

Striptease Study Guide

Striptease by Carl Hiaasen

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Contents

Striptease Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1.....	6
Chapter 2.....	8
Chapter 3.....	10
Chapter 4.....	12
Chapter 5.....	14
Chapter 6.....	15
Chapter 7.....	17
Chapter 8.....	18
Chapter 9.....	20
Chapter 10.....	21
Chapter 11.....	22
Chapter 12.....	24
Chapter 13.....	26
Chapter 14.....	27
Chapter 15.....	29
Chapter 16.....	31
Chapter 17.....	33
Chapter 18.....	35
Chapter 19.....	36
Chapter 20.....	38
Chapter 21.....	40
Chapter 22.....	42

Chapter 23.....	44
Chapter 24.....	46
Chapter 25.....	48
Chapter 26.....	51
Chapter 27.....	53
Chapter 28.....	55
Chapter 29.....	56
Chapter 30.....	58
Chapter 31.....	61
Chapter 32.....	63
Chapter 33.....	65
Epilogue.....	67
Characters.....	69
Objects/Places.....	73
Themes.....	76
Style.....	79
Quotes.....	81
Topics for Discussion.....	82

Plot Summary

Erin Grant is a divorced mother fighting to regain custody of her daughter. Her ex-husband Darrell, a career criminal and drug addict, has schemed to get custody from her. Erin works at a strip club to pay her bills and pay her custody attorney. One night, investment analyst Paul Guber comes into the club to celebrate his bachelor party. He gets a little too drunk and jumps on stage, grabbing Erin's leg and professing his love for her. Congressman David Dilbeck, wearing a disguise so as not to be noticed, grabs a champagne bottle and whacks Guber over the head. One of Guber's buddies just happened to be taking pictures at the time. A customer, Jerry Killian, recognizes the congressman despite his disguise.

Killian tries to impress Erin by blackmailing the congressman. He wants Dilbeck to speak to the judge handling Erin's custody case. Dilbeck's handler, Malcolm Moldowsky, cannot allow a scandal with re-election and a sugar subsidy vote looming. Dilbeck is financially backed by the powerful Rojo family who control the sugar business of south Florida. When Moldowsky is unsuccessful with the judge, he makes an intricate plan to kill Killian. Killian's body turns up in a Montana river, apparently a drowning victim on a fishing trip. His body is found by Sgt. Al Garcia, a homicide detective from Miami. Garcia becomes involved in the case.

As soon as the Killian problem is solved, another arises. Guber's fiancée discovers a copy of the incriminating photo. She shows it to her cousin, Mordecai, an attorney. He knows Dilbeck from years ago. He knows the power of the photograph and suggests contacting Dilbeck about a settlement to keep them from filing suit. Guber refuses to play any part in the demand, but Mordecai and Guber's fiancée proceed anyway. Moldowsky listens to Mordecai's blackmail proposal. Ultimately, instead of paying a \$2-3 million settlement, Dilbeck's supporters order the murder of the lawyer and the fiancée.

Sgt. Garcia's investigation into Killian's murder leads him to Erin. She becomes involved in the case and wants to help. She feels partly responsible because Killian was trying to help her when he was murdered. Dilbeck, meanwhile, has developed an interest in Erin after seeing her in the incriminating photo. He wants a "date" and Erin will oblige in order to gather information on Killian's murder. During the first meeting between Erin and Dilbeck, Erin is not successful at obtaining information. Dilbeck is smitten with her and wants a second date.

Erin's custody case is resolved when the custody judge, who happens to enjoy strip clubs, falls dead of an aneurysm just before getting a dance from his favorite stripper. Erin reclaims her daughter, which throws Darrell into a rage.

By the time the second meeting occurs, Garcia has developed enough circumstantial evidence to implicate Moldowsky in the murders of Killian, Mordecai, and Guber's fiancée. Erin hatches a plan to fix Dilbeck. As she executes her plan during the date, Darrell unexpectedly shows up. Erin takes them at gunpoint to the sugar cane fields. She forces Dilbeck to strip to his boxers and cut cane. Darrell, meanwhile, escapes,



only to fall asleep in a drug-induced fog in the bed of a sugar cane truck and wind up chopped to bits by a sugar processing machine. At the same time, once Dilbeck is good and sweaty from cutting cane, Erin encourages him to chase her into the sugar cane field. Moments later, as she planned, the FBI shows up in response to a call about an alleged kidnapping. They find Dilbeck, wrestling with Erin in the field. Instead of having him arrested, Garcia and Erin convince him to continue his political campaign, but then feign a heart attack the day after the election and resign his seat.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Striptease opens in the Eager Beaver strip club in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Paul Guber is enjoying his last night of pre-marital "freedom" with his buddies. It is his bachelor party. Paul is drunk and spraying the dancers with Korbel champagne. As the night nears its end, Paul drunkenly crawls on stage and put his arms around a stripper, Erin.

Someone yells at Paul, telling him to get off the stage. One of Paul's co-workers pulls out a camera and takes a picture. "Blackmail," he yells jokingly. Suddenly another patron of the club jumps on stage and smashes Paul over the head repeatedly with an empty champagne bottle. Paul clutched at Erin. The man with the bottle has silver hair and a black, crooked mustache. The bouncer arrives just as the bottle smashes Paul's head. He grabs the silver-haired man and is about to throw him off the stage violently when the silver-haired man's companion displays a gun. The silver-haired man and his gun-toting companion leave the club without incident.

A car speeds away from the club. Inside is the silver-haired man, Congressman David Lane Dilbeck. He asks Erb Crandall, his gun-toting assistant, what happened. Erb tells him he assaulted a man. Dilbeck admits that he loves naked women, that they are his weakness. Dilbeck chastises Erb for not stopping him sooner. Erb informs Dilbeck that someone in the club, a little guy with Coke-bottle glasses, recognized Dibeck despite his fake mustache. Erb tells him he will call "Moldy" in the morning, presumably to address that situation.

The following night, Erin is in the dressing room getting ready. She tells Shad, the bouncer, that she called the hospital about the victim of the beating and that he was out of intensive care. Shad, meanwhile, is busy with a scheme to defraud a dairy company; he meticulously heats the wrap from a cup of yogurt so that he can remove it to place a cockroach inside and then reseal it. Erin continues her train of thought, and recalls that the assailant did not look like the typical strip-show type. He wore a silk tie and passed out twenties like gumdrops. Erin asks Shad if "Mr. Peepers" is in the crowd. One of her regulars, he is skinny and wears odd rectangular glasses. He called earlier and left a message that he has a big surprise for her.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The blackmail theme is set up right from the start when Paul Guber's buddy shouts "blackmail" as he snaps a picture of Paul on stage with Erin. The next few photos he snaps will result in some blackmail indeed. The blackmail theme is also seen in Shad and his "cockroach in yogurt" scheme.

Though she is embroiled in the midst of this mess while dancing on stage, Erin is established right from the start as a not-so-ordinary stripper. She does not perform table

dances like all the other girls. She wears burgundy rose lipstick, against her bosses' wishes; the burgundy rose is not as garish as the candy-apple red lipstick the boss would like her to wear.

Dilbeck is established as an unusual character. A man of power, he travels with a bodyguard and is forced to wear a disguise to prevent being recognized. He claims a love, a weakness for women, that will develop over the course of the novel. This insanity runs so deep as to force him to defend Erin's honor from the man assaulting her on stage. Interestingly, though, Guber has not really done much. Guber may not really be that different than Dilbeck. They are both drunk and "in love" with Erin. Perhaps Dilbeck is jealous that Guber does what he only dreams he could do: jump onstage and latch onto Erin's leg.

Shad asks Erin why she likes "that song" so much (presumably "Brown Eyed Girl" by Van Morrison) when she doesn't even have brown eyes. She responds that it's a good dancing song and that no one looks at her eyes anyway. A couple of themes are set up here. The songs she dances to are extremely important to her. They provide her motivation for working. She's a dancer, not a stripper. No one looks at her eyes because they are distracted by either her dance moves or her amazing smile.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Malcolm J. "Moldy" Moldowsky visits Congressman Dilbeck at the latter's office. He calls Dilbeck a "card-carrying shithead." Moldowsky is short, but dresses very well and always wears expensive colognes. Moldowsky, once brought up to speed on the previous night's events, sees problems in the situation. Dilbeck promises that it will never happen again, and that he has been doing some soul searching. Moldowsky believes the problem is in his pants, not his soul. In an election year, Moldowsky tells Dilbeck, it is best not to get caught at a strip club. Moldowsky asks him why he hit the other man with the bottle; he suspects that Dilbeck has something going on with the dancer on stage. Dilbeck, however, maintains that he does not even know her name. Moldowsky reminds him of his campaign and the importance of an upcoming sugar vote. He then tells Dilbeck that he will take care of the problem.

The sugar vote is an agricultural subsidy given to a handful of millionaire sugar growers in Florida through a vote every few years. The subsidy inflates the price of sugar to discourage foreign competition in the market. The subsidy was promoted as an aid to the struggling farmer; struggling farmers they were not. Part of Moldowsky's job was making sure that this subsidy passed. This year there would be a problem with the bill because Dilbeck, who chairs the committee, upset other committee members by voting against a congressional pay raise, and his vote was the deciding vote. He cast the vote while in a drunken stupor and was apparently unaware of what he was doing. The next day, the media praised him for taking a stand. Instead of owning up to his mistake, he took the credit lauded upon him. Moldowsky knows, then, that he will have his hands full this year without Dilbeck smashing someone over the head with a champagne bottle in a strip club.

The other dancers know something is bothering Erin. One asks if it is Darrell, Erin's ex-husband. Erin started stripping to pay her legal bills that stem from her nasty custody battle with Darrell. Darrell turned the tables on her and alleged that, as a stripper, she was an unfit mother. The born-again Christian judge, after collecting evidence in the form of watching her perform seven songs at the Eager Beaver, agreed with Darrell and gave him custody. He did so despite the fact that Darrell was a pill head, a convict, and dealer in stolen wheelchairs. Erin was given visitation every third weekend. The decision was on appeal and Erin needed to earn money now more than ever. Erin is upset because her regular customer, Mr. Peepers, has not been to the club in a few days. Erin reveals that he slipped her a note the last time he came in saying that he could help get her daughter back.

The dancers are called into a meeting with Mr. Orly, the owner. There are complaints about the dancing. Erin thinks the morale problem at the club is due to its name, Eager Beaver, which she thinks is too crude. Ordinarily, Orly would have fired a girl over such a remark, but Erin is his best dancer. Orly responds that customers of a strip club do not



want to visit a club full of "nice" girls. After the other dancers leave the meeting, Orly asks her if she was hurt in the altercation with the customer and the bottle. He tells her that if she is hurt at all he will get her a doctor. Orly makes sure to tell her that he has no complaints about her dancing, that she's the best one they ever had. When Erin leaves the meeting, she is sure that she is in the middle of trouble. When she gets to her car, Mr. Peepers is waiting for her.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Dilbeck's office, filled with pitiable tin mementos, is a testament to his undistinguished political career. The fact that he has embroiled himself in this mess, that he would even consider dressing up in a costume to go to a strip club and ogle women, is further testament to his diminished character and, perhaps, a lack of intelligence. His further lack of good sense is demonstrated by Moldowsky assuming that he might be dating the stripper or may have impregnated her. This theme is carried a bit further by the tale of Dilbeck's vote on the congressional pay raise. Dilbeck drunkenly miscasts his vote, and then takes credit for it later when it is to his political advantage to do so. He has made a career of being an opportunist.

Moldowsky overdoes his dress and cologne to make up for his exceedingly small stature. He is referred to later in the novel as a "midget." Dressing very nicely is his way of overcompensating. He needs to generate some sort of authority as a "fixer" and this is how he does it. Thematically, reference to Moldowsky's cologne appears throughout the novel. The cologne contrasts his nickname, Moldy. The cologne can be seen as a figurative balance to the stench emanating from the type of work he performs.

We first learn about Erin's reason for stripping. By her taking the lead in negotiations with Orly, we know that Erin is not an ordinary stripper. Indeed, Orly calls her the best dancer at the club. Erin's intelligence and perceptiveness are shown in that she recognizes Orly's offer to pay her medical bills as out of character and a sign of trouble to come.

The custody judge is a weak, lecherous old man, susceptible to temptation like most of the other men in the novel. Like Dilbeck, he is a powerful man who cannot resist continually visiting the young, nude dancers at the club. He disguises himself like Dilbeck, but in a slightly different way. Instead of wearing a get-up, he hides himself behind the bible that he carries with him for each visit.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Paul Guber, victim of the congressman's attack, regains consciousness in a hospital bed only to see a lawyer in a three piece suit standing at the end of the bed. His name is Mordecai, and he is Guber's fiancée's cousin. Mordecai is eager to take the case. Paul worries that his fiancée learned the true story of his beating-that it happened in a strip club rather than outside a synagogue as his buddies told her. Paul is relieved to learn that they know nothing of the strip club.

Erin's mother, married to her fifth husband, lives in California and writes Erin twice weekly accounts of her shopping sprees. Each of her letters ends with a plea to Erin to move to California and live with them. Erin's mother does not approve of her dancing. Erin, likewise, does not approve of her mother marrying men for their money. Erin's mother is apparently an expert at divorce; each of her successive husbands is wealthier and older than the previous. Erin refused to take money from her stepfathers, though they always offered. Erin's real father died in a drunken car accident with three young girls in the back seat, all of whom escaped unscathed. Through her mother's experiences, Erin learned that men would do anything for even the most distant promise of sex.

When Erin visited the divorce lawyer for the first time, she realized that her 9 to 5 clerical job was not going to pay the maddening attorney fees. She went home that night, put on some music, and stripped in front of the mirror. She could not believe men would pay to see her strip. The next night she visited the Eager Beaver and watched hopelessly uncoordinated girls "dance" onstage and tantalize men, despite the girls' lack of musical coordination; Erin decided she could do it, and she told her mother about her decision. Her mother felt that she would need breast augmentation to make any money at all as a stripper; her mother insisted there was a mathematical corollary between the size of a woman's breasts and the finances of her suitors. Erin preferred to make a go of it with her natural breasts and her dancing ability.

Jerry Killian, known to Erin as Mr. Peepers, waits for Erin in the parking lot at the end of her shift. He gives her gifts and tells her he loves her. She tells him he is delusional and that he loves nothing more than her naked body. He drops to one knee and tells her he can fix her custody case. Her judge has aspirations of becoming a federal judge and with one phone call, Killian can get the judge to change his mind. Erin is dubious. He tells her that it is not a call from him, but a call from a certain United States congressman that could get him to change his mind. Shad comes out of nowhere and tackles Killian, then tells him not to come back to the club. Just before Erin drives off, Killian makes his proposal: "Be my wife." Shad does not let Killian off the ground until Erin is gone.



The next night, Monique Sr., another dancer, bursts into the dressing room to announce that Carl Perkins is in the audience. While the other dancers believe her, Erin knows that this is her motivational trick. Monique Sr. pretends that a not-so-recognizable celebrity is in the crowd as a fantasy to convince herself to dance her best. Shad enters the dressing room and hands Erin an envelope. It is a letter she wrote previously to her daughter, marked "return to sender," which means that Darrell, her ex-husband, has moved again. Shad hands her a second envelope. This one is from Killian. It says that the plan is in motion.

Moldy Moldowsky pays Orly, owner of the Eager Beaver, a visit. Moldy is digging for information about the guy who recognized the congressman. Orly is coerced to help. Through credit card receipts, Killian's identity is discovered and passed on to Moldowsky. By that time, though, the point was moot because Killian had already contacted the congressman.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Mordecai is the type of lawyer who will go to the hospital to meet a client. Mordecai is desperate and his career to this point cannot be characterized as a success.

Erin's mother has made a career out of living off the good will of men, and Erin is very much like her mother. She has learned from her mother that men will do anything for even the "distant promise of sex." Erin picks up on this fact and uses her looks, smile, and dancing ability to convince men to give her money. On the other hand, a big point is made of the fact that Erin only dances on stage. In her mind, she is not really enticing men with sex. She is only dancing. This is demonstrated by the repeated references to Erin's music and how important the songs are to her. Remember that Erin's first impression of the club is that the other strippers cannot dance. Erin can make it as a stripper without the large breasts her mother feels are necessary. Her dancing abilities are the reason she earns money.

