis

Primarily, Alex wants the safe because of the letter that is in there from Carly. It seems as if Katie imagined Jo the entire time. It is possible that Jo is really Carly—the ghost or spirit of Carly.



Chapter 43

Chapter 43 Summary

Katie stumbles back into her house. She wonders if she's gone crazy—creating an imaginary friend as an adult. She starts to question whether Alex, Kristen and Josh are real. Katie reaches for the letter and she's scared to open the envelope. She opens the letter and starts to read it.

The letter from Carly says that for most of her life her friends called her Jo. She remembers the night of the fire when she looked at the portrait hanging on the wall of Alex's bedroom. She remembers thinking now that Carly looked a lot like Jo. Now, Katie realizes that Jo is gone and that she'll never get a chance to enjoy the good times with Jo again.

Katie goes inside the cottage and finishes reading the letter. Carly asks Katie to love Alex forever, if she loves him now. She also asks Katie to love the children the same way she does. Carly says if Alex has chosen you that she wants Katie to believe that she has chosen her as well.

Chapter 43 Analysis

The letter Carly writes is to the person that Alex chooses. In this case, it is Katie. For Katie, the letter is affirmation for her that she and Alex do belong together.



Characters

Katie Feldman

Katie Feldman is the main character of the novel. She works as a waitress at Ivan's and is 27 years old. She rents a small cottage nearby, which is an old hunting cabin sitting at the end of a gravel road. She dyes her hair a brown color and cuts her own hair. Naturally, she is a blonde and her real name is Erin Tierney. She steals the identity of Katie Feldman from her old neighbors. Katie is their daughter who died. While she is friendly and efficient as a waitress, she doesn't tend to be too chatty with the customers or even her co-workers.

Katie chooses to keep to herself because she is hiding from her abusive husband. Erin had come to Southport after running away from her husband and marriage in Dorchester, Massachusetts. After living in Southport for a few months, Katie starts to relax. She gains enough weight to look healthy. She also gets rid of the dark circles under her eyes from not sleeping. Katie ends up learning how to drive and gets her driver's license. Additionally, Katie and Alex fall in love with each other.

Alex Wheatley

Alex Wheatley has silvery gray hair. He also has two older brothers. He served in the Army with the investigation unit. He retired as a major when he was thirty-two years old. Alex had been a newlywed and his wife, Carly, was pregnant when they moved to Southport. They had moved to Southport because it was his wife's hometown. His father-in-law sells him the family business, so he trades in his law enforcement career for running an old-fashioned country store.

Alex now has two children, Kristen, five, and Josh, seven. He is a single father now that Carly is dead. Because of Alex's investigative background, he notices that Katie is trying to hide something when she comes in to shop for groceries at his store. Eventually, he realizes that she has the same habits as abused women that he would question when he was in the military.

Alex ends up falling in love with Katie. He also gets Katie to tell him the entire story about her husband, why she left him and how she was able to escape. When Alex decides that he wants to spend the rest of his life with Katie, he gives her a letter that Carly wrote to Alex's future spouse when Carly was dying.

Melody

Melody is another waitress at Ivan's. She tends to be a gossip, so Katie doesn't say too much to Melody. Melody has auburn hair, green eyes and is about 25 years old. She is dating a guy named Steve who makes deliveries for the local home improvement store.



Ivan

Ivan is the owner of Ivan's. This is the restaurant where Katie works as a waitress. Ivan has owned the restaurant for 30 years. Originally, Ivan comes from Russia.

Ricky

Ricky is the cook at Ivan's. Katie estimates that he is younger than she is. Ricky has asked Katie to go on a date, but she turned him down. Ricky is always offering Katie a ride home from work.

Irv Benson

Irv Benson is Katie's landlord. He offers to pay for the supplies for Katie to spruce up the cottage. Irv also tells the new tenant of the other cottage, Jo, that she and Katie are neighbors.

Jo

Jo rents the cottage that is next door to Katie's cottage. Jo is in her mid-thirties and has unruly, curly, brown hair. Jo says she grew up in Southport. She left and now she has returned. Jo and Katie become friends—sharing a bottle of wine while they talk and going out for a drink at a local bar after Katie gets off work. At the end of the novel, Katie finds out that Jo is the name that Carly went by for most of her life. Katie also realizes that either Jo is a figment of her imagination or a spirit that appears to Katie as if Jo is real.

