

Spencerville Study Guide

Spencerville by Nelson Demille

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Plot Summary

Spencerville is a novel by bestselling writer Nelson DeMille. In this novel, Keith Landry has been forced to retire after twenty-five years as an intelligence expert in the Army. Keith has returned to his hometown, Spencerville, in hopes of recovering his pride and perhaps reconnecting with old friends. One of these old friends is Annie Baxter, wife of the town police chief and ex-lover to Keith. Things become complicated as Annie and Keith renew their relationship under the watchful eye of Annie's controlling and abusive husband. Spencerville is a novel that pushes the boundaries of social convention and shows just how far one man can go for the woman he loves.

Keith Landry drives to his family's farm in Spencerville, Ohio within days of being forced to resign from the Army and his job with the National Security Council. Although his parents and his siblings are all in different states enjoying their own lives, Keith has chosen to return to the small town where he grew up, a town he feels has not really seen in more than twenty years despite frequent trips home. Keith finds himself thinking of Annie Baxter, his college lover, as he returns to town, aware that she still lives there with her husband.

Keith is unaware that Annie's life has become a prison. Annie's husband, Cliff Baxter, is the police chief, and he uses his resources to keep her a prisoner in her own home out of fear that she will take a lover behind his back. Annie has never cheated on her husband, but when she learns Keith has returned to town, the idea of an affair becomes a possibility. Annie does not go out of her way to see Keith, but a chance meeting in town reminds them both of the unfinished business left between them.

Keith reunites with other friends in Spencerville, including a couple from college who were anti-war activist during Vietnam even as Keith found himself drafted into the same war. This couple, Jeffery and Gail Porter, are unhappy with the control Chief Baxter has over the town and they are plotting to push him out of office. This includes a public meeting that exposes all of Baxter's illegal acts, including forcing young women to become his lovers.

As the town is pushed into a growing atmosphere of tension, Keith and Annie reunite and become lovers once more. Keith and Annie plan to run away together, but before they can meet at the appointed time, Keith finds himself forced to return to Washington, DC. Unable to return in time due to a storm, Keith misses his meeting with Annie. However, Annie comes to him the following day and they take that moment to make their move.

Within hours of Annie and Keith leaving Spencerville, Chief Baxter issues a state wide APB for them. Unable to fly out of state and with their car listed on the APB, Keith and Annie hide up in a hotel. Unfortunately, they are unaware that Chief Baxter placed a tracking device on Keith's car. They are quickly found. Baxter beats Keith, leaving him for dead, and kidnaps Annie. Keith wakes a couple of days later in an unfamiliar

hospital. Aware that he is most likely still wanted for kidnapping, Keith sneaks out the door.

Keith traces Annie and her husband to a cabin in Michigan. With the help of an old high school buddy, Keith makes the trip to the cabin and stakes it out, trying to find a vulnerable moment to attack Baxter without placing Annie in harm's way. The moment comes and Keith manages to get into the house under the distraction of his high school buddy's death. A fight ensues in the dark. Annie manages to get free and she kills her husband by slamming a fireplace poker into his head. Keith and Annie escape, leaving Keith's old spy buddies to clean up the mess.

Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary

Keith Landry is a career soldier who served several tours of duty in Vietnam and has functioned as a spy in the twenty years since the war ended. With the end of the cold war, Keith finds himself without a job, so he has decided to return to his old hometown.

In chapter one, Keith drives to Spencerville, Ohio to the family farm that was deserted five years previously when his parents retired to Florida. Keith enters the house, still consumed with anger at his forced retirement and wondering how long he will remain in his hometown.

In chapter two, Annie Baxter watches as her husband finishes his dinner and prepares to return to his job as chief of police in their small town. Annie wonders if her husband knows that she knows he uses work as an excuse to hide his infidelity. As Annie goes outside to feed the dogs, she watches a police car drive by. Her husband, Cliff Baxter, has his men watch the house constantly out of fear that Annie will take a lover, something she has never considered doing. As Annie sits on the porch with her dog, she caresses a letter in her pocket that was returned from the offices of Keith Landry. Annie is afraid the return of this letter means that Keith is dead.

In chapter three, Keith walks through the farmhouse, reflecting on his current situation and his future. Keith believes someone should return to the farm and farm the land, but there is no one in his family in a position to do so. This makes Keith nostalgic for his uncle who was killed in Korea.

In chapter four, Annie Baxter wakes long before dawn, alone. Annie calls the police station to speak to her husband, but learns he is not there. Annie calls Cliff's car phone, but cannot get an answer there, either. A few minutes later, however, Cliff calls her back, obviously tipped off to her need to speak with him by one of his men. Annie goes into Cliff's office and cuts the security cord on his guns, takes a rifle, loads it, and waits for her husband at the kitchen table. When Cliff comes home, Annie holds the gun on him, threatening to kill him unless he admits to his infidelities. However, Annie finds herself unable to kill her husband, so instead she fires at the ceiling. This causes Cliff to wet his pants. Cliff becomes angry and holds Annie against the floor and tells her that he is going to make her stay there until she loses her bladder as well. However, they are interrupted by one of Cliff's men who has come to see if he is needed. Cliff changes his clothes and returns to work.

Chapters 1-4 Analysis

These early chapters introduce each of the main characters. First, the reader meets Keith Landry, an ex-spy who found himself to be unwanted after the end of the Cold War. Keith has been forced into early retirement and decided to come home to the

family farm until he decides what he wants to do next. Keith's decision to come to Spencerville seems almost like an act of habit, a desire to go home again, until the reader realizes that the one who got away, his first lover, still lives in Spencerville. This makes the reader wonder if Keith has come back for her despite his apparent indifference to the existence of Annie Baxter.

Annie Baxter, it turns out, has been married for more than twenty years to a controlling, abusive husband. Cliff Baxter uses his power as the chief of police to keep tabs on his beautiful wife out of fear that she might one day cheat on him. However, Annie has never cheated, although she knows her husband has, and she feels like a prisoner. In fact, Annie pulls a gun on Cliff in the fourth chapter, showing the reader just how trapped and desperate she feels. Annie wants out of her marriage and she has lost the final hope she once held onto, the hope that Keith Landry would one day come back for her, so she has taken a drastic step to end her marriage. It does not work, however, and the reader wonders how long it will be before Annie tries again.