Killian has obviously fallen under her spell. Erin's ability to charm and beguile, to put men into a trance, is a theme that runs throughout; in fact, Erin has snake-charmer qualities. Killian is so taken with her that he proposes, despite the fact that this is likely the first time he has ever spoken a word to her.

Monique Sr. has an interesting trick to motivate herself to dance. She tells everyone who will listen that a famous, though not universally recognizable, person is in the audience. For her, this breaks the monotony. Erin's motivation is simple: earning the money to get her daughter back.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Erin ventures to Darrell's house to verify that he no longer lives there. When no one answers her knock at the door, she sneaks around through the back. She walks inside and notices that Darrell has cleaned this furnished apartment bare of literally everything. He has gone so far as to remove the tile from the kitchen floor. She walks into Angie's room and finds every present that she gave her daughter scattered on the floor either decapitated or otherwise mutilated. Darrell left a heart shaped mirror on the wall. She thinks that he left it there so that she could see her own reaction to the mayhem.

Erin pays a visit to Darrell's sister, Rita, to attempt to learn his whereabouts. Rita and her boyfriend Alberto share a double wide trailer. Alberto, who knows of Erin's profession, is smitten with her to the point that he once snuck over to the club to watch her dance. Rita hasn't heard from Darrell in few weeks. After Rita leaves to tend to a litter of puppies, Erin works Alberto for information. She discovers that Rita talks to Darrell a few times a week when Darrell needs money. Erin decides that she might get lucky if she takes Rita's mail.

Erin flashes back to her pre-stripping days. She worked as a typing and file clerk for an FBI agent. She enjoyed her job. She was fired, though, when Darrell was arrested for his fourth felony offense: stealing 11 wheelchairs from a nursing home. She was deemed a security risk. The charges against Darrell were later dropped when he agreed to work with the sheriff as an informant. In exchange, the sheriff "erased" Darrell's criminal history from the sheriff's crime computer.

Erin finds what she is looking for in Rita's mail: a phone bill with a series of collect calls that must be from Darrell. She calls the number and he answers. She pretends to be collecting donations for a charitable organization in an attempt to get his address. She strikes out when he asks for her address so he can deliver some canned goods himself.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Darrell is particularly demented. Not only will he do everything possible to keep his child from seeing her mother, a mother who had every right to divorce him for his criminal activity and drug addiction, but he goes out of his way to torment and hurt her. Darrell's devious criminal mind is put on display when he doesn't fall for Erin's trick to try to discover his address through the charity call.

Darrell's brother-in-law Alberto is another victim of Erin's good looks. She doesn't do anything to string him along, yet he sneaks over to her club to watch her dance. She would not take advantage of him if it was not necessary for the sake of regaining her daughter.

Erin's former job with the FBI reveals much about her. She has the mind of a detective. This is evident throughout the novel; her detective work begins here when she "borrows" Rita's mail to track down Darrell. Again, she would never have done this if Rita had given her truthful information about her daughter's whereabouts. That Erin really enjoys detective work is evidenced by her manner of dress and music when she pores over Rita's mail: a Hawaiian shirt, sunglasses, a pink baseball hat, a pony tail, and Jimmy Buffet on the stereo.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Moldowsky meets Killian aboard the *Jungle Queen*, a tourist paddlewheeler that sails up and down the Intracoastal Waterway in Ft. Lauderdale. Killian is upset that Congressman Dilbeck isn't there. Moldowsky explains that the congressman is busy campaigning. Killian makes two requests: one million dollars and a favor with Erin's custody case. When Moldowsky replies that the sum is outrageous, Killian quickly rescinds the request and says he just wants the help with the case. Moldowsky says he will see what he can do about the case.

Mordecai, the attorney, is struggling with Paul Guber's case. None of Paul's friends can recall the exact location of the synagogue at which he was purportedly mugged. He considers asking Guber about it, but his master strategy for the case is to not let Paul talk until the case is done. Returning to his office, discouraged, he has a meeting with a new client, Shad. Shad has his cockroach-infested yogurt in hand. Mordecai is unmoved when, as part of the interview, Shad tells him he's a bouncer at a strip club. The meeting continues to go south when they quibble about the amount of attorney fees. Mordecai's attitude changes when Shad fishes the gigantic cock roach from the blueberry yogurt; Mordecai will take the case.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Poor, pathetic Mr. Peepers is way out of his league trying to blackmail Moldowsky. It is likely that he knows the object of his blackmail scheme is ridiculous, which is why he first asks for one million dollars.

Mordecai gets credit for his thorough, if not desperate, tactic of locating every synagogue in Ft. Lauderdale with a push pin on a map and showing it to the Guber gang. This ploy having failed, he is in a somber mood when he meets Shad. Despite being a large, oafish man himself, Mordecai is put off by Shad's somewhat similar looks, but when Mordecai sees the giant roach, his attitude changes immediately. A roach is a roach, after all.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

At the Eager Beaver, it is Tuesday, nude oil wrestling night. Erin, as always, refuses to participate. She tells Orly that she plans on taking the night off to meet with Darrell. Shad will accompany her to the meeting for her protection.

Erin flashes back to the time she first met Darrell. Her mother was in the hospital for elective plastic surgery. Darrell worked at the hospital as an orderly. She was impressed with his good looks and let herself be charmed with a fabricated story. They dated for six months, against her mother's wishes. Her mother produced a steady stream of doctors and lawyers for her to date; none, however, met Erin's approval. Erin married Darrell in part to break free from her mother. About eighteen months later, Darrell became a full time criminal. He also fell into amphetamine and methaqualone addiction. After she became pregnant, Erin gave Darrell a chance to clean up. He tried, but was unsuccessful. She walked in on him chiseling the serial numbers from a wheelchair. She confronted him and he slapped her twice. She punched him right back, threw him to the floor and whacked his testicles with a mop handle. He never laid hands on her again.

Erin and Shad drive to a mostly empty strip mall and park the car. They are staking out an abandoned video store that Erin surreptitiously tipped off Darrell would be expecting a delivery of wheelchairs. Shad offers to inflict some violence on Darrell; perhaps break a finger or an arm. Erin wonders what it is about her that leads men to beat each other on her behalf. Around midnight, Shad heads off for a Coke machine. Erin pops in a Jimmy Buffet tape and is immediately taken off to dream land. When she reopens her eyes, both doors to the car are open and her shoes are gone. Darrell grabs her by the hair and jerks her head back, holding something sharp against her throat. Darrell orders Shad to the ground and handcuffs him. Darrell abuses Shad by slightly digging the tip of the blade into Shad's forehead. Darrell recounts the way he was set up by Erin. He points out her foolishness of parking her own car in the parking lot: he could see it three blocks away. Darrell stands on Shad's head, then carves the letter G into Shad's forehead. Erin and Darrell argue about going to court. Finally Darrell punctures all four of Erin's tires and walks off.

Chapter 6 Analysis

With all the reader has learned about Darrell to this point, the reader must wonder how Erin, an intelligent woman, got mixed up with a rough character like Darrell in the first place. He seems to have been beguiling in the same way she is. She impresses men with her good looks and charms them. It is no coincidence that the author uses the word "charm," as in snake charmer, to describe how Darrell lured her into a relationship. That Erin really is a good, caring person is demonstrated by the fact that she gives him a chance to clean up and be a good father after she learns of his addiction.

The parking lot scene demonstrates that Darrell has a unique hold on Erin. She is not her normal, cool, calculating self around him. This is first introduced when she is unable to track him on the phone. In this scene, she truly messes up her plan, first by parking her car in a part of the parking lot visible from blocks away, and second by falling asleep on the surveillance job.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The next night at the club, Erin dances to ZZ Top as Killian has requested in his note. Her meeting with Darrell gone awry, Erin decides Killian might be her best hope. She looks for him in the club, but does not see him. After work she tells the other girls she's going to meet him; she has found Killian's address and phone number with a phone call to the FBI agent for whom she used to work.

Moldowsky meets with Dilbeck to learn about the congressman's visit with the judge. He is getting a massage from a beautiful redhead. Dilbeck tells him that the judge will not play; the judge refuses a bribe or "political contribution." The judge suggests to Dilbeck that oral sex from Erin might convince him to change his mind. Otherwise, he feels she is a harlot and unfit as a mother.

Two hours later Dilbeck is at a strip club with Erb Crandall and Christopher Rojo, a young heir to a sugar fortune. Rojo's only real connection to the sugar cane field is that he spends the money it produces. They sit enthralled, watching Lorelei perform with a python. Rojo throws \$50 and \$100 bills at her. Later, Rojo treats Dilbeck to a private friction dance from Lorelei. The dance frees Dilbeck of all of his troubles; he no longer worries about his wife, his campaign, being blackmailed or the sugar vote. Dilbeck startles her by unbuttoning his shirt and dropping to the floor. He tells her to dance on him and offers her two hundred dollars to do so. She accepts. Dilbeck then seemingly falls into an epileptic fit. Erb Crandall rushes into the private booth at that very moment and lifts Lorelei off of Dilbeck. He hands her three hundred dollars to presumably wipe her memory clear of the event. When she tells Erb that Dilbeck said he was a congressman, Erb gives her another hundred.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Everyone, it seems, is obsessed with sex. The custody judge will not reconsider Erin's fitness as a mother unless she performs oral sex. If Dilbeck cannot be at a strip club, he hires a woman to pamper him at home with a massage.

Christopher Rojo, heir to the sugar fortune, is a parallel to Dilbeck. Both are the sons of successful businessmen. Neither ever engaged in their father's messy/difficult work. Christopher has never seen the cane fields just as Dilbeck has never cleaned a septic tank. They live easy lives, yet they are bored and unmotivated. In essence, both men are spoiled brats who are accustomed to getting everything they want.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Moldowsky has a discreet meeting at a local bowling alley with a man wearing a brown UPS shirt. Moldowsky hands him an envelope and asks him to pass along a message: have his people move as quickly as possible.

Mordecai sits in his office despairingly. He has just arranged a meeting with a lawyer from the yogurt company in an effort to settle Shad's case in the mid-six figure range. The opposing lawyer needs pictures of the offending blueberry yogurt. Mordecai's day, if not month or year, is ruined when it is discovered that the temp secretary ate the yogurt/evidence for lunch. There will be no settlement.

Erin has visitation with her daughter. She meets Darrell and Angela in a local park. Darrell, as always, sits nearby in his van watching the visitation picnic out of fear that Erin will abscond with Angela.

Erin decides it is time to pay Killian a visit. She has obtained his address from her former FBI boss. She phones ahead, tells Killian she is coming over, and warns him that she has a gun in her purse. Erin pushes Killian for information about the congressman, but he will not talk, except to tell her she should be expecting a call that afternoon. Killian shows her a shrine of pictures of exotic dancers on his spare bedroom wall. Centered among them is a publicity photo of her. Once Erin gets her daughter back, she'll never strip again. Killian convinces Erin to dance for him on top of a table. Before she leaves his house, he slips her a folded note, which reads, "Thank you for saving my soul."

The first time Erin danced on stage, she vomited both before and after. She later learned to get over the fear and apprehension in a couple of ways: thinking of her daughter and falling into a dream-like state through her music. Consequently, her song selection is very important. Her songs have to mean something. At first it was hard for her to smile on stage. Later she learned that when she made herself smile, her tips increased. She was constantly reminded of the ridiculous power of sex and the edge sex gives women over men.

That night she works a double shift, hoping to see Killian and hear some good news. He does not show. She phones his work the next day and they tell her that he is on vacation for two weeks. She will never see him again.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Could Moldowsky be more out of place, the little short guy who fancies nice suits, in a bowling alley? He delivers an envelope of cash to a man dressed in a UPS uniform-the

deliveryman picking up the package. Moldowsky's controlling personality shines through when he fabricates a good bowling score as he waits for the meeting.

Mordecai's hopeless meeting with the lawyer for the dairy company demonstrates his desperate situation. Just when he thinks he's going to fall into a huge settlement, his payday is snatched away by a careless temporary secretary. The despair brought about by this event will haunt Mordecai throughout the narrative.

Erin visits Killian's apartment and sees the stripper shrine in which she is currently the centerpiece. She learns that Mr. Peepers takes an interest in the girls and tries to help them; he is a friendly and helpful stalker. That a casual smile from a dancing girl can spur a relatively normal man to do so much is another testament to the power of sex that Erin, and women in general, possess. Erin learns that Killian actually had a life at one point: he has an ex-wife and two children.

The flashback to Erin's first time dancing informs the reader that this line of work does not come naturally to her. She vomited before and after her first dance. She has trouble smiling on stage until she realizes it increases her tips dramatically. She is amazed to learn how much power sex gives women over men. Since she is a natural dancer, she realizes that losing herself in the music is her best coping mechanism.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The scene shifts to a bar in western Montana. Two brothers leave the bar, and on their way home a storm kicks up. As the two men cross a small rural covered bridge over a river, one of them notices a raft below in the water. He thinks it odd that someone is fishing in the middle of a thunderstorm with night falling. They follow the progress of the raft through intermittent lightning flashes. Finally, they realize that the raft's occupant is no longer in the raft. A search ensues, the raft is recovered, but no body is found.

Al Garcia is a homicide detective from Miami. He takes his wife, who is the ex of a murderer Garcia arrested, and two stepchildren on a fishing trip to Montana. In the middle of his trip, his stepson alerts him to a dead body in the river. Garcia investigates and discovers that the dead man's driver's license has a Ft. Lauderdale address. Why will dead bodies not leave him alone, he wonders.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The only reason that seems to make sense for including such a vivid description of the two brother's spotting Killian's raft in the creek is to demonstrate just how remote Montana is from South Florida and to provide a basis for later plot development.

Garcia is introduced. The fact that he would marry the former wife of a murderer he put away says something about him. He is a patient man who looks beyond the surface of things. An ordinary cop wouldn't go near the wife of a criminal he busted. She would be tainted and too connected to the "bad" side.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Shad visits the psychiatrist as instructed by Mordecai. As the examination turns from Shad's alleged bad dreams about the roach to questions about his mother, Shad flips out. He throws the doctor face down on the floor and cuts his clothes from neck to buttocks. Shad grabs a rubber stamp and stamps the doctor's back until he runs out of ink. Shad calls the psychiatrist a phony. The doctor calls him disturbed.

The girls are in a meeting with Orly at the Eager Beaver. During the meeting there's a knock on the door. "Police," is the call. Al Garcia wants to talk to Erin. He shows her a copy of Killian's driver's license and tells her that Killian has died by drowning. Garcia tracked her down after seeing her picture in Killian's apartment, as well as some notes he had written to her on Eager Beaver napkins. He tells her that the death was classified as a drowning by the Montana coroner. Garcia convinced the coroner to perform an autopsy. Inside, the coroner discovered that Killian's lungs were filled with fresh, clean water. He expected to see them full of bugs and sand as would have been more likely in a river drowning. Garcia tells her that he thinks Killian's death was a homicide. He asks her if she had anything to do with killing Killian, and she says no.

Mordecai gets a visit from his cousin Joyce, the fiancée of Paul. She is very upset. She has just discovered several slides in Paul's underwear drawer, which are the pictures from the night at the strip club. Joyce never wants to hear from Paul again. Mordecai looks at the slides and, in the final one, recognizes Dilbeck as the man about to hit Paul over the head with a champagne bottle. He gets excited. He knows Dilbeck and thinks he might be able to work out a settlement.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Shad's behavior at the psychiatrist's office reveals his personality. At the club, he is the ultimate authority figure. He is in control. He is out of place sitting in the psychiatrist's chair. He knows what he needs his evaluation to say and he tells the psychiatrist to write that down. The psychiatrist, however, has other ideas and starts to analyze Shad, causing Shad to erupt. He's either irritated by the question about his mother, or simply at not being in control. There is an interesting parallel here between Shad and Darrell. Shad marks the psychiatrist with the "No Insurance" stamp, much like Darrell marked Shad with the G.