Kevin Tierney

Kevin Tierney is Erin's husband. He is also a Boston Police detective. Kevin seems to be obsessive compulsive so everything always has to be clean, neat and orderly. Kevin often abuses Erin, both physically and emotionally. When Erin leaves him, Kevin lies to his boss and his co-workers about Erin helping a sick friend in New Hampshire.

Additionally, Kevin is an alcoholic. His drink of choice is vodka because nobody can smell it on his breath. He drinks often throughout the day. In spite of his drinking, he is a good detective. He uses his investigation skills to find Erin after she runs away from him the third time, which is when she is living in Southport.

Joyce

Joyce is retired. She is in her seventies. She works for Alex at the store. She also babysits for Alex's kids.

Roger

Roger is the cook for the grill at Alex's store. He is also the one working when Kevin comes in to buy the gas to start the fire. When Roger locks up the store and leaves, Kevin breaks in and starts the fire.



Objects/Places

Ivan's

Ivan's is the restaurant where Katie works with Melody and Ricky. Katie waitresses at the restaurant, which has been around for 30 years. Along with tourists, Ivan's also draws a crowd of regular customers. When Kevin tracks Erin to Southport, he also figures out that she works at Ivan's as Katie.

Southport

Southport is the small town where Katie lives. Southport is an historic town with a population of only a couple thousand people. Southport sits where the Cape Fear River meets the Intracoastal.

Katie's Cottage

Katie rents a small cottage in Southport. The rent includes the cottage furnishings. The cottage sits at the end of a gravel road, with another identical cottage nearby. The two cottages are former hunting cabins that are up against a wooded area. Katie rents the cottage because it is out of the way, the rent is inexpensive and she didn't have to worry about buying furniture. The cottage has one bedroom, a bathroom, kitchen and small living room area. The front porch even has rocking chairs.

Country Store

The country store is the business that Alex owns. He bought it from his father-in-law when he and Carly first moved to Southport. Katie shops in the country store for her groceries, which is how she and Alex meet. Alex lives in an apartment above the store with his two children, Kristen and Josh. This is the same country store that Kevin burns down when Kevin finds out that Katie is upstairs.

Wind Chime

Jo hangs a wind chime on the front porch of her cottage. She tells Katie that she likes the sound of it. The wind chime is missing when Katie returns to the cottages after Kevin attacks them. The missing wind chime is one of the ways that Katie figures out that Jo was never her neighbor and never living in the cottage next door to Katie.



Fishing Pier

The fishing pier is behind the country store. Josh, Alex's son, loves to sit on the fishing pier and fish. He falls off the fishing pier and Alex has to save him from drowning.

Carly's Portrait

Carly's portrait is hanging in Alex's bedroom. When Katie runs into his bedroom to escape during the fire, she remembers looking at Carly's portrait hanging on the wall. She also remembers thinking that Carly and Jo look alike.

Vodka

Vodka is Kevin Tierney's drink of choice. He is drinking vodka by the bottle while he's married to Erin, but he increases the amount he is drinking after Erin leaves him. Kevin gets very drunk on vodka when he's in Southport, which makes his blood alcohol level extremely high at the time of his death.

Driver's License

Katie is able to get her driver's license before the end of the novel. Not only does this allow Katie to drive, but it is also how Kevin tracks Erin down. One of Kevin's police officers finds the driver's license for which Katie applied and gives Kevin the information so he can find Erin.

Letter

When Carly is dying, she writes a letter to the woman with whom Alex chooses to spend his life after Carly dies. Carly writes the letter to tell the woman about Alex and her kids, and that she has chosen the woman because Alex has chosen her. Alex ends up giving the letter to Katie because he intends on spending the rest of his life with her.



Themes

Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. The two primary types of relationships the novel covers are friendships and romantic relationships. Additionally, the novel covers family relationships.

Friendship is the first type of relationship the novel tackles. It seems as if Katie doesn't have many friends because she has just moved to Southport. Additionally, since she is trying to hide from her husband, Katie is also keeping a low profile, which inhibits her from making many friends. This changes, however, when Jo moves into the cottage next door to Katie. For the first time since she got married, Katie finds a true friendship with Jo. They talk, share bottles of wine, give each other advice and help each other. In the end, however, it turns out that Jo wasn't real, but either an illusion or the spirit of Carly.