Chapters 5-8

Chapters 5-8 Summary

In chapter five, Keith Landry drives around the county, looking at familiar landmarks that have changed. Keith stops at the gas station and fills up, asking questions about the job prospects in town. Keith then continues on, stopping at the cemetery to visit the graves of relatives and then he drives past the Baxter home, intent on stopping, but finding himself unable to do so. At the same time, Cliff Baxter stops at the gas station and learns that Keith is back in town.

In chapter six, Cliff Baxter drives around town, thinking about Keith Landry. Cliff knows that his wife and Keith were lovers in both high school and throughout college. Cliff wonders if Keith has come back to claim his ex-lover. Cliff is determined to keep that from happening. With this thought on his mind, Cliff goes to the home of Sherry Kolarik. Cliff forces Sherry to re-enact the first time they met when Cliff forced Sherry to perform a sexual act in exchange for him paying a couple of traffic tickets for her. Afterward, Cliff contacts one of his officers and learns that he could not get any information from the DMV on Keith Landry.

In chapter seven, Keith Landry goes to Baxter Motors, the Ford dealership in Spencerville owned by Cliff Baxter's family. Keith suggests he might want to trade in his SAAB, but he and the salesman end up talking about Cliff, something Keith suspects will get him in trouble. Keith then drives through town, remembering good times with Annie and his other friends, wondering how Cliff Baxter feels about him being back in town. In fact, he can recall Cliff in high school, attempting to bully Keith but never making much of an effort.

In chapter eight, a week has passed and Keith has gotten settled. Keith spends a week working around the farm and then goes into Toledo to trade in his SAAB for a Chevy Blazer. In the mailbox, Keith finds a letter from Annie. This causes Keith to recall their last few times together before he went to Vietnam. Annie was against the war and this caused some tension between them that eventually led to their split. Keith also recalls his heartbreak and the terrible time he had getting over her. In fact, Keith wonders if he ever got over her based on the fact that he never could commit to a woman again after Annie. However, Keith and Annie had continued a correspondence over the years, but it was usually casual, especially on his part after he realized her memory was holding him back.

Chapters 5-8 Analysis

In these chapters, the reader learns more about Annie and Keith's relationship. They were deeply in love in college, but it appears that the Vietnam War tore them apart. Annie did not understand why Keith had to go fight in the war and never realized that

Keith was never too clear on that fact, either. They never really ended their relationship, it continued in letters for more than twenty years, but Annie moved on with her life and married. Keith knows he never got over Annie, so the reader can finally see that Annie is a big reason why Keith came back to Spencerville. It appears that now that Keith's commitment to the Army has ended, he feels safe returning to the one love of his life.

Even as Keith realizes he still loves Annie, Annie's husband is abusing his job to force women to have sex with him and to keep track of Keith. This is an outrageous abuse of power that leaves the reader wondering just how far Cliff might go to keep his wife from reuniting and possibly running away with Keith.

Chapters 9-12

Chapters 9-12 Summary

In chapter nine, another week passes. Keith spends the Labor Day holiday with his Aunt Betty and finds himself the subject of several attempts at matchmaking. Despite his single status, Keith feels as though he is not really available to date. However, he does take one woman's number. A few days later, an old college buddy of Keith's shows up at his door. Jeffrey Porter was against the Vietnam War, a fact that tore he and Keith apart twenty years ago. In fact, Jeffrey wrote to Keith in Vietnam and called him a baby killer. However, Keith is happy to let bygones be bygones and welcomes Jeffrey into his home. The two men get drunk and talk about old times, a subject that inevitably includes discussion of Annie Baxter.

In chapter ten, Keith goes into town to run some errands. At the post office, he hears a clerk address Annie by name. Keith follows her out into the street until she turns and speaks to him. Annie is clearly emotional about their meeting after so many years, but also frightened that someone will see them together and tell Cliff. Annie promises Keith that she will make an excuse to come see him someday soon.

In chapter eleven, Keith goes to the Porter home for dinner. Jeffrey and his wife, Gail, are vegetarians who live off of the massive garden at the back of their rental home. They spend the evening drinking a large amount of cheap wine, talking about the past. Eventually Jeffrey gets out the marijuana and they get stoned. During the night, they talk about their political affiliations and Gail tells him about the growing movement against Cliff Baxter. Gail is a city councilwoman and she wants to lead a charge to have Cliff removed from office. Gail hopes that Keith will join their movement and that he will steal Annie away from Cliff, distracting him long enough to run him out of town.

In chapter twelve, Keith decides to go into town and visit the local bars. Keith runs into Billy Marlon, a high school classmate who went to Vietnam straight out of high school. Keith is saddened to realize that Billy has become a drunk, presumably because of his time in Vietnam. Keith sends Billy home and walks through the town park alone. Keith becomes aware that a couple of cops are harassing Billy, who has passed out in the park. Keith interferes even though he knows Cliff has had the police watching him, and takes Billy home. A police car follows Keith as he returns to his own home and car horns beep all night, causing Keith to call the police department to arrange a meeting with Cliff the following night.

Chapters 9-12 Analysis

As Keith begins to recall his relationship with Annie, one that lasted more than six years, he also begins to hear rumors about the way Cliff treats Annie. The reader also gets a sense of the hostility Keith faced during his years in Vietnam, including from people he

counted among his friends. This shows the reader how difficult that time period was for many people, soldiers and civilians alike, and how it ruined relationships that might have lasted decades. The reader also sees that Keith has a strong character in the fact that he can forgive someone he once wanted to kill.

The sentiment against Cliff Baxter in Spencerville is not just from his wife and those who know him. It appears the whole town is aware of how Cliff abuses his power, and many have been afraid to stand up against him. However, Gail Porter is not afraid, and she is leading a move against him in hopes of having him and others like him removed from power. The reader wonders how this will affect Keith and his newly developed desire to steal Annie back from Cliff Baxter.

Chapters 13-17

Chapters 13-17 Summary

In chapter thirteen, Keith goes to the high school and plays basketball while he waits for Cliff Baxter to show up. At first it appears that Cliff will not show, a fact that pleases Keith for multiple reasons. Eventually two other cops show and give Keith a newspaper that announces a dinner being thrown for the chief of police that night, excusing Cliff from their meeting.