Orly, though the manager of the strip club and the purported boss of the girls, is actually somewhat impotent and helpless when it comes to dealing with them. He cannot stand up to them using his own authority, but, instead, must invent mob connections to back himself up.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Dilbeck and Christopher Rojo are back at the Flesh Farm strip club. They are celebrating Moldowsky's news that the blackmail problem is solved. Dilbeck was not informed of any details. By dawn the congressman and Rojo, accompanied by two girls from the club who were paid \$1,000, are 80 miles away on a levee on the shore of Lake Okeechobee. The levee overlooks Rojo's family farm. This is the first time Rojo visited the farm. Rojo tells Dilbeck that the money he spent on each girl is equivalent to three weeks pay for one of the workers. Dilbeck cannot believe it. The workers only make \$30 a day for cutting a ton of cane an hour.

Erin spots the judge at the club. She sits down at his table and asks if he remembers her, the unfit mother. She has to talk to the judge because of Killian's death; the judge refuses to reconsider her case. She finds the judge is not very imposing as he fidgets in a dark booth at a strip club. He asks her for a dance, but she refuses. He then asks her for "something else," a reference to the oral sex he had discussed with Dilbeck. She does not know what he is talking about, but she refuses that too. The judge mentions Dilbeck by name, thereby clueing her in to Dilbeck's involvement and just who Killian may have been blackmailing.

Shad visits Mordecai's office and Mordecai has to explain the fact that the yogurt case is lost. This upsets Shad, causing him to drill holes in a Matisse print on the wall with a drill he has conveniently brought with him. Shad reaches into his pocket and produces several varieties of dead insects. Shad thinks the secretary should go to the store immediately and buy some yogurt for his insects. Mordecai refuses to go along with the plan and Shad throws him to the ground and inserts a dead scorpion in his mouth. Later Mordecai calms Shad by showing him the slides Joyce gave him. Mordecai convinces Shad that with his help, they can get millions from the Congressman's supporters since Shad was an eyewitness. Shad agrees to help.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Dilbeck does not want to know too much about Moldowsky's shady ways; he insulates himself from information he doesn't want to know about. A portion of this insulation is busted by Chris Rojo, who tells Dilbeck that the cane workers only make \$30 a day; Dilbeck has had no idea.

Erin's pathetic custody judge is yet another man consumed by the weaknesses of the flesh. He pathetically tries to justify his presence by toting a bible into the club and claiming he is praying for the girls. Any doubt as to the truthfulness of this statement is removed when he tells Erin that only oral sex would convince him to reverse his custody decision. He is as pathetic as Dilbeck, Killian, and Alberto, if not worse. He's the only

one of that group that overtly propositions her for a sexual act. The rest are content to drool over her while she dances.

How sick is Shad? He did have a minor confrontation with Mordecai on the previous visit, and his psychiatric visit did not go too well, but why he shows up at Mordecai's office with a portable drill and a pocket full of dead insects is a mystery. Perhaps if he had known beforehand that the cockroach-infested yogurt case was lost, this behavior could be explained. But he is not privy to this information until he arrives. The only explanation is that Shad is truly disturbed.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

A new girl, Marvela, shows up at the club and gives Erin competition for the top dancer spot. Erin is upset and tells Urbana about Killian's death; it was possibly a murder and that she might be indirectly involved.

Erin goes home and calls Angela. She speaks with her briefly until Darrell picks up the phone. She warns Darrell not to use Angela in his wheelchair stealing schemes for fear she'll be taken away by the state.

Erin visits her former FBI boss, Tom Cleary, late at night. She explains her problems with Darrell. She suggests something about the judge being corrupt. Cleary is mildly interested, but needs more proof. Erin doesn't tell Cleary about Killian's death for fear he will be upset at having given her previous information about Killian.

Erb Crandall visits Moldowsky's home to discuss the campaign. Crandall reports that every living Rojo, as well as their Caribbean farm workers, donated thousands of dollars to the campaign. Dilbeck is not informed about these improper campaign contributions. Dilbeck is allowed to think he has many public supporters. Crandall reports that there was an unusual call to the congressman's Washington office that morning. A woman called and left a message with a secretary, saying she was a friend of Jerry Killian. Moldowsky is not amused by this development.

Erin and Detective Garcia meet at a Denny's restaurant. It is apparent that Garcia has done some homework on Erin, knowing intimate details of her life, such as her past jobs and the status of her divorce and custody case. Garcia tells her that Killian will soon be buried in Atlanta. He also tells her that the Montana authorities classify his death as "Unclassified" rather than a homicide. They will keep the matter open if he discovers something later. Garcia asks Erin about any unusual incidents at the club. She recounts the incident of the drunken bachelor smashed over the head with the champagne bottle. Garcia is especially interested when she mentions that the assailant had a bodyguard. She says she didn't get a good look at the assailant, but that Shad did. Garcia will pay Shad a visit. Erin tells Garcia that she made a call to the congressman's office. Garcia warns her not to do it again.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Marvela is introduced as a truly spectacular dancer. She has to be, because later she is the one who causes the judge's head to explode. Erin, despite her mesmerizing dance moves and brilliant smile, is never able to accomplish that feat.

Erin decorates her apartment minimally. This is so she can pick up and move effortlessly. She also does this for a psychological reason-she is in a transitory period of

her life. She doesn't want to put down roots until her life is more solidified. The fact that she once kicked a potential lover out of her apartment because he didn't want to watch *60 Minutes* is telling of her personality. As a former FBI employee, she is fascinated by investigations and cannot relate to a man who is not naturally inquisitive. Erin begins to understand how people could inflict harm or injury on others they do not know after watching boxing on ESPN. This will be an important tool for her later when she translates her frustration at not having Angela into a knee to the jaw of Alberto.

That Dilbeck is little more than a pawn to his controllers is demonstrated by the fact that he assumes he has many, many supporters and benefactors in the community. In fact, the balance of his campaign contributions are from the Rojo's but disguised to look like they come from ordinary people.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Jerry Killian is buried outside Atlanta. Moldowsky sends a clandestine photographer to take pictures. After viewing the photos, Moldowsky is convinced that the woman who phoned Dilbeck's office asking about Killian is not at the funeral.

Darrell Grant loads wheelchairs into the back of a U-Haul truck when two detectives stop by to pay him a visit. Grant is their informant and they are not happy with his recent work. They threaten him with a trip to the custody judge for a urine test (they correctly suspect he has been using speed) if he doesn't produce better tips.

Shad is upset with deejay Kevin's musical stylings. After hearing one too many M.C. Hammer songs, Shad jumps into the deejay booth and literally chews up the CD. Shad explains to Erin that he just does not feel normal. He feels a change coming over. Shad almost tells Erin about the plan with Mordecai, but resists. Erin needs him to speak to Garcia about the Killian homicide investigation. Shad says he doesn't remember anything.

Dilbeck hears about his wonderful fundraising numbers and wants to celebrate properly, with some strippers. Crandall agrees to let the strippers come to Dilbeck's home. Crandall leaves Dilbeck to his strippers and waits outside the door. There is something of a commotion and Crandall realizes something's wrong. One of the girls has punched Dilbeck square in the forehead and knocked him out. Crandall pays the dancers double their normal rate and tells them to forget they've ever been there.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Darrell's tenuous life of drugs and crime is starting to cave in. Stealing wheelchairs in front of his two police handlers crosses the line. He is heading for disaster.

Shad's eruption at the deejay and his confession to Erin that he doesn't feel normal both signal that his career as a strip club bouncer is nearing an end. He can't control the power and aggression necessary to the job. That the strip club affects his appreciation of women is demonstrated by the fact that he doesn't notice Erin's breasts, but does notice that she has a new G-string. His reading of *The Metamorphosis* symbolizes his need for change.

Dilbeck has crossed the line with strippers once again and gets knocked out. What is he doing with them? Is he simply touching them inappropriately or is there some sort of attempted violence on his part? A stripper who goes to Dilbeck's house to perform would seem to have a pretty high threshold for normal touchy-feely antics.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Paul Guber, his fiancée Joyce, and Mordecai go for a drive. Paul refuses to participate in Mordecai's plan to sue Dilbeck despite the fact that they might be looking at a \$2-3 million settlement. Guber doesn't want his employer learning of the strip club incident. Mordecai tells him he is suffering from diminished capacity: his head injury is affecting his judgment. In confidence, Joyce suggests that perhaps they can pursue the suit without Guber's knowledge.

Erin arrives at the club and is startled to see the Eager Beaver sign coming down. Apparently a chainsaw company of the same name has threatened a lawsuit. The new name of the club will be Tickled Pink. Erin is not tickled with the new name.

Sgt. Garcia spends the morning at a rockpit outside Hialeah. He is working on collecting the scattered remains of a murder victim who was chopped up and spread all across Dade County. Someone spotted a head in the water-filled rockpit and a diver is looking for it. It turns out to be the severed head of a hog wearing an Atlanta Braves cap.

Garcia meets with Erin and Shad at the club. Shad is everything Garcia thought he would be, and then some. He is brutish, ferocious, dinosaur-like. Garcia thinks it a good sign that Erin trusted him. Erin identifies a photo of Dilbeck as the drunken lout with the bottle. Garcia tells her she has just picked out Congressman Dilbeck. Shad refuses to identify Dilbeck. Garcia tells them that it all makes sense: Killian was in the bar at the time of the assault, he recognized Dilbeck, and decided to blackmail him in the most unselfish way possible—to help Erin get her child back. For this he was killed. Next, Garcia shows them a picture of Erb Crandall. Again, Erin identifies him as the bodyguard and Shad refuses to make an i.d. Shad is bothered that he is holding information from Erin. Garcia, who suspects Shad is holding out information, confides in Shad that Erin could be in danger as a way to try to pry the information loose.

Chapter 14 Analysis

This is the second trip that characters in this novel make to the Rojo farms. The first time, Christopher took Dilbeck. On both occasions, one character tries to provide a glimpse into the secret, powerful world of the Rojos. Maybe Guber is not as dumb as he first appears, for he sees the power and chooses to walk away from the blackmail scheme. He is content to live his life and let the incident fade into memory. Guber has already had one prayer answered when Joyce is not mortified at learning of the bachelor party night. He does not need to press his luck.

Garcia tracking the remains of Mr. Goyo, which are spread all over Dade County, is a metaphor for his investigation in this case. It shows the reader that he is willing to look everywhere, to turn over every stone, until he finishes a case. Whereas another

detective may have washed his hands of this case and said to himself, not my jurisdiction, not my problem, Garcia sticks to it and tracks down the pieces of this investigation.

Shad's soft spot for Erin must be gnawing at him. This brutish bouncer who beats up lawyers and psychiatrists over his money-making scheme is now feeling a pang of guilt for holding out information from a stripper? He must be going soft.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Dilbeck awakens to the sharp smell of Moldowsky's cologne. Moldowsky and Crandall are standing at his bedside. Crandall and Moldowsky are trying to think of alternative methods to quench Dilbeck's sex drive. They insist that Dilbeck be ready to attend a fundraiser that evening. Six potential sugar vote congressmen will be flown in for the affair and Dilbeck will not miss it, despite his protests. Dilbeck swears to Moldowsky that this is the last time he will chase women. Dilbeck falls asleep to dreams of a beautiful dancer with dark hair, small breasts and a beautiful smile. He awakens and is fascinated at the apparition. He knows he had seen that girl somewhere, but cannot remember where.

Orly installs a wind machine to blow the girls hair when they dance on stage. He also upgrades the cocktail napkins and puts in a smoke machine and a neon blue strobe light. Erin asks the two Moniques if they remember Mr. Peepers (Killian) being at the club on the night of the champagne bottle incident. Monique Jr. vividly remembers that she was giving him a dance at the time of the incident because he got up from his table to get a better look at the fight. He asked her whether she knew who the guy with the bottle was.

Erin receives a \$50 tip from a new customer. He later tries to proposition her for \$2,000 and inadvertently knocks her out of her chair. Shad pounces on him and throws him out of the club. As Shad and Erin give the customer a lesson in chivalry, they notice police cars, fire trucks, and an ambulance whizzing down the street. Orly walks out and exclaims that there is a god. A judge has keeled over dead at the Flesh Farm. Erin runs 7 mile down the street just on the odd chance that the judge is her judge; it is. He has followed Marvela from the Eager Beaver to the Flesh Farm. He suffers a massive cerebral hemorrhage when Marvela is about to give him a friction dance. Erin is hopeful that her case may have a different outcome.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The significance of Dilbeck's dream of Erin is that it makes his later infatuation with her more plausible. As demonstrated through his almost nightly strip club trips, Dilbeck doesn't seem too picky when it comes to the women he chases. Pretty much any one will do. Through this dream, the reader can understand that maybe there was a reason that Dilbeck defended Erin's honor the night he whacked Guber on the head with the champagne bottle. Maybe he fell in love with her when he saw her dancing. Maybe he was charmed by her smile. He just had a delayed reaction because he was so drunk that night.

When Erin refuses the \$2,000 proposition, it shows that she isn't in it just for the money. As shown time and again, she just wants to dance for her money. Dancing is a job. Hooking is not.

The hypocritical judge gets just what he deserves: a cerebral hemorrhage in anticipation of receiving a friction dance from Marvela. Maybe his head exploded as a result of the unresolvable contradictions inside: he purports to be a bible thumper, yet is a strip club regular who tries to sexually extort Erin.

Erin's attempt to console Marvela over the judge's death is reflective of her attitude towards work. Erin tells her to relax, it's not her fault, she was just doing her job. This is how Erin feels. Stripping, to her, is nothing more than a job. She keeps a clear conscience about it because she isn't engaged in questionable practices. She isn't having sex with her customers. She's not even doing table dances.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Darrell leaves Angela with his sister Rita before heading to St. Augustine to deliver some stolen wheelchairs to a nursing home. Prior to leaving, he gives his two detectives the name of an alleged heroin dealer. When he is about 1/3 of the way up the coast, he realizes that the dealer he named was killed a few years earlier.

Dilbeck makes it to his fundraiser with makeup covering the bruise on his forehead. Dilbeck lavishes absurd praise on his fellow congressmen whose votes he needs for the sugar subsidy. After giving his speech, he walks from table to table, thanking his contributors. He approaches Mordecai, who introduced himself as a lawyer and asks if Dilbeck remembers him from the Mondale campaign. Dilbeck lies and says yes. Mordecai hands Dilbeck the photograph of the champagne bottle incident. Dilbeck is shocked. He realizes that the stripper in his dream that morning is real. Dilbeck has no memory of the incident. He apologizes for what he did. Crandall takes the photo and rushes off to find Moldowsky. Later, Moldowsky meets with Mordecai. Moldowsky calls the affair extortion, while Mordecai prefers to use the term settlement. Mordecai wants three million and offers Moldowsky some time to think things over. Moldowsky reveals that he already knows all the details of the incident.

Joaquin and Willie Rojo meet Moldowsky aboard their luxury yacht around 2 a.m. Their pet ocelot, a wild cat, wears an emerald-studded collar. Willie says that three million is out of the question. Moldowsky thinks Mordecai will settle for two. Willie caves in and agrees to pay the money, but his brother Joaquin refuses. After some heated discussion, the brothers decide against paying off Mordecai. They tell Moldowsky to take care of the problem.

Darrell drives back from his wheelchair deal with \$3,200 in hand. He stops in Daytona Beach where he purchases an assortment of pills and two prostitutes. He takes them to a motel. When the hookers think Darrell is asleep, they let their pimp in to steal his belongings. Darrell, awake the whole time, pulls out his dagger, ties up the prostitutes and the pimp, shaves the pimp's head, and then carves a G in his forehead with his dagger. Darrell calls Rita to check on Angela. Rita informs him that Erin is coming for visitation the next day and that the judge is dead. Darrell's phone conversation is interrupted when he is knocked out by one of the hookers. The hookers and the pimp steal his money, his drugs, his dagger, and his van.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Darrell walks a tightrope with his criminal enterprise. He is so far down as a bottom feeder in the criminal world that he really doesn't know too many other criminals to give

to his handlers. His spot on the criminal hierarchy is further demonstrated by the fact that he gets robbed by the hookers and the pimp.

It's an interesting tidbit that Mordecai and Dilbeck worked together on the Mondale campaign of 1984. Just when the reader begins to think that Dilbeck had a conscience and political ideals way back when, it is revealed that Dilbeck spent the nominating convention drunk at a San Francisco strip club. Dilbeck has been a drunk and a lecherous man throughout his political career. His stupidity is demonstrated once again, when seeing the picture, all he can think about is Erin. This picture can ruin his political career, but he, instead, cannot stop thinking about her.