Romantic relationships are another big part of the theme of the novel. Erin falls in love with Kevin because he saves her from being raped one night. After a year or two of marriage, however, Kevin changes. He becomes very controlling and abusive toward Erin. Even though Erin loves Kevin, she fears for her life so she ends up leaving Kevin.

After Katie moves to Southport, she tries to avoid falling in love again. When Katie meets and starts spending time with Alex, however, Katie does fall in love with him. In turn, Alex is still trying to overcome the death of his wife. Once he meets and starts spending time with Katie, he realizes that he is ready to fall in love again, and he falls in love with Katie.

The novel also touches on family relationships. Since their mother died when they were younger, Kristen and Josh form a bond with Katie that is similar to that of mother and child. While they are not trying to replace their mother, the kids love Katie as if she is a mother to them. Even though Josh and Kristen are not Katie's biological children, she loves and cares for the children as if they are her own.

Death

One of the primary themes of the novel is the rite of passage of death. The final rite of passage that a human being faces is that of dying. Each person also faces death with different approaches. In Carly's situation, she knows she is dying, so she takes steps to prepare her husband and children for life after her death. At moments when Carly is lucid, she writes a letter to Alex to help him move on and cope after her death. Carly also writes a letter that she wants Alex to pass on to the woman with whom he plans to be for the rest of his later.



Not only does Carly have to deal with her death, but her family does as well. Because the children are young when Carly dies, they miss having a motherly figure in their lives, which is one of the reasons they bond so well with Katie. Josh, the older of the two children, even worries that he is forgetting his mother. Alex not only has to deal with his own emotions in the aftermath of his wife's death, but he is also concerned for the well-being of his children.

Domestic Violence

Another major theme in the novel is domestic violence. Kevin Tierney is physically and emotionally abusive to his wife, Erin. The domestic violence starts when Kevin isolates Erin from her family and friends. Slowly, he becomes more and more controlling. He makes Erin show him receipts to account for every penny she spends. He also prohibits Erin from getting a driver's license so that he has to drive her everywhere.

His emotional abuse turns into physical abuse. Kevin starts slapping Erin, punching her and even breaking bones at times. After he abuses Erin, he always tells her he is sorry and that he'll never do it again. Yet, he always does. This is the typical cycle of domestic violence. The only way Erin could stop it is to run and hide from Kevin. This is especially true because Erin feels as if the police would never be able to help her since Kevin is a detective.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view, from the perspective of the author. The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with the main character, Katie Feldman. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside each of the character's heads, thoughts and inner struggles. The reader cares what happens to the main character. The point of view also allows the author to inject his own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters.

Setting

The novel starts out in Southport, North Carolina. When Kevin Tierney comes into the novel, the primary setting switches back and forth between Massachusetts and Southport. The novel is set primarily in the small town of Southport during the 21st century. The main characters are involved in daily life in a small town as Katie tries to restart her life after running away from her abusive husband.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the main character, Katie, is really Erin Tierney. However, as events unfold, Katie's true identity is a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The language is from the 21st century, which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand.

Structure

The novel is divided into 43 chapters. Each chapter ranges from six pages to 20 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and with some dialogue. The narrator injects his own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing his opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel. The narrator switches back and forth between the past and the present.

The past represents the time when Katie was Erin Tierney. The present represents the time when Erin Tierney becomes Katie Feldman. The novel contains one main plot and

several subplots. The main plot is that of human relationships—family, friendships and romantic relationships. One subplot is death. Another subplot is domestic violence.



Quotes

"Dating a guy from work, I mean. Since then, I've kind of made it a rule not to do it again."

Chap. 1, p. 4

"Makes sense to me. Sometimes starting over is exactly what a person needs."

Chap. 2, p. 8

"My favorite Dickens novel is Great Expectations."

Chap. 3, p. 19

"I'm a grief counselor."

Chap. 4, p. 23

"I get the sense you're a pretty good father."

Chap. 5, p. 29

"Let's do something for Miss Katie."

Chap. 6, p. 36

"There's always something I can do."

Chap. 7, p. 40

"You've been giving me things and you've got to stop."

Chap. 8, p. 44

"Then it's okay to talk about her. She's part of who you are."

Chap. 9, p. 49

"I'm glad you decided to come today because I'm having a great time."

Chap. 10, p. 52

"Because my dad says that you're his friend."