In chapter fourteen, Keith visits his neighbors and apologizes for the harassing car horns a few nights before that might have disturbed them. When the neighbors learn the truth of what was happening, they admit to Keith that they also have heard stories about Cliff Baxter's abuse of power. Later Keith goes to a local pond where he once spent many nights with Annie and their friends. Keith thinks about the past and the danger his presence seems to present for Annie. Keith decides to leave town.

In chapter fifteen, Keith sits at his kitchen table and tries to write a letter to Annie. Gail calls and insists that Keith attend the meeting that night at the local Lutheran Church regarding Cliff Baxter. Keith goes and listens to Gail speak. Gail promises to present several witnesses that night to Cliff Baxter's abuse of power and begins with Sherry Kolarik. Keith walks out only to find local cops writing down license plate numbers. Keith tries to stop them from this illegal act, but the cops threaten Keith with bodily harm. Finally the group is broken up when the church's pastor intervenes.

In chapter sixteen, Keith joins the pastor in the parsonage. The pastor tells Keith that he knows about this previous relationship with Annie Baxter and that Annie's marriage is in trouble. The pastor encourages Keith to wait until Annie is divorced before beginning a relationship with her.

In chapter seventeen, Keith returns home and realizes someone has been in his house. Keith goes into the living room and finds Annie Baxter waiting for him there. They talk for a few minutes, then find themselves in a romantic embrace. Annie and Keith share a few romantic moments together before a warning call from Annie's aunt announces that it is time to go. To keep Annie's departure secret from the police, Keith leaves first in the hope that anyone watching his house will follow him.

Chapters 13-17 Analysis

Keith tries to end the rivalry between himself and Cliff like they might have once done in high school, placing himself in a very dangerous position. However, Cliff proves himself to be a coward, not showing and sending his officers to make his excuses. The reader wonders if Cliff would have shown up even if he was not the honored guest at a dinner that night. Later, Keith goes to a meeting of people who do not want Cliff to remain chief of police and finds Cliff's men illegally recording license plate numbers. This leads to

another confrontation between Keith and the police, again showcasing the growing danger in Spencerville for Keith.

Keith and Annie finally meet up. They immediately fall into bed with one another, showing both them and the reader that their relationship never really ended. This leads to many questions that are complicated by Annie's marriage. The fact that Annie has to sneak around and Keith has to draw surveillance off of her shows the reader that this affair is not going to end easily.

Chapters 18-21

Chapters 18-21 Summary

In chapter eighteen, Cliff Baxter is unhappy when he learns that Keith Landry interfered with his men the night before. Cliff is even less happy to learn about the meeting that took place and the people who spoke out against him. Cliff makes a list of the people he intends to get revenge on, including his wife Annie. Cliff goes to the gas station with the sheriff and threatens to take the city and county accounts elsewhere. Cliff also goes to the diner in search of Sherry Kolarik, but finds her already gone. Cliff then goes to Keith's farm and threatens him, giving him six days to get out of town. Cliff then punches Keith in the stomach.

In chapter nineteen, Cliff and Annie have a fight that ends with Cliff telling Annie that he threw her ex-lover out of town. Cliff accuses Annie of having an affair, but Annie is able to successfully cover her two meetings with Keith. Then Cliff forces Annie to have sex with him.

In chapter twenty, Annie calls Keith from a payphone and arranges to meet him at the pond. They talk for a short time, walking around the pond, before they make love. Keith tells Annie he wants to take her away from Cliff. They discuss possible plans and agree to meet at Annie's sister's the following Saturday. In the meantime, they agree it is too dangerous to see one another again.

In chapter twenty-one, Keith spends Sunday first at church and then at his aunt's house for dinner. The discussion at the dinner table appears to center around Annie, but Keith carefully does not reveal anything about his plans with Annie. Over the next few days, Keith remains at his house, afraid of causing any trouble with the local police that will reveal his plans with Annie.

On Wednesday, Keith realizes he is out of food, so he calls the Porters and asks them to bring food. Over dinner, Gail and Jeffrey tell Keith about the transcripts of the meeting they held and how they have sold over five hundred copies. Discussion then turns to Annie. Keith reveals his plans and asks his friends to watch his house after he is gone. Keith offers a rifle to the Porters, but Jeffrey refuses.

Chapters 18-21 Analysis

The reader gets to see the full disregard of boundaries that Cliff Baxter has when he makes a hit list and begins visiting the people who spoke against him at the meeting. Cliff clearly feels that there is no limit to his power and this makes him a very dangerous man. This fact increases the tension in the novel as Annie and Keith plan to run away together. The fact that Keith refuses to leave his house for the days leading up to his plan to leave Annie only underscores how dangerous Cliff can be. This also brings into question Keith's ability to beat Cliff if it should come to a fight. At the same time,

although living on the euphoria of their successful meeting, the Porters are afraid for their own safety, as witnessed by Keith's offer of his rifle.

Chapters 22-26

Chapters 22-26 Summary

In chapter twenty-two, it is the following morning and Gail asks for Keith's rifle behind her husband's back. Keith gladly gives it to her, carefully showing her how to use it and suggesting she hide it under her bed. Before the Porters leave, Keith suggests they have a security firm come from Toledo to make sure Cliff Baxter is not bugging their phones. Later in the afternoon, Keith is working on the farm when a visitor from Washington, DC arrives. The man is Charlie Adair, Keith's former boss. They go for a walk and Charlie tells Keith that the President asked for Keith by name when attempting to fill a slot on his staff. Keith refuses, but Charlie insists that Keith needs to refuse the job in person. Eventually Charlie talks Keith into flying to Washington, DC with him.

In chapter twenty-three, Keith and Charlie arrive in Washington. Keith insists that he will not go to their scheduled meetings unless Charlie gives him a return ticket to Ohio beforehand. Keith spends the night alone in a hotel, wondering how Annie would react to his decision to take the offered position. Keith worries that Annie would not fit in in Washington.

In chapter twenty-four, Charlie picks up Keith with ticket in hand. They go to the White House where they are asked to wait in a waiting room in the basement. Keith is adamant that he does not want the job, but Charlie continues to encourage him to be polite and to keep his options open. Keith and Charlie are called into a meeting with the Secretary of Defense, the Security Advisor, and his assistant. Keith learns it is the assistant's job he is to take over. Keith answers questions politely, but with some sarcasm, especially when his former boss and the man who fired him enters the room. After the meeting, Keith and Charlie return to the waiting room to wait for Keith's meeting with the President. Keith is again instructed to keep his options open. Keith is restrained but polite with the President, asking him boldly why the President asked for him. The President gives a general answer and then leaves.