The Rojo's ocelot, a fancy wild cat, could be a symbol for Dilbeck. Dilbeck is a little bit wild, a little bit exotic, and he is under the Rojo's control, just like the ocelot. Dilbeck is not an ordinary politician in their pocket. He's not an ordinary pet, just like the ocelot isn't an ordinary pet. The Rojos are astute businessmen: they will work every ounce of soil they can out of their sugar cane fields, then sell the land for housing developments and golf courses.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Sgt. Garcia's investigation takes him to the Flightpath Motel near the Ft. Lauderdale Airport. Killian's checkbook has been found in a room at the motel. Garcia correctly predicts the carpet in the room will be brown, because the Montana coroner found three brown carpet fibers under Killian's left thumbnail. Garcia learns that three Jamaicans rented the room at some point during the previous two weeks. They paid cash and checked out by midnight. The name was John Riley and the address was a post-office box in Lake Okeechobee. They wore shorts in bright colors and all had scars on their legs.

Erin goes to Rita and Alberto's to see Angela. Rita is in the backyard with her dogs, and Alberto is inside. Erin demands from Alberto the location of her daughter. He says he doesn't know. Alberto suggests a little show from Erin and he will lead her to Angela. Erin starts to dance on top of a table. She dances to the imaginary sounds of "Brown Eyed Girl." Alberto gets a little too excited and reaches for her breasts. When he tries to pull her down to kiss her, that's it. She grabs his head and swings her knee square into the underside of his chin. He is flat on his back in no time. The kick causes him to sever the tip of his tongue. With Erin threatening to pour hot coffee on his testicles, Alberto tells her that Angela is next door. Erin grabs Angela and drives back to Ft. Lauderdale.

Mordecai thinks that Moldowsky's cries of blackmail are an exaggeration. He compares the case to a slip and fall in a grocery store. The grocery stores routinely settle cases for large amounts of money rather than going to trial and no one cries blackmail. Mordecai wasn't proud of arranging a secret settlement of the case without his client's knowledge, but, frankly, he needed the money. He saw it as his only shot at ever earning a seven figure fee. The practice of law has become extremely competitive in South Florida and Mordecai is struggling to make ends meet.

Moldowsky calls Mordecai and instructs him that they will meet. He must bring Joyce with him to the meeting. As he leaves his office, he notices Shad coming in; he sneaks out to avoid Shad. He picks up Joyce and they proceed to the meeting place. A man in a blue bowling shirt is in the parking lot waiting. He says he works for Moldowsky. He gets in and gives them directions.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The Killian murder investigation seems a little bit of a stretch. Why would Moldowsky use Jamaican cane farmers to kill him? Why would the Rojo's private plane be used? As Garcia deduces, three Jamaicans stand out like a sore thumb in rural Montana. It might make sense if the Rojos were the ones carrying out the murder, but not when the act is left to Moldowsky. What kind of connection does Moldowsky have to the Jamaicans?

The reader never learns why, and it just seems out of character. How do they know he vacations annually in Montana? Moldowsky's style is more like the Mordecai/Joyce hit: a non-descript man in a blue bowling shirt pumping a few shots into their heads. This is the second time a bowling theme has been associated with a Moldowsky hit: the shirt worn by the assassin here and the payoff to the UPS man in the bowling alley earlier.

Erin is not shy in using her "talents" to convince Alberto to tell her where Angela is located. She will dance for him; she knows he is under her spell. She doesn't mind the dancing, but when he crosses the line, that's it, and he gets a knee to the chin. Her newfound ability to dish out some violence to Alberto may go back to her watching the Mexican boxing on ESPN a few nights earlier and understanding how people can hurt people they don't really know. Any lingering doubts about Darrell's fitness as a parent are wiped out when it is revealed that he uses Angela in his scheme to steal a sick young boy's wheelchair.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Erin moves out of her apartment the same day she grabs Angela. She brings her lawyer some more money and he files papers to have custody instantly granted to Erin because Darrell has left Angela with dangerous and unreliable relatives. The new judge grants the motion.

Erin brings Angela to work with her that night. Erin announces that she will now do table dances because of her need for money. Orly is not happy that Erin has brought the child to work-he could lose his license. Orly is more upset that the Flesh Farm is pulling in more business because of publicity from the judge's death.

Shad is at Mordecai's office for a second day in a row. He sits patiently with the secretary in the waiting area. The secretary is worried because she hasn't heard from Mordecai since the previous day. He has already missed several appointments. She is also concerned that a bank officer called to confirm Mordecai's account number for a wire transfer withdrawal. Shad enters Mordecai's office to look for clues. Shad is convinced that someone's been through the office because things are too neat. He also notices that Mordecai's Rolodex is missing.

Erb Crandall secretly follows Erin home from work. He watches her apartment until 10 the next morning, then leaves. He repeats the process the next two nights. On the third morning, Erin emerges with a basket of laundry. Crandall follows her to a laundromat and watches from across the street as she does her laundry. When she is finished, he goes inside and takes the lint from the dryer she used. Dilbeck told him that he wanted the girl, and that he wanted her like no other woman before: he was under her spell. He told Crandall to find out everything about her. He wants Crandall to offer her a job on his staff. Dilbeck is impressed that Crandall succeeds with his lint mission.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Erin's desperation for money forces her to start table dancing. She is desperate because she has turned the corner in her custody battle and wants to see it through. For this, she will cast aside her morals against table dancing.

With other girls, Dilbeck wanted relatively normal clothing items like a bra cup or panties. These are very personal items. Why is lint more personal to him? Why does he cherish lint more than he would covet panties? Does lint signify something more personal because it comes from the clothes she wears everyday as opposed to the ones she strips in? Perhaps the answer is that with the other girls, he was in love with their looks, their illusion of beauty. With Erin, he purports to be in love with her. The lint could be more a part of her than a flashy pair of panties could ever be.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Shad calls Sgt. Garcia and tells him its time to talk. Garcia picks him up and they go for a ride to Belle Glade, a town near Lake Okeechobee. Shad tells him everything he knows. He tells Garcia that Mordecai planned to go to Dilbeck and demand money and that Shad would get a cut. Mordecai is missing and Shad is worried. They're both worried about Erin. They arrive at the Belle Glade post office where Garcia wants to investigate John Riley, the name from the guest register of the Flightpath Motel. The clerk tells him that Mr. Riley is dead and has not picked up his mail in six months. Riley was hated by most people in town because he was the crew boss at Rojo Farms. Apparently he was shorting his cutters pay and they all knew it. He was run over by a migrant bus in an incident that was declared an accident. Garcia tells her he is looking for three Jamaicans who might not have liked him. The entire crew was Jamaican.

On the drive back from the cane fields, Garcia pieces together what happened. Killian has blackmailed Dilbeck with a strange request-to fix a custody case. Dilbeck's people get nervous when they can't make it happen. They send three cane cutters down to snatch Killian. They take him to a cheap motel, register in the name of their dead boss, drown him in the tub and take him to Montana to fake a drowning. Garcia theorizes that the three Jamaicans are either already back in Jamaica or dead. Shad pieces the sugar empire together: they get water for almost nothing, imported slave labor, jacked-up prices because of the Congressional subsidy, and then they get to dump their waste into the Everglades.

Moldowsky is restless, worried, and nervous. He does not appreciate the position Dilbeck has put him in; he is second guessing his actions. If only they had waited to kill Killian. If they had waited a few days more, the problem with the judge would have been solved by way of his untimely death at the strip club. Moldowsky checks off items from a mental checklist: the three cane cutters who murdered Killian are now in Jamaica and will soon be the victims of a truck accident; the flight logs from the Rojo's private jet will not be a problem either, since they show a trip to Aspen, not Montana. Erb Crandall stops by to tell Moldowsky that Dilbeck has finally done it, that he's gone off the deep end. Crandall recounts the lint incident. When Crandall asks, "What, now?" Moldowsky replies, "The girl, obviously."

Erin is at the club doing table dances. She makes an extra ninety dollars the first night without any customer-grabbing incidents. She doesn't like the fact that she has to dance to the other girls' music when she does table dances. On the second and third nights of table dancing she continues to do well. On the fourth night, Garcia stops by. A young Latin man, dressed well, tips her \$100 for her table dance. He asked her for four more and gives her \$100 each time. Later that evening, he slips \$200 into her garter and whispers something into her ear. Erin meets Shad and Garcia at the bar. Garcia informs

her that her new customer is Christopher Rojo, heir to the sugar fortune. Erin shows them that she is missing a shoe and that Christopher Rojo purchased it for \$1,000.

Chapter 19 Analysis

The Goyo analogy to the investigation of the Killian murder is revisited. Garcia has Mr. Goyo's head in an Igloo cooler in his trunk at precisely the same time he pieces together the Killian murder.

Moldowsky idolizes John Mitchell, Richard Nixon's advisor who went to prison over President Nixon's Watergate scandal. Mitchell, a fixer like Moldowsky, played fast and loose with politics and the law. Mitchell's career was destroyed when a simple burglary was botched. Moldowsky wonders whether the same fate awaits him for not being able to handle a little man with glasses who is fascinated by a stripper.

Rojo buys Erin's shoe for Dilbeck. A shoe seems less personal than the lint Dilbeck coveted earlier. This event may demonstrate how Dilbeck is tied to the Rojos financially. On his own, perhaps he can't afford a \$1,000 shoe. With the Rojo money, anything is possible.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Merkin and Picatta, Darrell Grant's police overseers, get a collect call. Darrell's in jail in Martin County for stealing a wheelchair and he wants their help. They refuse to take the call, and, instead, let him know that he's about to lose custody of his child and that they are upset with him for giving them a bogus tip. Darrell has troubles with another inmate who isn't happy about the fact that Darrell's in jail for stealing a wheelchair from an old lady with polio. Darrell is apparently beaten silly by the other inmate: he awakens in the hospital. He discovers that he is not cuffed to the bed. His plan has worked perfectly; he can now escape.

Mordecai's secretary is interviewed by an investigator from the Florida Bar Association. They believe that Mordecai has stolen \$85,000 from his client trust account and has disappeared. Beverly, the secretary, doesn't believe he stole the money, although he hasn't been seen in three days. The investigator asks about Joyce, Mordecai's cousin. Guber has told the investigator that she has disappeared too. The secretary can't believe that Mordecai would be involved with his own cousin.

Garcia, Shad, and Erin are in Orly's office. Garcia has discovered that someone called Orly asking about Killian and he wants details. Orly informs Garcia that he gave Moldowsky Killian's name by digging for credit card receipts. Orly gave up the information because Moldowsky told him he worked for a congressman and could give him problems if he resisted. Orly mentions that Moldowsky asked several questions about Erin, such as what kind of person she is, whether she has a drug problem and whether she has a boyfriend. Moldowsky knew that Erin had a child and a custody issue.

Garcia waited at the club until closing time. He followed Erin home for her safety. Erin drove very fast and arrived twenty minutes earlier than Garcia. When Garcia arrives, though, Erin was still in her car, in front of her apartment, with her gun on the dash. She is petrified that the bedroom light is on. She never left lights on. Garcia goes inside to check things out, then motions for her to come in when he finds everything is okay. Nothing seems amiss until they enter the bathroom. Erin notices the shower curtain is open. She never leaves the shower curtain open. Still, nothing seems to be missing. Finally she is aghast when she figures out what has been taken. She tells Garcia, "you won't believe it, I don't believe it."

Chapter 20 Analysis

Darrell, for all his shortcomings, is a resourceful criminal. He knows an opportunity when he sees it, and uses his bottom-dweller criminal status to escape from jail. He congratulates himself on a well executed plan.

The bar association is on the Mordecai case so quickly, when they otherwise wouldn't be, because they were tipped off by Moldowsky.

Erin's keen sense of observation and potential detective skills are demonstrated once again when she knows not to go in her apartment because a light is on that she never leaves on. She also figures out exactly what is missing: her disposable razor.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Dilbeck lays on his bed wearing a black cowboy hat, a white towel, and a pair of green lizard skin boots. One arm and both legs are tied to the bed with handkerchiefs. His lower legs are covered in Vaseline. The room is lit with black light. Erb Crandall walks in and asks what is going on. Dilbeck says he is creating a mood. Dilbeck asks if Crandall got him what he wanted. Yes, Crandall did. It was Crandall who broke into Erin's apartment at Dilbeck's request. The object of his theft: one pink disposable razor. Crandall, thoroughly disgusted at what he sees, pulls out a screwdriver and holds it to Dilbeck's throat. He resists the urge to puncture Dilbeck's jugular. Dilbeck then asks Crandall for one more favor, to shave him all over.

Flashback to Dilbeck's early years. He is the only son of Chuck "The Straw" Dilbeck, the one-time foremost pumper of septic tanks in South Florida. In the early boom days of Florida, before sewers, everyone had a septic tank. The Straw made a huge business out of pumping the tanks.

Young Dilbeck never spent a day pumping septic tanks. When he was twenty four, he ran for city council of Hialeah. Largely because of name recognition, he won. The council was known for its corruption and it was there that Dilbeck learned that fine art. Graduating to the Senate, he learned that some women were attracted to politicians. For eight years in the Senate, Dilbeck chased women, then settled down and married the daughter of a tycoon. Since she was more interested in fashion and social causes than sex, Dilbeck continued his philandering ways. Dilbeck's Senate career was remarkably undistinguished. He did virtually nothing. His big break came a few years later when Wade Sheets, the 82 year old congressman from South Florida, died and left his seat open. Though only a longshot to take the seat, Dilbeck locked it up by delivering a fantastic eulogy at Sheets' funeral. Crandall, a young staffer at the time, wrote the speech, borrowing heavily from John F. Kennedy. The newly elected congressman learned the Washington system of graft. He did well and managed to win re-election year after year.

Moldowsky stops by Dilbeck's. Dilbeck has now changed into a maroon jogging suit and is in the den sipping an iced tea. Moldowsky has heard about the Vaseline, razor, and cowboy boots. Dilbeck tries to explain by referring to the animal urges rising up inside him. Moldowsky wants to know if the shoe Crandall found in Dilbeck's desk belongs to the stripper. Moldowsky thinks Dilbeck is insane. Moldowsky offers to bring him a woman, two women, to satisfy his urges. Dilbeck is in love with Erin and can only be satisfied with her. Moldowsky imagines how much easier his life will be once Dilbeck is elected and he loses the chairmanship. Moldowsky makes an offer to Dilbeck: no more hunting for lint and razors and he will do his best to get Dilbeck a date with Erin.

By the 1970s, the underwater reefs off the South Florida coast were dead, polluted by sewage from the toilets of waterfront hotels. In an effort to revive them, the artificial reef program was born. Artificial reefs were old ships, dragged just offshore then sunk to the bottom. Once sunk, they attracted all types of underwater life. The actual creation of the reefs, the explosion of the old ships, was a spectacle in and of itself, attracting all sorts of spectators and media. On October 2nd, an old Guatemalan banana boat called the Princess Pia is towed from Port Everglades off the Ft. Lauderdale coast to be sunk as an artificial reef. The hull had been stripped meticulously. The boat skeleton is guarded continuously after being loaded with dynamite for the demolition. Unfortunately, there are a few hours when the guard goes to play poker and watch pornographic videotapes with the crew of a Japanese lumber barge that the ship is left unguarded. The Princess Pia goes down as scheduled. No one knows that there is a 1991 Lincoln Continental chained to the beams of its aft cargo hold, nor did they know what was in the car.

Chapter 21 Analysis

In this chapter, exactly what was stolen from Erin's apartment is revealed: a pink disposable razor. Dilbeck has specifically requested that Crandall pilfer this item. Then he asks Crandall to shave him with it. This sickens Crandall so much that he is tempted to puncture Dilbeck's jugular with a screwdriver. Dilbeck is truly sick.

Dilbeck's backstory is revealed. He is the son of "The Straw," the septic tank cleaning king of South Florida. There are strong parallels to Christopher Rojo: like Christopher, Dilbeck never spent a day working at his father's dirty business. Perhaps unlike Chris Rojo's ancestors, The Straw was a hard worker. For this reason, maybe Dilbeck should be more grounded in reality.