Chap. 11, p. 55



"It was a family day."

Chap. 12, p. 59

"She wanted him to know, if only because she had the strange sense that he was the kind of man she could fall in love with, even if she didn't want to."

Chap. 13, p. 62

"My dad didn't want to cook for us tonight."

Chap. 14, p. 64

"It's just dinner."

Chap. 15, p. 68

"I want to tell you something. I want to tell you about me."

Chap. 16, p. 77

"I don't drive. My husband drives me when I need to go somewhere."

Chap. 17, p. 79

"My only day off and you pick that day to get your damn hair done in the middle of the city! And then go grocery shopping!"

Chap. 18, p. 84

"Not many women have the strength to do what you did. That's what I see now, and that's what I've always seen when I look at you."

Chap. 19, p. 88

"Erin's back in Manchester."

Chap. 20, p. 89

"I want you to meet someone new."

Chap. 21, p. 97

"It's probably bad service where you are."

Chap. 22, p. 108



"Love doesn't mean anything if you're not willing to make a commitment."
Chap. 23, p. 114

"Safe. That was the word she used. Safe"
Chap. 24, p. 120

"Why the sudden rush to learn how to drive?"
Chap. 25, p. 122

"I'm married."
Chap. 26, p. 129

"And that's why I think somehow we were meant to find each other."
Chap. 27, p. 131

"Stop lying to me! I can smell your breath from here."
Chap. 28, p.138

"Your place? I never get to spend time at your house."
Chap. 29, p. 139

"My mom told me she reminded her of Katie."
Chap. 30, p. 143

"You're talking to someone who only has secrets."
Chap. 31, p. 149

"I'm coming, Erin. I'll be there soon."
Chap. 32, p. 152

"He'll forgive you, though."
Chap. 33, p. 153

"The only problem was that she wasn't here, and he didn't know when she'd return."
Chap. 34, p.157



"Is Erin working today?"

Chap. 35, p. 160

"Watch where you're going."

Chap. 36, p. 167

"Drive safely, the kids will be fine."

Chap. 37, p. 170

"Damn!"

Chap. 38, p. 170

"And, of course, the man she'd seen, a man who'd been moving like a hunter through the brush, in search of game."

Chap. 39, p. 174

"That's a lot of gas to carry."

Chap. 40, p. 176

"Then we'll find a way to work through all this together because I know I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

Chap. 41, p. 194

"One by one, the answers came as quickly as she could think of them: the reason she'd never learned Jo's last name or saw her drive a car... the reason Jo never invited her over or accepted her offer to help her paint... how Jo had been able to magically appear at Katie's side in jogging clothes..."

Chap. 42, p. 196

"If Alex has chosen you, then I want you to believe that I have chosen you as well."

Chap. 4, p. 200



Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Katie? Why do you think she avoids making friends when she moves to Southport? Do you think she knows that Kevin will find her when she receives her driver's license? What do you think happens to Katie now that Kevin is dead? Do you think she goes back to being Erin?

Discuss the relationship between Katie and Jo. Are they friends, neighbors, or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? Why does Jo continuously offer advice to Katie? Why doesn't anyone else see Jo? Do you think Jo is Carly? Do you think Jo is Carly's spirit, a figment of Katie's imagination, or something else?

Who is the true Alex Wheatley? Why do you think he notices so many details about Katie when she is shopping in his store? Do you think Alex is ready to move on when he meets Katie, or that meeting Katie helps him to move on from his wife's death? Does Katie's relationship with Kristen have anything to do with Alex and Katie getting together?

Who is Kevin Tierney? Is he a tortured soul or simply an abusive man? Why do you think Kevin never tries to get help for his abusive behavior? What role does Kevin's job play in helping him to continue his bad behavior?

Discuss the relationship between Katie and Alex. Why do you think Katie tells Alex the truth? Why do you think Alex continues to play along with Katie's secrets? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Katie feel about Alex? How does Alex feel about Katie? How do Alex's feelings change after he finds out that she is Erin? What does he do about it? What happens to Alex?

Discuss the relationship between Katie, Josh and Kristen. Why do you think Katie cares about them so much? Is there true competition in their relationships? How does Katie feel about the children? How do the children feel about Katie? How do Katie's feelings change? What does she do about it?

Discuss Erin's domestic abuse. What impact does it have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?