In chapter twenty-five, Charlie and Keith have lunch together. Keith continues to insist that he does not want the job and Charlie finally relents, promising that after Keith and Annie spend the weekend in Washington and make a final decision, he will smooth things over with the President. Charlie also agrees to help get Annie a passport.

In chapter twenty-six, Keith returns to his hotel and gathers his things in anticipation of catching a plane. However, on the way out of the hotel, Keith learns there is a hurricane just off the coast that has grounded all flights. Keith tries every way he can to get to Ohio, but there are no flights and no rental cars. Keith calls Charlie's driver and convinces him to drive Keith to Ohio. However, the drive takes longer than expected and Keith realizes he will miss his meeting with Annie. Keith calls Annie's sister to ask her to make sure Annie stays put until he arrives. Unfortunately, when he arrives home, Keith discovers that Cliff Baxter has been in his house, stolen his pistol, and taken the

battery out of his Chevy. By the time Keith reaches the home of Annie's sister, it is more than four hours past their planned meeting time.

Chapters 22-26 Analysis

Keith is all set to run off with Annie, but his past comes back to haunt him. For some unknown reason, the President has taken this moment to offer Keith a new, powerful position. Keith does not want to go back to the same government that turned their back on him less than six months before, but Charlie Adair convinces him he cannot turn down the President without a face to face meeting. This forces Keith to fly to Washington just two days before his rendezvous with Annie. The meetings go well, but Keith continues to refuse to accept the job, even though he tells this to no one but Charlie.

As Keith attempts to go home, a hurricane hits. The hurricane cuts off all of Keith's attempts to get to Ohio, forcing him to hijack Charlie's chauffeured car. The reader might see this as Charlie's final attempt to make Keith take the job. No matter what the cause, however, now Keith has missed his meeting time with Annie. The reader worries along with Keith that his arrival is too little, too late.

Chapters 27-33

Chapters 27-33 Summary

In chapter twenty-seven, Keith learns that Annie waited until one and then left. Annie left Keith a letter that makes it clear that she believes Keith did not make their meeting because he had cold feet. Keith is disappointed and soon returns home, alone. The following day, Keith goes to the church in town to see Annie. They do not speak, but Keith watches her as she sings in the choir. Afterward, Keith stops by his Aunt Betty's house to ask her to watch the farm when he leaves on Monday.

In chapter twenty-eight, Annie makes a surprise visit to Keith's house. Keith convinces Annie to run away with him when he learns that Cliff is still away, fishing at his cabin in Michigan. Annie agrees.

In chapter twenty-nine, they drive first to Annie's sister's to retrieve her things. Annie's brother-in-law is a volunteer sheriff's deputy and he warns Keith that they should trade cars after Cliff calls the house looking for Annie. Keith refuses, however, afraid the move will frighten Annie.

In chapter thirty, Keith and Annie reach the highway and must make a decision about which direction to go. Keith chooses Toledo because it is closer, but he worries because it has a much smaller airport.

In chapter thirty-one, Keith and Annie reach the Toledo airport only to find out they missed the last flight by an hour. Keith calls Annie's brother-in-law and learns an APB has been issued for him and his vehicle. Keith knows they have to lose the car quickly. When Keith gets out to the parking lot, he finds a security guard talking to Annie. Keith is nervous that the guard knows about the APB, but it turns out he is only trying to be helpful. Keith and Annie leave the airport and find a small motel near the highway. Keith uses a disguise when he registers for a room, then they take the Chevy to a Chevy dealership and walk back to the room, convinced they have covered their tracks well.

In chapter thirty-two, Cliff Baxter learns that Keith and Annie were spotted at the Toledo airport. This information comes with the report that Annie appeared to be with Keith willingly, causing the state police to back off the APB. However, Cliff refuses to give up and takes three men on a drive to Toledo.

In chapter thirty-three, Cliff has a tracking device on Keith's car, so he uses the short range radar to find the car. When they find the car, Cliff begins checking motels close to the Chevy dealership. When Cliff notices a motel sign that has been unplugged, he questions the clerk and learns that Keith checked in several hours previously.

Chapters 27-33 Analysis

Annie chickens out on running away when Keith is delayed, convinced that his delay is his cold feet. However, Keith is able to convince Annie otherwise on the following day and they make their escape just a short time before Cliff Baxter comes home and finds his wife missing. Cliff is a police officer and he has been known to abuse his power to control his wife in the past. This fact adds suspense as the reader watches Keith and Annie run away. The fear is confirmed when Cliff manages to have an APB, all points bulletin, issued for Keith and his car for kidnapping.

It is important to note in these chapters that a state police officer does question Cliff closely about the kidnapping charge, informing him that the guard at the Toledo airport felt that Annie was with Keith willingly. However, Cliff is so intent on getting his wife back that he ignores this. This behavior shows the reader that Cliff is a dangerous man, making the reader fear what would happen to Annie if Cliff ever found her again.

Chapters 34-36

Chapters 34-36 Summary

In chapter thirty-four, Annie and Keith are making love when Cliff Baxter bursts into their motel room. Cliff separates Annie and Keith and begins beating Keith about the face. Keith falls to his knees, grabs a knife, and stabs Cliff in the leg. Unfortunately, Cliff moves before Keith can sever a major artery and uses his gun to beat Keith in the head again. Keith falls to the floor and Annie tries to protect him. However, Cliff threatens to kill her if she does not back off, so Keith urges Annie to go with Cliff, promising he will find her. As Keith lies nearly unconscious on the floor, Cliff threatens to castrate him, but his own men pull him away when they hear approaching sirens.

In chapter thirty-five, Keith wakes two days later in the hospital. After the nurse leaves to get the doctor, Keith dresses and slips out of the hospital. Keith goes to the Toledo airport by taxi and hires a man to drive him to Spencerville. On the radio, Keith learns that he is wanted for questioning in a possible kidnapping and that Cliff Baxter and his wife have gone into seclusion. Keith and his driver arrive at the Landry farm only to discover the house has been burned down.