During Dilbeck's rise through politics he learns the tricks of the trade that will earn him extra money and extra influence. At the same time he learns to exploit his position for money, he also learns that he can exploit his power for sex. There are women who are intoxicated by the power of politicians.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Erin table dances for some young bankers while Urbana takes on all comers in the creamed corn wrestling pit. She reflects on what Garcia told her earlier: Killian had been killed over sugar and the fact that he threatened the career of a crooked politician. Garcia told her he wanted to catch the killers before they came looking for her. Erin could not forget that it was her sexy dancing that fatally infatuated Killian. Erin remembered what her mother had said about strip clubs, that they were degrading to women. Her mother was wrong. Her mother was correct that strip clubs were meat markets, she was just wrong about who was the meat. The men were the meat. A good stripper could spot a mark the minute he walked in the door and relieve him of all of his cash by the end of the night. There was no actual sex involved. A nice smile, a little hug, and a few minutes of private conversation were all it took. Erin is going to have to go on a date with Dilbeck. She wonders what he will do. When a hand latches onto her leg, she snaps back to reality. She's table dancing for three drunk young bankers. One is playing with her garter and running his hand up her leg. She tells him to stop, but he won't.

A small article appears in the back of the local newspaper that day, a story about a missing lawyer named Mordecai who has emptied his client trust account and fled the country. He hasn't been seen for several days and is believed to be in the Bahamas with an unidentified female accomplice. Garcia reads the article, clips it, and places it in his briefcase.

Erb Crandall also clips the article. Erb is about to commit a minor crime. He enters the Sunshine Fidelity Savings Bank, forges Mordecai's name on the vault-room ledger, and uses Mordecai's stolen key to open the box. Inside, instead of the champagne bottle picture, he finds nothing but a business card. Sgt. Garcia's business card. Crandall's fingers shake as he returns the safe-deposit box.

That evening Garcia re-reads the newspaper clipping. He is amazed that anyone would go to the trouble to frame Mordecai. He was impressed with the trust account ruse. During dinner, Garcia gets a call from the Broward County Sheriff. They are not interested in pursuing the Killian murder case.

Shad and Orly have a problem. They have stolen Lorelei, the python dancer, away from the Flesh Farm. She refuses to dance, however, because her python is missing. She will not dance without her python. Orly sends Shad to the Flesh Farm with \$500, suspecting they want ransom for the snake. The Lings, owners of the Flesh Farm, make Shad wait for two hours, then refuse the offer and send Shad back with a package for Orly. When Shad returns, the club is in an uproar, with Erin in the middle of the commotion. Paramedics are putting a neck brace on a young man. Apparently, Erin could take no more of the customer whose hands would not stop rising between her

legs. Once too high, she gave him a swift kick. Shad explains to Orly that Erin is under a lot of stress. Orly opens the package from the Lings to discover a twelve-inch portion of Lorelei's snake. The Lings also sent a message that there's plenty more where that came from.

Chapter 22 Analysis

Now that she's table dancing, Erin fully understands the power she wields in the strip club: the power of her sexuality. A nice smile is all she needs to relieve men of their money. She will try to combine this sexual power with her detective senses to catch Dilbeck. She knows she will be able to control him.

Again, Erin shows that she is not afraid to dish out a little violence. The customer with the wayward hand gets a kick to the chops just like Alberto did. She can be violent to people she doesn't know. This practice will help her with her Dilbeck plans. Borrowing from the snake metaphor, she will strike if touched in the wrong way.

The snake metaphor is revisited. At the Flesh Farm, Lorelei had no problem dancing with her snake. Likewise, Dilbeck had no problem with the dancers and the friction dances at the Flesh Farm. When Lorelei moves to Erin's club and is forced to use a new snake, her act is ruined. The snake does not cooperate. It urinates on her and coils around her leg; the snake doesn't want to work within her act. Likewise, when Dilbeck goes to Erin's club, Erin does not cooperate with him. Soon, Erin will react like Lorelei's new snake in an effort to kill Dilbeck.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Well-to-do Connecticut newlyweds suntan on the beach outside the Breakers Hotel on Palm Beach. As they prepare to leave, Darrell appears on the beach, not dressed for the occasion, and asks them if they have a car. He threatens them with a knife and they say, yes, they do have a car. Darrell steals the car and steals the wife's birth control pills.

Moldowsky has the use of the Rojo's yacht. Crandall meets him there to tell him the bad news about the safe deposit box. Time for Plan B, Moldowsky says. Moldowsky is prepping Dilbeck for his date with Erin the following night. There are certain questions that Moldowsky needs Dilbeck to ask her. Erin will be paid \$2,000 to do two hours worth of dancing. Dilbeck hesitates at the need to pump Erin for information. Moldowsky cautions him that people are trying to harm him and they need to be sure she's not one of them.

Garcia pays Erin a visit at her apartment. She is drunk on the bed, wearing only panties and a bra. Garcia tries to cover her up with the bed sheet. Erin reminds him that he's seen her nude at the club several times. He tells her that this is different. She whips off the few clothes she is wearing and throws them at him. She's upset about her upcoming meeting with the congressman. Garcia warns her that Darrell has escaped police custody. They go to lunch. When Garcia asks her if she has a boyfriend, she flips out. She immediately thinks he wants to ask her out. He tells her no, he just wants to cover all the angles. He reminds her that he took Erin to meet his wife. She tells him that by the end of a night working she doesn't have much energy or interest in men. He asks her if she trusts any men. Shad, she says, is the only man she trusts. After lunch, at Erin's insistence, they take a walk down the beach. Erin asks if Garcia thinks she's a whore. His answer is no. He asks her if she wants to reconsider the date with Dilbeck. He warns her that he'll want more than a peek for his \$2,000.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Moldowsky is worried about Erin. She has the power to bring down Dilbeck. He arranges for her to have a date with Dilbeck so they can extract information from her and see just what she knows. Short-sighted Dilbeck, thinking only of his carnal desires, pays barely a bit of attention to Moldowsky's interrogation instructions, and, instead, wonders if she will shave him.

Garcia's visit to a drunk Erin in bed at her apartment reveals much about her mental state. The perfect gentleman that he is, he tries to cover her up with a sheet when he walks in to find her in bra and panties. She reminds him that he's seen her nude at the club. By telling her things are different here, he acknowledges that her stripping is just a

job. For her to be naked in front of him in a bedroom is something different. Moldowsky's preparation of Dilbeck parallels Garcia's preparation of Erin.

Erin doubts herself. She has no interest in men. Men are objects to her. They are walking wallets. She sees them at their weakest moments, when they are beguiled by her sexuality. She asks Garcia if he thinks she's a whore. This self-doubt is brought on by the fact that she's doing table dances and because she has agreed to sell herself to Dilbeck. She cleanses herself in the ocean in final preparation for the date.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Shad and Orly talk about the strip club business. Orly would like to teach the Lings, owners of the Flesh Farm, a thing or two. Shad refuses Orly's suggestion that he torch the Flesh Farm. Orly recalls the old days when the strip club was little more than a biker bar. Back then there were no worries about lawsuits or wind machines or trained snakes. The girls did what they were told. They weren't artists. They were simply strippers. Shad reminds Orly that the new breed of patrons spends a lot more money at the club. Moldowsky calls Orly looking for the picture of Dilbeck with the bottle. Shad claims he doesn't know anything about any photograph. Moldowsky has a message for Erin-to meet Dilbeck at 10 p.m. the following night on a yacht. Orly says that he assumes she's going to have sex with Dilbeck. Shad reminds Orly that he knows her better than that. Orly is a little frustrated. He tells Shad that Moldowsky is riding him. Orly is worried he'll lose his liquor license if Erin doesn't have sex with Dilbeck. Meanwhile, Lorelei struggles on stage with a new snake; the new snake does not like her. It has urinated on her and now coils itself around her leg. Orly says he will take bikers over congressman any day. He will no longer allow congressman inside the establishment.

Moldowsky contemplates the situation. He thinks about the photograph. They will not be blackmailed by the bouncer. Guber worries him a little more, but he has left town. His biggest problem is Erin. She could singlehandedly destroy Dilbeck's reputation. He thinks of how to handle Erin; her custody file was full of juicy accusations, but he doubts they are true given Darrell's reputation. Moldowsky decides to treat Erin very gingerly. He tells Dilbeck to look at her, but not touch her. Dilbeck cannot do anything to frighten or anger her. If all else fails, he is instructed to make friends with her. Moldowsky just does not trust Dilbeck to stick to the program. Dilbeck is instructed to stay away from the topic of Killian. He can ask a few questions about Angela, and he can mention that he knows the new judge and maybe can help with him. If she brings up the bottle incident, he is to be remorseful, but say nothing.

Moldowsky reflects that in the worst case scenario, Erin could sink Dilbeck on her own, even without the photo. She could just hold a news conference. If the Dilbeck story broke, the sugar vote would be lost. Moldowsky dismisses the possibility that Erin has no angle, has no axe to grind. He figures she needs money and would understand how much leverage she holds over Dilbeck. Moldowsky considers the possibility of purchasing her silence: maybe she'll take a large sum of cash and just leave town. A more sinister disappearance was no longer possible given Garcia's presence on the case. Moldowsky can't figure out how Garcia came to be involved and how his card appeared in Mordecai's safe deposit box. Moldowsky's experience has taught him to be prepared for the worst. He should think that Garcia is hot on their tail, that Garcia knows of the blackmail plots, knows about Killian, and knows about Mordecai. Moldowsky

considers these possibilities, but then thinks to himself that there is absolutely no proof connecting any of these things to Dilbeck. The best plan of action is to do nothing.

Moldowsky has a problem with a lack of restraint. He has a huge ego, short temper, and no patience. It is not in his nature to do nothing in the face of a potential threat. He is a fixer and that's what fixers do. He cannot resist the urge to grab the phone, peddle some influence, or get some information.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Shad and Orly engage in a conversation comparing the old days of the strip club, when it was full of bikers and other tough guys, to the new days of the club, full of bankers, lawyers and politicians. Things were simpler back then. The girls stripped. The guys fought. There were no lawsuits, bribery or scandals. Times are changing. The politician who was satisfied with the adoring art student years ago now must find a more exotic and tempting object of desire.

The end of the chapter features a revealing passage about Moldowsky and his work as a fixer. Moldowsky's job is about power. Power is a drug to him, a drug he can't resist using. Power affects Moldowsky in exactly the way that sex and women affect Dilbeck. They both show a lack of restraint and have huge egos. They can't resist giving into their fatal flaws: Dilbeck in chasing women, particularly Erin, and Moldowsky in using his power, even when he knows it's not in his best interests.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Erin arrives at the Rojo yacht wearing an outfit designed to impress and arouse. Two bodyguards wait in front of the yacht. Shad accompanies her wearing a red beret, carrying a .38 and with a kinkajou (a small monkey) perched on his shoulder.

Garcia's boss, Lt. William Bowman, calls Garcia into his office for a talk. Bowman wants to know if Garcia is working a case in Broward County involving a missing lawyer named Mordecai. Garcia tells Bowman the whole story beginning with Killian. Bowman is impressed with Garcia's investigative work. Bowman reminds Garcia that he needs plenty of evidence to bust a Congressman. Bowman asks where the champagne bottle slide is, Garcia responds that he does not want to know. Garcia acknowledges that he's got no evidence, but he's got some great theories. Bowman tells Garcia he's on his own, but he is impressed with his work thus far.

Dilbeck greets Erin. He's trying to impress her with his attire and cologne. Erin compliments him on the yacht. She has him put in her dancing music. Dilbeck strikes her as just another jittery old lech. She really expects more from a congressman. She dances for him, but is uncomfortable working without mirrors. Nonetheless, she easily puts him into a sexual trance with the progressively slower pace of each song. Dilbeck compliments her on her beautiful blue eyes. She corrects him that they are green. Dilbeck reminds her about the first time they met, when he wore a fake mustache. She cannot forget almost having her skull bashed in, and he apologizes. He doesn't remember what came over him that night.

By the fourth set of music, Dilbeck is hopeless. He tells Erin he loves her. She says she loves him, too. He asks her to be his girlfriend. He will lavish her with an apartment, a car, money—anything she wants. She asks if she'll have to have sex with him. Clearly he expects this. After toying with him, she tells him that she cannot accept the offer. Erin, fishing for information, asks Dilbeck what he does in Washington. He helps people. In fact, he has tried to help her with her custody case. She asks how he could know about her case. This is what Garcia prepared her for. She wants Dilbeck to drop Killian's name, but he doesn't. He says a little "birdie" told him she needed some help. He admits that he had the razor stolen from her bathroom. She calls him a "sick puppy," and her attitude about him begins to change quickly. He tells her he did it because he loves her. He tells her about making love to her dryer lint. She really thinks he's sick now. She tells him to come close to her and close his eyes. He obliges. She takes off a shoe and pounds the 4 inch heel into his hand. She tells him that if he ever comes near her apartment again, she will kill him.

Erin and Shad meet Garcia at a bagel shop after the yacht affair. Garcia asks Erin how it went. She says it was a piece of cake. She gives him a quick account of everything that happened, the lint story being the highlight. She doesn't tell him about driving the



shoe into his hand. Garcia suspects that Dilbeck's knowledge of Killian is limited. He figures that Dilbeck wouldn't have had the guts to kill Killian himself and that his handlers wouldn't be dumb enough to tell him about it.

Garcia gives Erin a ride home. She notices that he is unusually happy. He tells her he has a new piece of evidence: a clerk at a hotel in Montana remembers three Jamaicans spending a night there. A check of the room charges reveals that they made a 22 minute phone call to Moldowsky's residence. Garcia asks if Dilbeck mentioned Moldowsky's name. He did not, but he did mention Erb Crandall. Erin says perhaps he'll mention something about Moldowsky next time. Garcia can't believe his ears. There is not supposed to be a next time. It's too dangerous. He reminds her that someone is already dead. Erin says that Dilbeck tipped her \$1,000 on top of the \$2,000 she was already paid. She needs the money, and Dilbeck is the dupe to give it to her. She is not worried about him. She thinks he's a pushover. Erin is drunk with power.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Shad's kinkajou/monkey is yet another exotic pet in this story. Lorelei has her python, the Rojos have an ocelot, and Rita has her wolf dogs. In a sense, Shad's dead cockroach and dead scorpion might also be seen as pets. Shad uses the little creature as a distraction to throw the Rojos' security guards off balance. The pet theme crosses over to the characters of the novel, many of whom can be seen as pets. Dilbeck and Moldowsky are both pets of the Rojos, at their beck and call and under their control. Dilbeck wants desperately to make a pet out of Erin, but her will and intelligence prevent that from happening; in fact, she turns the tables on him. He might as well be on Erin's leash.

Finally, someone's political aspirations are working out in a good way. Lt. Bowman, who has designs on being Chief of Police, allows Garcia to work on his investigation. He wants Garcia to be a satisfied and happy subordinate. Another supervisor in his shoes, after receiving a warning from the chief, might not have been as patient with Garcia for working out of jurisdiction.

Dilbeck tries to set an amorous mood for his encounter with Erin aboard the yacht. She walks in and gets straight to business. Out with the Dean Martin tape, in with her dance music tape. There will be no lovemaking, only dancing. After all, she is a dancer, not a prostitute. She has designed the tape so that each song get progressively slower. Note that Dilbeck compliments her on her blue eyes. She corrects him by pointing out that they are green. In the very first chapter, Shad and Erin have a conversation about eye color. He asks her why she dances to the song "Brown Eyed Girl" when she doesn't have brown eyes. She answers that nobody looks at her eyes. That Dilbeck cannot tell her eye color is further proof that his purported love for her is not genuine. He is not in love with her: he's in love with her dancing and her smile. Her dancing puts him in a trance. Erin feels a rush of control when her dancing is really good. She is in control. She toys with Dilbeck's emotions when he asks her to be his girlfriend. Erin is drunk with her power in much the same way Moldowsky is.

Erin is as upset to learn that Dilbeck violated her by breaking into her apartment and stealing her razor as she would have been if he had put his hand a little too high between her legs. Her newly-acquired skill at dishing out a little violence comes in handy here. She hammers his hand with the heel of her shoe.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Erin takes Angela for a movie and then some shopping. Erin buys her new clothes and new Barbie dolls. Angela wants to know when she can go home with Erin. She is concerned with her father's well being, but isn't interested in living with him. Angela wants Erin to be careful and not get in trouble like Darrell.

Darrell pays his sister Rita a visit. They talk about his bleak prospects of a future. He wants to take Angie back and leave the state. He steals a car from Rita's neighbor.

The morning after the night on the yacht finds Dilbeck hot on the campaign trail. He gives a rousing speech in Little Haiti followed by another before the American Legion. So good is Dilbeck that the Legionnaires think he served in Korea. He didn't, of course, because of an undescended testicle. The final of the three speeches is to a group of 300 retirees, and Dilbeck has them in tears. He vanquishes his campaign opponent who shows up for an impromptu debate. Moldowsky calls Dilbeck and asks for details about the date. Dilbeck was a perfect gentleman; there was no shakedown; and there was no mention of the photograph. Dilbeck tells Moldowsky that he'll need the yacht and more cash in a couple of nights for a return visit from Erin. Moldowsky instructs Crandall to stay close to Dilbeck, but Crandall has been instructed by Dilbeck to take a vacation to Atlantic City for a few days.

Urbana tells Shad there's a guy masturbating in a green Pontiac in the parking lot. Before Shad goes out to investigate, he has to break up a fight between two guys wearing suspenders. By the time he goes back out to the parking lot, the Pontiac is empty. Darrell had been in the Pontiac, and he now breaks into the club through a back door. He finds Monique Sr. in the dressing room. He yanks her into his lap and pulls out a knife. He cuts her hand, cuts a bra strap and accosts her. She hits him in the head with an elbow, but that only enrages him. He squeezes her chest until she passes out. She comes to only to find herself still on his lap and that he has tried to have sex with her, unsuccessfully.

Erin walks in, and Darrell tells her he's going to rape Monique Sr. Erin tells him to go ahead, that she'll watch. She knows if she shows the slightest bit of fear he will be emboldened. Darrell wants his daughter back. Erin tells him it's too late, that she doesn't have her anymore. She tells him to talk to the judge. Darrell jumps on Erin. He's about to stab her with the knife, but cannot do it while staring into her eyes. Erin points out that her eyes remind him of Angela's eyes. Monique Sr. escapes the dressing room and Shad comes in with tire iron in hand. Shad gives Darrell to the count of three to drop the knife: Darrell refuses. Shad cracks his arm with the tire iron so hard it snaps in two, leaving the bone poking through the skin. Darrell takes off.

Chapter 26 Analysis

Dilbeck's alone time with Erin has inspired him. His campaign stumping amazes all. In his crazed mind, he is in love with Erin. Perhaps he is riding high because she has agreed to see him again. To him it's a sign of interest. She simply wants another payday and another chance to trap him for information about Killian's murder. For the first time, the reader learns of Dilbeck's undescended testicle. Perhaps this defect in his reproductive organs is the reason for his sexual deviance.

Again, reference is made to Erin's eyes. Darrell, about to kill her, cannot go through with the violence because he is looking into her eyes. Her eyes remind him of his daughter's eyes. Erin's power to mesmerize is seen once again. With Darrell, though, her sexual attraction and dance moves don't work. Her power to mesmerize brings about his downfall when Shad breaks his arm in half with the tire iron.

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Shad checks the parking lot for Darrell, but finds nothing. The Pontiac is gone. Erin calls the local sheriff to report Darrell's fugitive status and the fact that he needs desperate medical attention. They seem uninterested. Erin goes home and Shad follows her. Nothing happens.

Upon Shad's return, Orly announces that the Lings are trying to steal Urbana. They have offered her \$1,000 to work at their club. Orly also tells him that the Lings have called the Health Department on him. They have served him a violation notice because of unsanitary conditions in the pasta wrestling area. Orly wants some revenge, but Shad refuses to engage in arson. Urbana returns, upset, from her meeting with the Lings. She will not be working for them. The shorter Ling groped her.

The Princess Pia, the boat sunk as an artificial reef, has begun to attract a little sea life and the occasional scuba diver. Dive operators know that they can't take experienced divers to the wreck because it is too recently sunk. For tourists, however, it is perfect. It is close to shore and doesn't require that they use much fuel to get there. One day a young couple is taken to the site for some diving. The couple descends to the wreck. The woman goes inside the vessel as her boyfriend waits outside. First she notices a hubcap, then she notices the car chained to a beam. It looks out of place. Investigating further, she kicks open the trunk. Inside she is horrified to see crabs eating the dead body of Mordecai. Joyce's dead body is there, too. Police are called. An autopsy is conducted, which Garcia attends. Mordecai was killed by three small caliber shots to the head. During the autopsy, Garcia is allowed to search Mordecai's pockets. Inside, he finds an important key to a safe deposit box.

Moldowsky missed the news broadcasts of the Mordecai discovery that day. As he prepares for dinner, he is disturbed by a knock on the door. He answers. Garcia flashes his badge and walks in. He comments on the John Mitchell portrait. Garcia introduces himself and tells Moldowsky he's with the homicide division. Garcia asks if Moldowsky knows a murdered lawyer named Mordecai. Moldowsky says no. Garcia lets him know they found the safe deposit box key on the body. Inside the safe deposit box they found a Rolodex card with Moldowsky's name and number. He tells Moldowsky they also found a slide photograph of Dilbeck's strip club incident in the box. Garcia asks if Mordecai and Joyce were blackmailing him. Moldowsky gets impatient and wants to leave. Finally Garcia plays a little trick with Moldowsky. He pulls out his cellular phone and dials a number. Moldowsky's home phone number rings. Garcia tells Moldowsky to answer it. He doesn't. Moldowsky hangs up and the phone stops ringing. Garcia tells Moldowsky that he knows he has a non-published phone number. Garcia obtained his non-published number from the Montana hotel clerk. The Jamaicans who killed Killian made a collect call to Moldowsky's house from Montana. Moldowsky does not remember any such call. Garcia asks where he can find Dilbeck, but Moldowsky will not

give him a location. Garcia leaves and Moldowsky is left to stare at the portrait of John Mitchell. He wonders what Mitchell would do in this situation. His conclusion is that Mitchell would admit to nothing and stonewall.

Chapter 27 Analysis

It seems out of character that Urbana would refuse to work for the Lings and refuse their \$1,000 bonus just because one of them grabbed a breast. Doesn't she do food wrestling where men pay to grab her entire topless body in a vat of cream corn or pasta?

The Moldowsky/John Mitchell theme is revisited. Garcia notices the portrait in Moldowsky's house and analyzes it for what it is: either Moldowsky has a great sense of humor or he's really sick. In fact, he is "sick" with power lust, just as Dilbeck is "sick" with his sexual deviance. Moldowsky wonders what Mitchell would do in his shoes. Moldowsky blames Nixon's paranoia for Mitchell's ultimate fall. It is interesting that Moldowsky's own paranoia-his need to make a call and use his power—contributes to his own downfall. He took the bait of Garcia's business-card-in-the-safe-deposit-box ploy and made a phone call instead of standing pat and stonewalling. Moldowsky failed to take his own advice.

Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

Erin comes to work and brings Monique Sr. a present, because of the trouble with Darrell. Monique Sr. tells Erin that a new dancer, Sabrina, plans to act in a porno for \$3,000. Erin talks to Sabrina. Sabrina will have sex with two men in a hot tub. She's going to do it because she needs the money. She's fed up with wrestling in corn or pasta at the club. Erin asks if she's ever seen a porn film; Sabrina hasn't. Erin fills her in on some details and Sabrina reconsiders. She announces that she'll be dancing for the congressman tonight. When asked why, she replies it is her "civic duty."

Rita assists Darrell with his broken arm. He has been hiding for a few days in a dumpster. She steals some pain pills for him from her neighbor's deceased husband. Later, he steals Alberto's gun and takes off.

Moldowsky drives to the yacht, trying hard to think of an alibi for the Missoula hotel phone call. He pictures Garcia grilling Dilbeck on the yacht. Dilbeck begins spilling his guts. One thing Moldowsky has going for him is that Dilbeck has absolutely no knowledge of any of the murders.

Darrell, on a nice pill high, drives straight from Rita's to Erin's club. Erin's Pontiac is parked between a Porsche and a Cadillac. A limousine pulls up in front of the club. Darrell expects to see a rock star get out. Instead, he can't believe his eyes when Erin, dressed in jeans and a baggy white t-shirt and carrying a shoulder bag, gets in the limo. He follows the limo as it drives away.

Chapter 28 Analysis

Sabrina is a mirror of Erin. Sabrina plans to do a porn film for \$3,000. It's no coincidence that \$3,000 is exactly how much Erin was paid to dance for Dilbeck. Sabrina, like Erin, has small breasts. Erin feels a need to warn Sabrina not to do the porn film. Likewise, under normal circumstances, Erin wouldn't be dancing for Dilbeck. It is, however, her "civic duty" to dance for him. Civic duty is a play on words: at first glance, it might seem to refer to a joke that she's dancing for an elected official; in reality, though, she's trying to get justice for Killian's murder.

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

Shad visits a snake farm near the Miami airport to purchase 100 rats. The rats are part of a plan he and Orly have concocted to bring down the Flesh Farm. Shad notices the Health Inspector's truck in the Flesh Farm parking lot when he pulls up. This is in response to a phony call made by Monique Jr., crying about rats biting her. Shad climbs to the roof of the Flesh Farm with the rats and dumps them down the air conditioning vents. Shad goes inside the club, finds the Lings and exacts a horrifying revenge on the Ling who groped Urbana. Shad's rats start to drop from the air conditioning ducts into the club. One lands in the Health Inspector's drink. As he's leaving, Shad speaks to a Flesh Farm stripper in the parking lot. She says she auditioned at the Eager Beaver a few months earlier. He gives her the snake to work up a routine. Shad tells her that tonight will be his last night working at the club.

Shad returns to the club and tells Orly he is quitting. He needs to go check on Erin. He is suffocating in the strip club world. Orly asks him what his dream job was when he was a child. Shad says it was to play professional football, but he got busted in the ninth grade. Orly wanted to be an obstetrician. Orly says to Shad, like it or not, this is God's plan for you; this is what you are cut out for. Orly can't talk Shad into staying. Urbana confirms for Shad that Erin is on the yacht dancing for the congressman. She tells him that Erin is out to do some damage.

Garcia, meanwhile, investigates the murder of Jesse James Braden. He was killed by his wife after he spilled a shaker full of Bloody Marys on the freshly cleaned upholstery of her car and then laughed about it. She shot him in the genitals. He bled to death in three minutes.

Chapter 29 Analysis

Shad quits working for Orly for a few reasons: he has mentioned throughout that he no longer notices the girls. With Erin, for example, he doesn't notice her bare breasts but, instead, notices she's wearing a new G-string. He and the ordinary patrons in the club (nor Dilbeck), never notices the color of her eyes. As Orly reflects, there are different kinds of reality in life and he wants the mystery back in his reality. Shad must think the same way.

The Jesse James Braden murder is a curious interlude. Significantly, the wife shoots him in his pelvic area. Throughout the novel, women have been victimized by men. The strippers are groped. Erin is propositioned by the judge. Darrell keeps Angela to hurt Erin. Here Braden laughs when he spills the drinks. It's a seemingly innocuous act; however, it must have been the last straw that pushes his wife over the edge. This scene foretells Erin's ultimate play with Dilbeck. Erin has been working up to it. She has

kicked an out of line guy here and there. She has worked her way up to having the ability to take command of Dilbeck at gunpoint.



Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

Erin makes herself a drink in the back of the limo on the way to the yacht meeting with Dilbeck. She reflects on a dream she had the previous night. In the dream, she made love to a man who resembled Garcia in an orchard of coconut palms. The scene was magical. Suddenly, the man no longer resembled Garcia. She sees Angela running through the trees chasing birds. Erin tries to chase Angela, but the trunks of the palm trees get in her way. Angie fades away. Erin looks up and the birds have disappeared. Erin, not understanding the dream, thinks about how she would get Dilbeck to implicate himself in the murder of Killian. She wants to destroy him. She dresses in a lace top bra and matching G-string, the one with the seahorses. Her shoes are candy-apple red and she wears a wine-colored mini-dress. Erin catches the driver peeking at her as she changes. He is a Haitian named Pierre who speaks English when it is convenient to him. Because of his indiscretion, and through her charm, she convinces him to take a note and agree to follow its instructions later. She asks about his loyalties to the congressman. He works for the Rojos.

Dilbeck wears a cowboy getup and glistens with Vaseline. Erin had called that morning with an odd request. Dilbeck agreed to it, though most men wouldn't have, because he felt a carnal connection to her. Dilbeck feels that there had been a genuine affection during the previous evening despite the fact that she hammered the back of his hand with her spiked heel. He thinks perhaps pain is a necessary ingredient of love. In addition to the item Erin requested, Dilbeck brings two bottles of champagne, three dozen roses, a gold bracelet, and several CDs she requested. He also brings a photo album of pictures of him with various Washington power brokers. She was not sufficiently impressed with his stature during their previous meeting.

Erin compliments Dilbeck on his outfit when she walks in. She is pleased at how sincere this fake compliment sounds. Dilbeck looks ridiculous. She wonders why his skin shines. Dilbeck immediately hands her the gifts and tells her he wants her to look at some photos. She's not really interested and starts dancing instead. She plays ZZ Top, in honor of Killian.

Moldowsky arrives at the dock. He walks around looking for signs of Garcia, but sees none. He can hear the music from onboard the yacht. He knows Erin is there dancing. As Moldowsky is about to open the door, he is startled by someone else aboard. Darrell appears with gun in his good hand. He says he wants his daughter. Moldowsky, not knowing who he is, tells him he's made a mistake, that his daughter is not there. Darrell takes aim and says he might as well kill Moldowsky. Darrell tries to shoot Moldowsky, but can't. He really isn't all that familiar with firearms and he hadn't realized that this one had a trigger lock. Darrell throws the gun in the Intracoastal Waterway. Darrell tells Moldowsky to get out of the way so he can enter the cabin. Moldowsky refuses to let him in. Darrell tells Moldowsky that he is on so many drugs that he can feel absolutely

no pain. Darrell gets fed up and repeatedly whacks Moldowsky in the head with the golf club shaft attached to his broken arm.

Back inside the yacht, Dilbeck offers Erin a job as his executive secretary. She's not interested. She tells him he's so cute. Dilbeck unbuttons his pants and pulls himself out. She tells him she's a dancer, not a urologist. When Erin takes a break, Dilbeck shows her his pictures. He is upset that she is not impressed. He insists that he is an important person, but she does not believe him. When he demands respect, she reminds him that he's the same guy who made love to her laundry lint. Erin grabs his hands and puts them on her breasts. Ninety-eight percent fat, she tells him. What's the big attraction? Men pay thousands of dollars for a peek and a jiggle. She can't understand why. She does this to kill his mood. She finally pushes him over the edge when she asks about his wife. Erin starts dancing again.

Darrell storms in. He is somewhat shocked at seeing Erin nude for the first time in years. He feels a tinge of excitement. Erin is so stunned, she simply keeps dancing. Darrell sits next to Dilbeck. Dilbeck tells Darrell he's in love with Erin. Darrell says he loved her once too, but all she did was cut him down. Darrell eventually tries to grab Erin with his golf club appendage. He demands to know where Angie is. Darrell slips a nickel under Erin's garter. Erin gets down and starts dressing. She puts the nickel in her purse and pulls out her pistol. They are going for a drive. As they leave she thinks, sarcastically, about what a great Saturday night she is having with the two men in her life.

Chapter 30 Analysis

Erin's dream reveals a couple of things. First, she knows that she is close to having Angela back for good. In the dream she can see Angela laughing and playing. But when she tries to chase her down, she is blocked by the trees. The trunks of the palm trees represent the lurking dangers that surround her. Maybe someone is trying to kill her. Maybe "they" are after her. The other interesting part of the dream is sex with a man who resembles Garcia. Aside from Shad, with whom she has a working, father-figure/bodyguard relationship, Garcia is the only man in the novel who treats her with respect. Garcia covered her up with the blanket when he found her drunk in bed in bra and panties. Garcia asked her if she had a boyfriend. The dream reveals that Erin does long for a man who treats her with respect. This theme is confirmed when Erin sarcastically thinks about the fun she is having on this Saturday evening with the two men in her life: Dilbeck and Darrell.

Erin dresses the part to destroy Dilbeck. Every item of her clothing, even her lipstick, is red. She wears candy-apple red shoes. She knows that the red outfit will tantalize Dilbeck and keep him entranced and under her control.