In chapter thirty-six, Keith goes to the Baxter home, where he finds the house deserted and evidence that the occupants do not plan to return soon. Keith goes to a convenience store to call Annie's sister. Keith learns that Annie called her sister the day before, claiming to have gone to Florida for a second honeymoon, but Annie stressed that they would be going through Atlanta, leaving the sister with the impression that they were in Michigan at the cabin, which is located near a small town called Atlanta. Keith then calls Schenley, a cop on the Spencerville force. Keith has guessed that Schenley is a good cop who disapproves of Cliff Baxter's disregard for the law. Schenley tells Keith that the Baxter left late Sunday night and that Cliff Baxter gave the impression he would not be back soon.

Keith has his driver drop him at the Porters and sends him back to Toledo. Inside, Keith finds the Porters have gone. Before Keith can decide what to do, Officer Ward with the Spencerville police knocks on the door. Keith pulls him into the house, assaults him, and handcuffs him. Keith goes into the bedroom to find his rifle, but instead finds Charlie Adair. Somehow Charlie has gotten wind of what is going on and has come to help. However, Keith knows that Charlie's help always has strings attached. Keith sends Charlie away, determined to do this on his own.

Chapters 34-36 Analysis

Cliff Baxter manages to get the better of Keith, a trained spy, because he has a gun. Keith is beaten badly and left for dead while Cliff takes off with Annie. This again increases the tension of the plot as the reader wonders what Cliff will do with Annie.

Keith manages to get back to Spencerville and learn that everyone thinks Cliff and Annie are in Florida, a fact that gives Keith hope that Annie is still alive. However, Keith does not believe they went to Florida.

Keith is determined to get Annie back, but he has no clothing, no guns, no transportation. Charlie shows up and offers to help, but again Keith knows that everything with Charlie has strings, so he refuses. This leaves the reader wondering what exactly Keith plans to do to get Annie back.

Chapters 37-43

Chapters 37-43 Summary

In chapter thirty-seven, Keith drives the police car with Officer Ward in the trunk to Billy Marlon's house. Keith wants to borrow hunting clothing from Billy. Billy is sober when Keith arrives and insists that he be allowed to go with Keith. Billy has a grudge against Cliff Baxter for forcing Billy's wife to perform sexually with him, ending Billy's marriage. Keith reluctantly agrees. Keith parks the cop car in a remote location and rides with Billy through back roads into Michigan. Keith makes Billy promise that he will not act on his own, but follow all of Keith's instructions.

When they reach the little town of Atlanta, Michigan, Keith meets with a sporting goods salesman to buy a crossbow in hopes of killing Cliff Baxter's three dogs without alerting him to his presence. While buying the crossbow, Keith questions the salesman and learns that Cliff Baxter bought dog food from him the day before, confirming Keith's assumption that Cliff is at his cabin by the lake. Keith calls Annie's sister and then he drives to the lake, stumbling onto the camouflaged road to Cliff Baxter's cabin.

In chapter thirty-eight, Cliff Baxter puts on a bullet proof vest and walks out onto his deck, surveying the surrounding area with a night scope on a rifle. Everything seems quiet, but Cliff fires off several shots just in case. Back in the house, Cliff forces his naked and manacled wife to stand over the couch so he can spank her with his belt. Cliff then forces Annie to have sex with him, all the while Keith is out in the woods waiting for the perfect moment to attack. Cliff then forces Annie to tell him about her sexual affairs during their marriage before he will allow her to use the bathroom and eat a small meal.

In chapter thirty-nine, Keith and Billy discuss their options. They finally decide that Keith will approach the house while Billy keeps him covered. When Keith gains access, Billy will follow.

In chapter forty, Cliff rises to go to bed, leaving Annie chained to the floor after she begs him not to handcuff her to the bed as he did the night before. Cliff believes he is punishing Annie by leaving her uncovered by the dying fire.

In chapter forty-one, Annie gets the fireplace poker and begins working at the bolt that keeps her chained to the floor. Annie tries to decide what to do when she is free, unsure if she would be capable of killing Cliff even after all his latest atrocities against her.

In chapter forty-two, Keith uses the crossbow to silently kill all three of Cliff Baxter's guard dogs. Keith then begins making his way to the deck stairs, unaware that Cliff has set a bear trap at the bottom of the steps. Just as Keith is about to reach the steps, Cliff Baxter wakes and comes to the glass doors. Keith slips into the cover of darkness, but Billy cannot see him and believes Cliff Baxter got him. Billy runs to the deck stairs, but



he is caught in the bear trap. When Billy screams, Cliff shoots him and kills him instantly. Keith fires at Cliff Baxter and hears him fall back into the house. Keith follows, but Cliff turns out the lights, leaving Keith blind. After a volley of shots, Keith plays dead to make Cliff come up close. Keith fires at Cliff, but misses. Just as Cliff is about to get off another shot at Keith, Annie frees herself from her chains and hits Cliff on the head with the fireplace poker. Annie hits Cliff a second time, killing him.

In chapter forty-three, Keith and Annie drive Billy's truck to a diner on the Ohio turnpike where they meet Charlie Adair. Keith tells Charlie what happened and Charlie makes arrangements to clean the mess up. Keith again refuses to take the job in Washington and focuses on the future with Annie.

Chapters 37-43 Analysis

Keith turns to Billy Marlon, the drunk who was once a soldier in Vietnam. Billy is surprisingly sober and he wants to join Keith's crusade. It turns out it was Cliff Baxter who turned Billy into a drunk, not Vietnam. Billy could not handle that fact that Cliff Baxter forced Billy's wife into sexual favors. It seems to the reader that both Keith and Billy have equal reason to want Cliff Baxter to pay for his crimes.

Keith uses all his knowledge of the military to plan an assault on Cliff Baxter's cabin even as Cliff humiliates and abuses his wife. However, even the best military plan can go awry, as this one does. It seems to the reader that Keith is pretty out of practice when it comes to the spy business, but it seems understandable when the reader recalls that Keith has been a desk jockey for the past few years. However, Keith manages to get into the house, but it is Annie who ends Cliff Baxter's life. This is an ironic turn of fate, especially since Annie tried and failed once before and that she asked Keith not to kill Cliff for the sake of her children. All people have their breaking point and it appears Annie reached hers on this particular night.