Erin never misses an opportunity to cash in on her stripping abilities. She catches Pierre, the driver, watching her change in the rear view mirror. She immediately turns

his indiscretion into "currency" by charming him into doing what she wishes. Instantly, any allegiance he may have had to Dilbeck is gone.

Dilbeck is seriously deluded. He thinks pain is necessary to love. He strains to think that she has feelings for him. Erin is working him, she has him eating out of the palm of her hand. He is so lust-struck that anything she does is okay. She could beat him silly and he would roll over and sigh contentedly. Again, the amazing power of the mere appearance, suggestion, or possibility of sex is revealed.

The theme of Darrell as an inept and pathetic criminal arises once more. Any criminal worth his salt would have realized much sooner that the gun had a trigger lock. Darrell probably never fired a gun in his life.

Moldowsky's utter lack of emotion is revealed when he is concerned about how the press would write up his death. To the end, he plays the part of politician guru: he's concerned about the media take on his death rather than thinking about his predicament. It is quite appropriate that Moldowsky goes to his death protecting Dilbeck. He can't let anyone, even the inept Darrell, see Dilbeck inside the cabin with a stripper. It matters not that Darrell has no idea who Dilbeck is and poses no threat.

Dilbeck understands that there is something unusual about Erin's affections. She is not impressed by his "power" like most of the other women attracted to him. He tries to impress her by showing her pictures of him posing with various political bigwigs. She knows the politicians he poses with and is not impressed. Since Dilbeck defines himself through his power, her rebuff is emasculating. It makes Dilbeck as figuratively impotent as he was literally impotent just a few minutes earlier when he unzipped his pants to reveal his less than impressive member. Erin then lets all the air out of Dilbeck's sexual bubble when she forces him to grab her breasts. By telling him they are just two balls of fat, she ruins his sexual illusion.

Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

Garcia and Shad arrive at the yacht and board it together, searching for Erin. No one is there. They notice bloodstains on the deck. Garcia follows the bloodstains off the yacht and along the dock. The blood trail leads to the fishbox of another boat parked nearby. Inside, Garcia finds Moldowsky's dead body along with a few bait fish. They wonder where Erin and Dilbeck are. Inside the yacht's bathroom, Erin wrote "Belle Glade" in lipstick. That is their clue. Garcia and Shad head for Belle Glade.

Darrell has never been in a limo before. Erin changes out of her stripper clothes into white panties and a plain bra, all the while holding Darrell at gunpoint. She thinks to herself that she doesn't want to be found dressed as a stripper. Darrell tells her he killed someone on the yacht. Erin doesn't really believe him. She thinks he hallucinated it in his drug-induced stupor. Dilbeck starts sobbing and reaches for the door. Erin presses the gun into his cheek and tells him he's not going anywhere. When Darrell asks where they are going, Erin replies that they are going to see their congressman in action.

Erin instructs the driver to stop and orders Dilbeck and Darrell out. Dilbeck holds a slender brown package. Darrell wants to sleep in the limo while Erin does her business with Dilbeck. Erin agrees, as long as Darrell sleeps in the trunk. Darrell wants to know how she dances naked for sick old guys like the congressman. She says the music takes over and the men are easily dazzled. She reminds him that she has a custody lawyer to pay. Darrell theorizes that she has figured out the hustle: mess with their hair, pull on their tie, tell them how good they smell. Maybe that's why they call it a tease, she says. Darrell refuses to get in the trunk and runs off into the cane fields. Erin can't shoot him after he admits that she was a good mother. She turns the gun to Dilbeck and tells him to take off his clothes.

Darrell finds comfort in the back of a cane loading truck. Unfortunately for him, he passes out into a deep, drug-induced slumber. The next morning, once the truck is full, it is taken to the processing plant. Darrell is chopped to pieces by the blades of the machine in the mill. The only reason anyone notices is because his golf club splint causes the machine to break down. A press release is sent out asking for help identifying a vagrant with an interest in golf who died in a freak milling accident at Rojo Farms.

Chapter 31 Analysis

Erin, now thinking like a former FBI agent, changes out of her stripper outfit and into white panties and plain bra. Being found dressed as a stripper could jeopardize her story later.

As the limo enters Belle Glade, a sign featuring the city logo is spotted: "her soil is her future." The sign hides a double meaning. Because of the Rojo's aggressive cane farming, her soil is about to be a thing of the past. Within five or six years, the soil will have been worked to its limit. The used up land will be turned into housing developments and golf courses.

As pathetic as Darrell is as a criminal, he is awfully perceptive when it comes to Erin. Earlier in the novel he cuts the heads off of Angela's dolls and leaves them in the abandoned apartment. He left a heart-shaped mirror on the wall specifically so she could see her own reaction to finding the decapitated dolls. He knows that Erin must have had a hard time working as a dancer. Even at gunpoint, he can't resist a little dig. How can she dance for sick old guys like Dilbeck? She must have learned the hustle-how to use her sexuality to relieve men of their money. While a woman like Mrs. Jesse James Braden would not hesitate to shoot Darrell for such an insolent remark, Erin can't shoot him when given the opportunity. Erin is better than Mrs. Jesse James Braden. She's more calm, cool, and collected. Her restraint will suit her well as an FBI agent.

Chapter 32

Chapter 32 Summary

Garcia and Shad speed down the interstate at ninety-four miles per hour.. Shad is worried about Erin. Garcia tells him to relax. He says that sometimes you just can't be a hero, and that all you can do is put things in motion and see what happens. He explains that this is what he did by putting his card in Mordecai's safe deposit box for Moldowsky to find. He thought it might motivate Moldowsky to do something stupid. Shad is convinced Erin has been kidnapped. Garcia doesn't think so. He theorizes that because the lipstick clue on the mirror was written in flowery cursive writing, it means that she was not hauled away hurriedly by Dilbeck. He thinks it means she's the one in control. If she were leaving a desperate message, it wouldn't have been written with a flourish. Shad remembers what Urbana said: that Erin was out to do some damage. Garcia continues with his theory: Erin has the high cards; Dilbeck is just a smitten, horny old guy. Dilbeck is not a rapist; he is too full of himself.

Dilbeck strips to his cowboy boots and boxer shorts as instructed by Erin. He unwraps the brown package he has dutifully carried. Inside is a machete loaned to him by Willie Rojo. Dilbeck, still delusional, thinks that they are playing a kinky game. Erin can't believe he is getting turned on. She instructs him to cut sugar cane with the machete. After a minute, he's tired. Erin tells him not to quit, that he needs to cut a full ton. A migrant worker can cut a ton in an hour. She asks Dilbeck if he knows what the Rojos pay their workers. Dilbeck swings the machete until his arm goes numb. Erin congratulates him, only 1900 pounds to go. Erin thinks to herself that Dilbeck is the sort of man of whom her mother would approve. She asks Dilbeck if he remembers Jerry Killian. Dilbeck replies that he was the guy who tried to blackmail him to work on Erin's custody case. Erin informs him that Killian was murdered, all because of him and the Rojos and sugar. A man's dead, she says, all because you're a crook.

Erin visits the limo to get a martini for Dilbeck. She begins to disrobe. She takes off the mini-dress. Dilbeck tells her he truly loves her. He has no idea what's going on. She throws the flashlight and gun as far as she can into the sugar cane. She thinks to herself that she must be nuts. Dilbeck is getting excited once again. She asks if he wants to talk or dance. He wants a friction dance.

Seventeen minutes away, a caravan of three gray, late model Fords, each with two clean cut FBI agents, speeds towards her. One car carried Angela and Garcia's wife. One carries Agent Cleary, Erin's old boss. Garcia sees the caravan and does a quick u-turn to follow them.

Dilbeck presses Erin into him. He tells her that he knows her plan; she's trying to kill him by heart attack. Dilbeck wraps his arms around her, but still holds the machete. Dilbeck is still playing coy: he tells her after the election she can go to Washington with him. Not satisfied with Erin's dancing, Dilbeck escalates the friction of the dance. He grabs her

pearl necklace and twists it into a noose. It tightens around her throat until it snaps and the pearls spray all over the ground.

Chapter 32 Analysis

Garcia has a theory. Sometimes one is helpless to act, and all one can do is put things in motion and see what happens. This is what he did when he put his business card in Mordecai's safe deposit box. This theory runs throughout the novel. The characters that violate this rule get in trouble. The ones that can follow it are rewarded. For example, Shad tries to push his "luck" and control things by putting bugs in yogurt and trying to control his psychiatrist. He is rewarded by the swift loss of his case. Later, however, when he actually finds a bug in his food, he casts it aside, thinking nothing of it because it's just too small to matter. He is rewarded with a nice rear-ender car accident case.

When Erin first tries to trick Darrell and force him to meet with her face to face, she messes up by parking in an obvious spot and literally falling asleep at the wheel. Her results are much better when she lets Darrell come to her. Darrell is crippled by Shad when he tries to get her on her turf. Erin first tries to get to Dilbeck by calling his office to ask about Killian. This likely would have led to her demise just like Killian, Mordecai, and Joyce. By setting things in motion under Garcia's direction, Erin is safe from Moldowsky's murderous ways because Dilbeck takes an interest in her. This may not have happened if she didn't let things happen.

Finally, Moldowsky provides the novel's perfect example of falling victim to hubris, to thinking so much of oneself that he thinks he can control everything. Moldowsky is not afraid to order murders to cover up the sexual dalliances of Dilbeck. Moldowsky covers up Mordecai's disappearance with a call for an investigation to the Bar Association. He tries to control everything. Trying to control the situation with Darrell ultimately leads to his demise. If he had just let Darrell in, Darrell would never have contacted any media. There was no need to protect Dilbeck from Darrell.

Dilbeck's pathetic sexual deviance and attitude persists. Even after she has forced him to strip to his boxers and chop sugar cane, he thinks they are playing some sort of kinky game. He wants her to run off to Washington with him.

Chapter 33

Chapter 33 Summary

The caravan pulls up on the limo parked at the side of the road. After rousting the limo driver, the FBI agents hear a scream from the cane field. They rush in.

Dilbeck, in a trance, pushes Erin deeper and deeper into the field. She can feel a poke from his boxer shorts. Erin tries to grab him by his testicles but misses, because there's only one. The two of them fall slowly to the ground. She lands on Dilbeck, then he bucks her off. Dilbeck crawls on top of her. He cuts her panties with the machete while trying to pull himself out with the other hand. She begins kissing his chest. He still thinks this is a game. She bites down hard at his bypass surgery scar. She successfully rips a chunk of flesh and hair from his chest. This time she's gone too far, even for Dilbeck. He somehow finds the machete in the muck. He accuses her of trying to chew his heart out and attempts a swing at her with the machete. She runs for her life, straight into the arms of Agent Cleary.

When the agents, at gunpoint, order Dilbeck to drop his weapon, he is relieved. He figures the FBI is there to save him. Trouble is, he doesn't really look like a congressman, messy as he is and dressed in boxer shorts and cowboy boots. He looks like a degenerate caught mid-rape. The agents handcuff Dilbeck and put him in the back of one of their cars.

Agent Cleary wraps Erin in his suit jacket. Erin tells Cleary she was kidnapped by the congressman. Erin is tempted to give him the whole story, but sticks to the story she has invented. She knows Cleary wants facts that will result in charges that stick. He worries that the investigation will turn into a nightmare. He is surprised to hear Erin tell him that she doesn't expect Dilbeck to be prosecuted. She tells him to stop thinking like an FBI man and start thinking about someone running for re-election. She tells him to just explain the facts of life to Dilbeck.

Dilbeck tries to talk himself out of his predicament. All the FBI agents and Garcia gather around to listen. He tells them he is the victim, that he was abducted at gunpoint. He states he was sitting by himself on the yacht, preparing a speech, when Erin showed up and tried to seduce him. The agents don't believe that she kidnapped him for sexual purposes. Dilbeck tells them that Moldowsky can verify that Erin was stalking him. Garcia informs him that Moldowsky is dead. Garcia explains things to Dilbeck: the FBI received an anonymous call about a kidnapping in progress; the alleged suspect is a congressman; the alleged victim is a former FBI employee; agents arrive to find the Ccongressman wielding a machete dressed only in cowboy boots and his boxer shorts and chasing the victim across cane fields owned by the Rojos. A subsequent investigation, he tells Dilbeck, reveals that the machete belongs to Willie Rojo. Garcia tells Dilbeck to imagine all of this on the front page of the *Miami Herald*. Garcia tells him to imagine how this story will play to the Rojos and to his voting public. Garcia tells him

there's no evidence to back up his story, and, in fact, the limo driver backs up Erin's version. Erin tells Dilbeck that he should go home and have a mild heart attack and immediately cease campaigning for re-election. If he does not, she will press charges.

It is now just before sunrise. Shad, Garcia, and Garcia's wife Donna sit at a truck-stop diner. Shad is eating his seventh donut when Donna tells him to stop. She has spotted a small bug inside. Shad removes a half-eaten centipede from his doughnut. He looks at it carefully and decides it is just too small. He flicks it away and finishes the doughnut. The group gets in the car and proceeds to the gas pump to fill up for the trip home. As Garcia exits the vehicle, it jerks suddenly. A tractor trailer has backed into the car. Shad circles the rig and tells Garcia that his neck hurts. He says he's in serious pain. He motions Garcia to look at the side of the rig. Garcia spots the Rojo Farms logo.

Chapter 33 Analysis

In the previous chapter, Dilbeck jokingly tells Erin he knows her plan: to give him a heart attack. His joke strikes a little close to home here when she makes her escape by ripping the skin from his chest at the site of his open-heart surgery scar. Only by her figuratively trying to rip his heart out does he finally realize that she harbors no affections for him. This metaphor comes full circle when, after the FBI interrogation, she instructs him that he is to go home and have a mild heart attack. Being a politician is all Dilbeck knows. By forcing him to resign the day after being re-elected, she has literally ripped his heart out. As Garcia notes, for a politician, there are some fates worse than death.

Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

Three weeks before the election, Dilbeck suffers a minor heart attack. He still manages to win re-election. He resigns his seat the following day due to health problems. A couple of months later, the House passes the sugar subsidies.

The Flesh Farm, after its closure for the rat infestation and health-code violations, burns down. The Lings are indicted for insurance fraud, but flee to Canada where they open a chain of massage parlors.

Darrell Grant's remains are ultimately identified. A sugar recall results. Rita sues the sugar company, but later drops the suit when she leaves town to avoid animal control officers from taking her prized wolf-dog.

Paul Guber quits his brokerage firm and enrolls in rabbinical school. He never again speaks of his brief engagement to Joyce or the ill-fated night at the Eager Beaver.

Erb Crandall settles in Atlantic City, where he becomes a political aide to a local councilman. He is killed when mugged while in possession of substantial amount of bribe money.

Orly moves to Pensacola and opens a topless oyster bar.

Urbana Sprawl works until she can work no longer, then enrolls in college in Atlanta as a pre-med major. The two Moniques marry wealthy, older customers and both retire from stripping.

Shad settles his Rojo Farms lawsuit for \$2.3 million. He purchases a condominium in Colorado and gets engaged to his Norwegian emigrant physical therapist.

Moldowsky's murder is never solved. A local columnist writes a story about him as a ruthless and shady political figure who must have finally crossed the wrong person. Congressman Bo Tooley denounces the story as a "damnable lie," a quote from Moldowsky's idol John Mitchell.

Willie and Joaquin Rojo remain prominent in the sugar industry. They begin optioning off tracts of cane acreage for future development as condos and golf resorts. A couple of days before the sugar subsidy vote, they fund college scholarships for Jerry Killian's two children.

Erin is granted permanent custody of Angela. They move to Orlando where Erin takes a night job dancing as Cinderella's step-sister in the Disney World Main Street Parade. During the day, she works as a data-entry specialist in the local FBI office. She has applied to become an FBI agent.

Epilogue Analysis

Congressman Tooley, Dilbeck's replacement as the Rojo's congressional helper, defends Moldowsky's honor after his death. That he uses a John Mitchell quote is appropriate. It signifies that the type of power brokering and fixing that Moldowsky practiced will continue. Even bible-thumping congressmen like Tooley are not immune. As evidenced by the custody judge, toting a bible does not prevent one from falling victim to lust, greed, or lasciviousness.