Characters

Keith Landry

Keith Landry was a spy working with the American government and the Army for more than twenty years. After the end of the Cold War, men like Keith became obsolete, so the government began urging them to retire. As the book opens, the reader learns that Keith has just recently become one of these men. Keith returns to his hometown, moving into the old family farm even though his entire family left Spencerville more than five years before. Keith is unsure why he has chosen to return to Spencerville, but soon reveals that the love of his life still lives in the small Ohio town.

Keith Landry quickly finds himself the subject of police harassment as his old lover's husband, the police chief, learns he has arrived in town. This harassment drives him into his lover's arms rather than scaring him away. In fact, Keith does not even have contact with his ex-lover until long after the harassment has begun. When they do meet again, however, Keith realizes he still loves the woman he once believed he would spend the rest of his life with.

Keith and Annie Baxter begin a love affair and plan to run away. When the escape plan is ruined by Keith's past, they change plans and run away a day later. However, this plan is foiled by the power hungry police chief, leaving Keith beaten and leaving the reader questioning his expertise as a spy. However, Keith wins back his love and proves to both she and the reader that he is still a powerful enemy to those who cross him.

Annie Baxter

Annie Baxter is the wife of Spencerville police chief, Cliff Baxter. Annie once loved Keith Landry, her high school sweetheart and college lover. However, Vietnam tore them apart, leaving Annie alone and angry with Keith for choosing the military over her. Annie marries Cliff Baxter out of spite, condemning herself to a life without love. Not only this, but Annie eventually discovers that Cliff, who has never believed he was good enough for Annie, is darkly jealous and will use any method at his disposal to make sure she never cheats on him. This includes using the Spencerville police force to keep tabs on her.

Annie is unhappy in her life, feeling trapped by the man who vowed to always love her. When Annie's youngest child prepares to leave home for college, Annie decides it is time to do something to get out from under Cliff. Annie steals one of Cliff's guns and tries to kill him, but in the end discovers that she does not have the strength to kill in cold blood. However, when she learns that Keith Baxter is back in town, Annie jumps at the opportunity to run away with the love of her life.

Annie and Keith run away, but underestimate the lengths Cliff will go to to get her back. Annie is kidnapped by her husband and chained to the living room floor of their hunting



cabin. Annie endures abuse and sexual assault over and over from Cliff. This does not keep Annie from fighting, however. Annie manages to free herself from her restraints just as Keith breaks into the house to rescue her. Although Keith is the military man, the spy, it is Annie who takes Cliff's life in the end.

Cliff Baxter

Cliff Baxter is the chief of police in Spencerville. Cliff has worked hard to get to where he is and now he feels it is his right to abuse his power. Cliff uses his power to force women into sexual relationships with him. The town looks the other way for years as Cliff abuses his power, taking more gas than he should on the town's budget, using the police equipment for personal gain, and using illegally gained information to blackmail people. However, when Gail Porter comes to town, she is determined to end this practice. Gail hosts a meeting at which many people come forward and confess to some of the awful things Cliff has done to them.

Cliff Baxter is obsessed with his wife and uses his power as police chief to keep tabs on her every move. While Cliff has multiple affairs, he is maniacal about keeping his wife from doing the same. When Cliff finally catches his wife in an affair, he tracks her down, kidnaps her, and forces her to endure terrible abuse. In the end, Cliff is killed by the one person he claimed to love more than himself.

Charlie Adair

Charlie Adair is Keith Landry's former boss. Charlie often guided Keith through spy missions and debriefed him when they were over. After Keith is forced into retirement, the President asks for him by name to fill a slot on his staff. Charlie comes to Spencerville to inform Keith of the job offer and even convinces him to fly to Washington, DC to accept the job. Keith refuses the job, but meets with the President anyway. This trip causes Keith to miss his meeting with Annie, a fact he believes Charlie was aware of. In the end, Charlie attempts to be a friend by offering to help Keith get Annie back, but Keith knows that everything Charlie does comes with strings attached, therefore he refuses the help.

Billy Marlon

Billy Marlon was a high school friend of Keith's who served in Vietnam. Billy is an alcoholic when Keith returns to Spencerville, something Keith assumes is a result of his time in Vietnam. However, Keith later learns that Billy turned to drink when Cliff Baxter used his authority to force Billy's young wife into a sexual relationship. The marriage soon ended, leaving Billy humiliated and depressed. Billy goes with Keith to find Cliff Baxter and save Annie at the end of the novel in the hopes that he will be able to get the revenge against Cliff he feels he deserves.



Jeffrey Porter

Jeffrey Porter is a college friend of Keith's and Annie's. Jeffrey was against the Vietnam War in the sixties, and this belief caused a rift in his friendship with Keith, especially when Keith was drafted to go to Vietnam. In fact, Jeffrey wrote Keith a letter during his first tour in Vietnam in which he calls Keith a baby killer. Despite still holding strong to some of his political views, Jeffrey apologizes to Keith for the opinions that ended their friendship more than twenty years before. Jeffrey and Keith renew their friendship and Jeffrey helps Keith in his desire to reunite with Annie.

Gail Porter

Gail Porter is Jeffrey's wife. Gail also had strong opinions against the Vietnam War twenty years before. Gail has softened a little now, though she still lives her life with the values of the sixties war-protesting youth. Gail continues to be political. Gail is a city councilwoman in Spencerville and as such has begun a campaign against Cliff Baxter in the hopes of having him replaced as chief of police.

Sherry Kolarik

Sherry Kolarik is a young waitress who works at the diner in Spencerville where Cliff Baxter often has his breakfast. Sherry had a couple of traffic tickets that came due at an inconvenient time. Cliff Baxter came to her door and told her to pay or he would arrest her. Instead of paying, however, Sherry offered sexual favors that result in a long term affair in which Cliff Baxter often forces himself on her and tells her that she will need to satisfy him four more times before they are even. However, the number remains four no matter how often Cliff comes to see her.

Larry and Terry

Larry and Terry are Annie Baxter's sister and brother-in-law. Larry works as a volunteer sheriff's deputy in his town. For the twenty years that Keith and Annie were separated, Terry forwarded their letters to one another so that Cliff Baxter would never learn of the correspondence. When Annie and Keith decide to run off together, it is Terry and Larry who help them with information and a place to meet.

Aunt Betty

Aunt Betty is a cousin of Keith's mother who he has always referred to as "aunt". Aunt Betty cares for the Landry farm when none of the family is in the area. Aunt Betty also invites Keith to her home several times during his time in Spencerville, often encouraging Keith to date one of the young, eligible women in town. Aunt Betty is something of a comic relief to the plot.

Objects/Places

Returned Letter

A letter Annie wrote to Keith is returned to her at the beginning of the novel causing her to believe Keith is dead.

Letter to Annie

Annie breaks into Keith's house and finds a letter he wrote to her explaining why he must leave town. However, instead of leaving town, Keith begins an affair with Annie.

Teddy Bear

When Annie and Keith run away together, Annie takes with her a teddy bear Keith bought her when they were first lovers, one of many items she kept hidden at her sister's house.

Rifle

Annie steals one of Cliff's rifles in an attempt to kill him for years of cruelty and for his numerous affairs.

Pistol

Keith keeps a pistol from his spy days in the farmhouse, but it is stolen while he is in Washington, DC. Keith suspects Cliff took the gun.

Briefcase

Keith has a briefcase from his spy days that has a false bottom where he hides some of the tricks of his trade including fake ID and a fake mustache.

Dogs

Cliff Baxter has three hunting dogs that he uses as security around his cabin when he kidnaps Annie. Keith is forced to kill them with a crossbow when he goes to rescue Annie.



Chevy Bronco

Keith trades his SAAB in for a Chevy Bronco. After Keith and Annie run away, Cliff finds them from the homing device he hid under the Chevy's bumper.

Spencerville High School

Keith attempts to deal with Cliff Baxter's bullying by meeting him behind the old high school, but Cliff does not show up due to attending a dinner that was thrown in his honor.

Landry Home

Keith moves into his childhood home when he leaves Washington, DC. Later, when Keith runs away with Annie Baxter, her husband Cliff burns the house down.

Spencerville, Ohio

Spencerville is a small farming community in Ohio where both Keith Landry and Annie Baxter grew up.

Washington, DC

Keith worked for many years in Washington, DC. After Keith is forced into retirement at the beginning of the novel, he vows never to return. However, when Keith is offered a powerful and prestigious job, he finds himself briefly considering a return to Washington.

Themes

The Past

When Keith Landry returns home to Spencerville, he believes he has chosen his hometown because he wants to be alone for a time to figure out what he wants to do with the rest of his life. However, as Keith gets over his unexpected retirement and begins revisiting some of the old haunts from his childhood and young adulthood, he comes to realize he has really come home to reclaim what is his. Keith was once in love with a girl named Annie, a relationship that ended when he joined the Army. Now Keith believes it is time to see if Annie still loves him the same way he loves her.

As Keith makes his presence in Spencerville known, it is as though he has stepped back in time and returned to high school. Cliff Baxter, a local rich kid who was a bully in high school and has become a bully as police chief, has become Annie's husband. For this reason, Cliff begins using his power as police chief to keep tabs on Keith Landry even before he makes contact with Annie Baxter. This causes Keith to recall the bullying attempts Cliff made on him in high school. Keith calls Cliff out, to duke it out behind the old high school. However, Cliff fails to show just as Keith suspects he would have done in high school.

The past takes over Keith's life as he reunites with old friends and reconnects with Annie. Keith decides to run away with Annie, but the first attempt ends in failure. Cliff has once again become the bully, the one who will use any trick in the book to get what he wants. Keith, however, has another past, a past in which he was a spy and an expert soldier. Keith rises to the bait and ends the conflict, moving out of the past and facing the future with Annie.

Abuse

Cliff Baxter is an abuser. Cliff has never hit his wife, but he torments her by keeping her a prisoner in her own home. Annie cannot have friends, she cannot leave the house, she cannot even feed the dogs without one of Cliff's officers knowing everything about it from the moment it happens. Annie feels trapped, frightened for her future, and grieving for the life she could have had with another, more trusting man.

Cliff Baxter is also an abuser of other women. Cliff uses his job as police chief to force women into sexual relationships with him. Despite his fear of Annie's unfaithfulness, Cliff feels it makes him more of a man to have more than one lover. In this novel, Cliff forces a young waitress to become his lover by threatening to arrest her over some unpaid traffic tickets. Not only this, but the reader later learns that Cliff has done this many times and that he even forced the wife of a Vietnam Vet to become his lover in a similar fashion.

When Annie runs away with Keith, Cliff refuses to let her go. Cliff tracks them down and kidnaps his wife, chaining her to the floor and forcing her to have sexual relations with him. Annie puts up with terrible abuse, that now includes physical beatings, in the hopes that her lover, that Keith, will find her. In the end, Cliff pays for all his abuse with the ultimate price.

Forgiveness

Keith was among the large number of troops to go to Vietnam in the sixties. Keith felt it was his civic duty to go to war, despite the differing opinions of many of his contemporaries, including several of his own friends. In fact, Keith went to Vietnam only to have one such friend write him and call him a baby killer. Keith was filled with anger and hatred for this treatment, but now, after more than twenty years, Keith can see his friend's point of view and forgives him.

Keith and Annie were also torn apart by the Vietnam War. Annie was against the war and did not understand why Keith chose the military over her. Annie and Keith ended their relationship, even though neither of them said the actual words, and each went on with their own lives. When Keith learned Annie had married Cliff Baxter, he was bitter and angry. However, after all the years that have passed, both Annie and Keith are able to forgive one another and go on with a life together.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told in the third person point of view. The majority of the novel is narrated through the eyes of Keith Landry. However, there are several chapters that are told through the thoughts and actions of other characters, including Annie and Cliff Baxter. The third person point of view is omniscient, allowing the reader to know the thoughts, emotions, and actions of each character who is narrating that particular section of the novel.

The point of view of this novel works well because it is the most common point of view utilized by modern novelists and it allows the reader to know exactly what the author needs them to know at specific sections of the novel. The point of view shows the story from a single point of view at a time, allowing the action to unfold as that one character sees it. However, the point of view often shifts, allowing the reader to see things from multiple viewpoints and thus raising the level of suspense. In a novel of this genre, the level of suspense is crucial to the enjoyment of the book, so therefore this point of view works well with this novel.

Setting

The novel is set in Spencerville, Ohio in the early nineties. Spencerville is a primarily farming community, but has begun to shift to a more urban area with the sale of the neighboring farms to farming corporations and the increase in retail businesses. However, some of the small town feel remains, giving the reader a sense that all the neighbors know everyone else's business even before they do.

The setting of this novel is important on two fronts. First, the setting is important because it is the hometown of the protagonist, a place where he thought he would be safe and welcome after more than twenty years serving his country in both a military capacity and a spying capacity. However, it soon becomes clear that the small town has been taken over by a bully and no one is truly safe. Second, the setting is important because of the amount of time that has passed since Vietnam. Many people in this novel have strong opinions regarding the war in Vietnam, but the time that has passed has allowed many of these opinions to soften, allowing old friendships to find forgiveness and renewal.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. There is some slang in the novel, but most of the language is straightforward, simple language that is often found in a novel of this genre. There are no foreign phrases and no technical language that a reader might not completely comprehend. In fact, the novel's language is simple enough that even the

youngest reader could read it and understand most of the words and grammar with no difficulty.

The writer of this novel has written a thriller that is laid back, a story that takes a long time developing to allow suspense to build for the reader. To do this, the writer has used a simple language that is not complicate in order to keep in touch with the setting and the characters that populate the novel. The language is simple, uncomplicated, just like the little town from which the novel takes its title. For this reason, the language of this novel works well with the plot.

Structure

The novel is written in forty-three chapters. Each chapter varies in length. The majority of the chapters are told from a single point of view, but there are a couple of chapters that utilize multiple narrating characters in order to show the action within the plot from several viewpoints to increase the suspense in the novel. The novel has a great deal of internal dialogue because the main character spends a lot of time on his own attempting to figure out where his future lies. The novel also includes exposition and dialogue that fills out the scenes in the plot to tell a well rounded story.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot revolves around Keith Landry, an ex-spy who has returned to his hometown upon his forced retirement. Keith finds himself drawn back into a romantic relationship that ended twenty years before. One subplot involves Keith's ex-lover and her controlling husband. Annie is a prisoner in her own house, watched constantly by her police chief husband's officers. Another subplot follows attempts by townspeople to rid their town of the corrupt police chief. All the plots come to a satisfying end at the conclusion of the novel.

Quotes

"Keith Landry was going home after twenty-five years on the front."
Chap. 1, p. 9

"Keith Landry had felt good when he was a soldier, an understandable and honorable profession in Spencer County, but later, when he'd become involved in intelligence work, he began to question his occupation."
Chap. 3, pp. 29-30

"But now she felt better, and she promised herself that if Keith was alive, she'd find the means and the courage to see him, to speak to him, to see how much of him was her fantasy and how much of him was real."
Chap. 4, p. 53

"Certainly, he'd known that it would be a long time before they would see each other again. But it never occurred to him that a quarter century would pass and that the world they knew would have vanished so completely."
Chap. 10, p. 155

"Keith wondered again why they hadn't married then."
Chap. 12, p. 195

"You arrived in life, he reflected, as a time not of your own choosing, then you stayed for a time, also not of your own choosing, and finally, you left, and the only choice you had then was to leave early, but not one moment later than the time you were allotted."
Chap. 15, p. 223

"Somewhere in the back of Cliff Baxter's mind was the important fact that his wife was smarter than he was."
Chap. 18, p. 278

"Love. I mean, through college, and turmoil, and war, and decades, and distance, and everything that life throws at you. If I were sentimental, I'd cry."
Chap. 21, p. 364

"She'd adjust, of course, and probably not complain, because that was how she was."
Chap. 23, p. 401

"He knew she was corrupt to the core, heartless, and cold. But she was beautiful, so well dressed and made-up and clever, and she smiled at him, and he loved her in the flesh but hated her in his soul."
Chap. 25, p. 445

"She never once thought he was faithful, and she didn't know why he thought this revelation was going to hurt her. But his brain was working hard to find things to do to

her and say to her that would hurt, humiliate, and cause her to question her own worth and integrity."

Chap. 38, p. 683

"She smiled and put her arms around his shoulders and said, 'Welcome home, Keith.'"

Chap. 43, p. 755

Topics for Discussion

Who is Keith Landry? Why has he come to Spencerville? Why does the police chief begin following him? Why is Keith afraid to visit Annie Baxter when he returns to town? What happens when they finally meet? Why does Keith get called back to Washington? How does he feel about this trip? Why does Keith go? How does he behave? What meeting does Keith miss due to this trip?

Who is Annie Baxter? Why does she pull a gun on her husband? Why does Annie not just leave her husband? Why did Annie marry Cliff Baxter in the first place? Why does Annie feel abused by Cliff? Why does Cliff feel that he is not good enough for Annie? Why does he fear that she will cheat on him? Has she? Will she?

Who is Cliff Baxter? How does he abuse his power as police chief? How does the reader learn of these abuses? What does Cliff attempt to do when Keith first comes to town? Why can Cliff not get the information he wants on Keith? Why is Cliff afraid of Keith? Why does Keith allow Cliff to bully him? What does he hope will come of this abuse?

Who is Terry? Why does she help Annie and Keith? What does Terry do for Annie and Keith before their reunion in Spencerville? What does Terry do after their reunion? Why does Terry encourage Annie to leave her husband? What does Terry think of Cliff Baxter? Is her opinion shared by others? Why?

Why does Annie ask Keith not to kill Cliff Baxter? What is Annie attempting to prevent? Why would Keith kill Cliff? Who urges Keith to do so? Is killing Cliff a crime? Does Keith have the right to take another man's life? What will killing Cliff solve? Is it justified based on Cliff's behavior prior to Keith coming to town? Who finally kills Cliff?

Discuss Billy Marlon. Who is Billy Marlon? Why does Keith assume it is his experiences in Vietnam that make Billy drink? Do a lot of Vietnam vets drink? For what reason? Why does Keith not drink? What is the true reason for Billy's alcoholism? What does he want to do about it? Why does Keith help him? How does Billy die? Is his death in vain?

Discuss the setting. Why do you think the writer chose a small farming town for his setting? What impact does the setting have on the plot of the novel? Does the setting impact the way characters behave? In what way? How might the novel be different if the author had chosen to set it in New York? Florida?