Erin's dreams now come true. Appropriately, she has a night job at Disney World. She is cast as a Cinderella step-sister: her nude dancing has tainted her to some degree. She cannot be Cinderella. Her practice detective work with Dilbeck gives her the confidence to apply to become an FBI agent.

Characters

Erin Grant

Erin is the main character of the novel. She is a relatively young woman, probably in her late 20s or early 30s. She has a young daughter named Angela, but is embroiled in a custody dispute with Angela's father, Darrell, throughout the novel. She lost her former job with the FBI because of Darrell's criminal record. She lost custody of her daughter and will do anything necessary to get her back. She is forced to take up stripping when office jobs will not suffice to pay her costly legal bills for her child custody case.

Erin does not particularly like her stripper job, but she is good at it. She is the best dancer at the club: dancer being the key word—Erin does not "strip," she dances. The music that plays when she dances is very important to her. She loses herself in her music when she dances. She is also something of a leader among the strippers. Whenever there is a dispute regarding working conditions, she speaks to Orly, the owner.

Erin's dancing puts men in a trance. Erin's dancing directly causes the champagne bottle incident that will result in the deaths of several characters. Erin often must dance to get what she wants. She dances on Killian's kitchen table to get him to help her with her case. She dances on Alberto's table for information about her daughter. She dances on the yacht to set a trap for Dilbeck.

Following Killian's murder, Erin develops as something of an amateur detective. She feels partly to blame for Killian's death and will do whatever it takes to avenge him. She learns of Dilbeck's involvement and works with Garcia to implicate him. She combines her stripper charm with her sleuthing skills to do just that.

Congressman David Dilbeck

Dilbeck is a career politician who seems to have never done an honest day's work in his life. He is the son of South Florida's preeminent septic tank cleaner. He earned his first political victory solely upon his last name. He slowly moved up the political ranks and learned corruption at each stop. As a state senator, he learned that some women are attracted to political leaders. Thus began his career as a woman-chaser. Though he married a wealthy dilettante, he continued to chase women because his wife was not particularly interested in sex. So strong are his desires that he will put on a disguise to go to a strip club and not be recognized.

Dilbeck, though a United States Congressman, has done nothing to distinguish himself as a politician. He owes his political career to the Rojo sugar family who supports him with illegal campaign contributions in exchange for continued support of a sugar subsidy. The sugar subsidy is in danger because Dilbeck has created animosity among the other members of the Congressional committee. The last thing he needs is the



scandal of him hitting the patron of a strip club over the head with a champagne bottle to completely ruin things.

Shad

Shad is the strip club bouncer. He is big, tough, and somewhat oafish. Shad is extremely protective of his girls and is willing to stomp on any customer who crosses them. Shad is not satisfied with his work. He hatches a bizarre scheme to sue a dairy company over a cockroach he allegedly found in a yogurt container but really placed inside himself. Unfortunately, his plan falls apart when his lawyer's temp secretary eats the evidence. Shad is a sort of big brother figure for Erin. He supports her and protects her, but he never makes any romantic overtures.

Jerry Killian aka Mr. Peepers

Killian is a strip club regular who is infatuated with Erin. When he recognizes Dilbeck as the assailant with the champagne bottle, he sees his chance to impress Erin by helping her with her custody case by blackmailing Dilbeck. Killian's efforts get him in trouble. First Shad beats him up when he thinks Killian is stalking Erin. Ultimately, his blackmail scheme gets him killed.

Malcolm Moldowsky

Moldowsky is an extremely short man who is fond of wearing excessive amounts of cologne and very nice clothing. Moldowsky is a political fixer. He works behind the scenes for the Rojo family to ensure that their interests are secure. Moldowsky is good at what he does. He fixes the problems that Dilbeck creates. Unfortunately, his desire to control all aspects of the situation eventually leads to the unraveling of his schemes and his death.

Darrell Grant

Darrell is Erin's ex-husband. He is a career criminal and drug addict who specializes in stealing wheelchairs. Despite a lengthy felony record, he convinces the local sheriff to allow him to work as an informant in exchange for staying out of jail and help with his custody case. He does whatever he can to keep Erin from seeing her daughter.

Sgt. Al Garcia

Garcia is a homicide detective from Miami who becomes involved in Killian's murder investigation after he finds the body on a fishing trip in Montana. Garcia, like Shad, is a nurturing and supporting figure for Erin. He has no sexual feelings for Erin, which surprises her. Garcia has no hidden agenda, he tries to solve the case because that's

what he does even though the case was not classified as a murder and it was not in his jurisdiction.

Mr. Orly

Orly is the manager of the strip club. Orly wanted to be an obstetrician, but wound up running a strip club. He laments the change in the strip club clientele, from what was once a biker bar to what is now a place where bankers and politicians gather. He struggles with the business, often making vague threats about the bar's mob connections, when, in reality, it is owned by a group of businessmen from the northeast.

Erb Crandall

Crandall is Dilbeck's political advisor and bodyguard. They have been together since the beginning of Dilbeck's career. Crandall writes speeches and helps with damage control in the wake of the strip club incident.

Mordecai

Mordecai is a struggling attorney. He is the cousin of Joyce, Paul Guber's fiancée. Joyce brings him in to handle Guber's case. Mordecai is also the attorney Shad chooses to sue the dairy company. Mordecai is on the verge of a huge settlement in Shad's case when he learns that his temp secretary ate the evidence. Mordecai agrees to join with Joyce in going behind Guber's back to seek settlement of Guber's case when he learns of the incriminating photo of the congressman. His greed in doing so ultimately leads to his demise.

Monique Sr.

Monique Sr. is one of two girls at the club who dances with the name Monique. She has an interesting way of motivating herself to dance: she pretends that there is a famous person in the crowd every night.

Rita

Rita is Darrell's sister. She protects him as best she can. Erin knows that she is the only person who knows where the elusive Darrell is at any given time. Rita raises an odd breed of wolf dogs. She is not very sympathetic to Erin.

Alberto

Alberto is Rita's subservient husband. He is fascinated by Erin, so much so that he has secretly visited her club to watch her dance. Erin knows about his fascination and uses it to gain information helpful to her efforts to find Darrell and reunite with her daughter.

Custody Judge

The nameless custody judge ruled that Erin was an unfit mother due to her job at the club and granted custody of Angela to Darrell. His "investigation" of the case caused him to personally visit the club many times. He always took a bible on his trips and ultimately became a regular. He dies of an aneurysm when he is about to receive a friction dance from his favorite stripper.

Christopher Rojo

Christopher Rojo is the heir to the Rojo sugar fortune. He has never worked a day in his life. He is much like Dilbeck in that regard. He regularly partners with Dilbeck to visit strip clubs.

Joyce

Joyce is the fiancée of Paul Guber and the cousin of Mordecai. Once Guber decides not to pursue a settlement demand from Dilbeck, Joyce convinces Mordecai to do so without Guber's knowledge. Joyce's greed ultimately leads to her death.

Paul Guber

Guber is drunkenly enjoying his bachelor party when he hops on stage and latches onto Erin's leg. He is then smashed over the head with a champagne bottle by Dilbeck. He and his friends concoct a story so his employers won't find out. When his fiancée Joyce learns the truth, she wants to go after Dilbeck. Guber decides against it because he feels fine and he still doesn't want his employer to know.



Objects/Places

Eager Beaver

Many of the events in the novel are set at the Eager Beaver, Erin's place of employment. It is a rundown strip club struggling to stay in business. Its owners are desperate and will use gimmicks like cream corn wrestling to bring in customers. Orly, the manager, is constantly thinking of ways to improve business. The club was once frequented by bikers, but, in this new day and age, it is fashionable for bankers, judges and politicians to visit strip clubs. Orly longs for the days when things were simpler, when the girls listened to the manager's requests and when the club didn't need fancy lights and smoke machines.

Belle Glade

Belle Glade is a town on Lake Okeechobee that is home to the Rojo's sugar empire. This rural community is visited several times over the course of the novel. Chris Rojo takes Dilbeck and some strippers there to demonstrate the vast wealth and power of his family. Likewise, Mordecai takes Joyce and Guber there to show the same thing and to try to convince Guber to demand a settlement from Dilbeck. Shad and Garcia visit Belle Glade to investigate a lead in Killian's murder. Erin takes Dilbeck and Darrell there at the culmination of the novel. The rich farmland of this community has been stripped by the Rojos' sugar farming. In a few years, farming will no longer be possible and the land will be sold for subdivision and golf course development.

Moldowsky's John Mitchell Painting

Moldowsky keeps a painting of John Mitchell prominently displayed in his house. Mitchell went to prison after conspiring in President Nixon's Watergate scandal. Mitchell is Moldowsky's idol, and Moldowsky patterns his career after Mitchell. When Moldowsky's schemes start to unravel, he thinks to himself about what Mitchell would do. Mitchell would have stood pat and stonewalled. Unfortunately, he doesn't take his own advice. Moldowsky makes a phone call to an influential politician whom he thinks can take the heat off of his case by contacting Garcia's boss. This is exactly what Garcia wanted. Moldowsky took his bait and showed Garcia that he was the one behind the killings of Mordecai and Joyce.

Missoula, Montana

This is the rural setting where Killian normally takes an annual fishing vacation and where his body is dumped after his murder. Coincidentally, Garcia is vacationing there and his stepson discovers the body. Garcia solves the case, in part, because of the



unique setting. The Jamaican killers who transported Killian's body there to set up the fake drowning stood out and were remembered by a motel clerk.

Killian's Stripper Shrine

Erin pays Killian a visit early in the novel to learn how he can help her with her custody case. Killian takes her into his spare bedroom to show off a collection of publicity photos of local strippers he has affixed to the wall. Her picture is centered as his favorite. The shrine, combined with Killian's fascination over the Bee Gees and Madonna when he meets with Moldowsky, shows that Killian is a harmless, star-struck fan. He is like a teenager with pictures of his favorite celebrities on his bedroom wall. When Erin leaves his house, he slips her a note that says, "Thank you for saving my soul." It is a curious message. Did she save his soul by talking to him? Did she save his soul by letting him do something to try to help her?

The Princess Pia

The Princess Pia is the retired vessel that is used to create an artificial reef a few miles off the coast. Mordecai and Joyce's murderer uses the Princess Pia to hide the evidence of their deaths by chaining Mordecai's car, with the bodies in the trunk, to the inside of the vessel just prior to its sinking. The vessel's use in the artificial reef program is symbolic of renewal and rebirth. An old, run down and used up ship is towed offshore and sunk to create an artificial reef which will be home to sorts of marine species. Similarly, Erin and Shad both go through symbolic renewals during the novel.

The Rojos' Machete

Just prior to the culminating scene of the novel, Erin has instructed Dilbeck to secure a machete for their final date. That a machete was requested is not revealed at first, only the fact that Erin had made an odd request and Dilbeck complied. Erin knows that Dilbeck works for the Rojos in securing them their sugar subsidy. She wants him to do some real work for the Rojos. She knows that the Rojos' sugar fortune is built upon what amounts to slave labor. Their average employee can cut a ton of sugar cane an hour. For eight hours work, the laborer is paid \$30. Dilbeck knows this too, since Christopher Rojo told him so when he took Dilbeck to the fields with a couple of strippers. Erin's ploy likely has a couple of intended purposes: first, it teaches Dilbeck a lesson about hard work (since he has never worked a day in his life) and second, it tires him out and gets him a little dirty to aid Erin's plot to have the FBI arrest him.

Shad's Cockroach

Shad has a plan to extort money from a regional dairy company. He opens a cup of yogurt and inserts a dead cockroach. He hires Mordecai as his attorney. His plan is miraculously about to work. An attorney is about to settle the case with Mordecai, and

all he needs is a photograph of the cockroach in the yogurt. Unfortunately, Mordecai's temporary secretary ate the yogurt for lunch, cockroach and all. There will be no settlement. Shad's attempt at blackmail is unsuccessful. By the end of the novel, however, Shad's luck comes full circle. He bites into a doughnut with a bug. He throws away the small bug, thinks nothing of it, and continues eating the doughnut. He is "rewarded" minutes later when the car in which he is sitting is rear-ended by a Rojo sugar truck. He finally gets the lawsuit he has dreamed about.

Angela's toys

Darrell is introduced to the novel in an extremely unflattering way, appropriate to his character. Erin thinks Darrell has moved again without telling her because a letter she wrote to Angela was returned. Erin goes to Darrell's former residence to find the house stripped of everything; even the kitchen floor tiles have been removed. In Angela's bedroom, however, every toy Erin gave to Angela is destroyed and left on the floor. Darrell has cut the heads off of the dolls. The sick-minded Darrell has left a heart-shaped mirror on the wall so that Erin can see her own reaction to finding the decapitated dolls.

Francisco Goyo

Goyo was a gun dealer who had been kidnapped on Key Biscayne, murdered in Carol City and dismembered in Homestead. Pieces of Goyo's body were found all over Dade County. Garcia was responsible for the investigation and would periodically follow tips to literally piece the case (and the body) together. At one point he visits a rock pit because of word that a head has been located. It turns out to be the head of a hog and not the head of Mr. Goyo. Garcia's dogged pursuit of the various body parts of Goyo is symbolic of his work on the Killian, Mordecai, and Joyce cases. Garcia will do whatever it takes to seek justice and to follow the cases to completion.

Themes

Blackmail

The blackmail theme is introduced at the outset when one of Guber's friends takes pictures of him onstage with Erin and yells "Blackmail." It's all fun and games when the joke is that the pictures will be mailed to Guber's future mother-in-law. Seconds later, however, Dilbeck hits Guber over the head with the champagne bottle while Guber's friend with the camera is still taking pictures. The blackmail and greed continues when Killian tries to blackmail Dilbeck through Moldowsky over what he saw. That attempt at blackmail results in Killian's death. Mordecai and Joyce pick up where Killian left off and meet an untimely end themselves. Mordecai terms what they are doing as seeking a settlement. Had Mordecai and Joyce not gone behind Guber's back, perhaps what they were doing could have been termed seeking a settlement.

Shad tries his hand at blackmail against the dairy company with his cockroach-in-the-yogurt scheme. His attempt fails when his evidence becomes a secretary's lunch. Unlike the other characters, Shad is not killed for his blackmail attempt. Perhaps a part of him is, though. Shad finds that he cannot continue working at the strip club. He is burned out. His blackmail scheme was likely his effort to find a way out of a job that he really didn't enjoy. He was a protector and a muscle man, always serving others. His character change is symbolized by his reading of *The Metamorphosis*.

Male/female power

An interesting dichotomy runs through the novel of a reversal of gender power roles. The men who would seemingly be the most powerful, Congressman Dilbeck and the custody judge, are hopelessly weak in the company of women. Dilbeck enjoys being abused by women, whether they punch him or step on him. The custody judge follows his favorite stripper from the Eager Beaver to the Flesh Farm and then drops dead as he is about to have a friction dance. The women in the novel, mostly strippers, take advantage of the male weaknesses.

Erin's mother encourages her to marry a successful young man, like a doctor or a lawyer. Her mother has made a living marrying more and more successful men. She is on her fifth husband. She tells Erin that strip clubs are meat markets and that Erin will never make it as a dancer without breast implants. It doesn't take Erin long to realize that strip clubs are meat markets, but the men are the meat. With some casual conversation, a smile and an arm around their shoulder, Erin can convince a customer to empty his wallet.

Erin's sexuality inspires Killian to try to blackmail Dilbeck. She uses her sexuality to get whatever information she needs from Alberto to track Darrell. She also uses her sexuality to corner and trap Dilbeck. Dilbeck is so hopeless and powerless that he



thinks she is playing some sort of romantic game with him. Despite the abuse inflicted on Dilbeck, not until she literally takes a bite out of him does he realize that she means him harm.

Exotic Pets

Several characters in the novel keep exotic pets. The Rojos have an ocelot on their yacht. An ocelot is a small cat from the leopard family. Lorelei, a stripper, performs with a giant python. When Erin visits Dilbeck on the Rojos yacht for the first time, Shad accompanies her with a kinkajou (a small monkey) on his shoulder. Even the scorpion Shad shoves into Mordecai's mouth might be considered a pet, though it is dead. These wild, exotic animals are not normally kept as pets. They sometimes demonstrate a desire on the part of their owners to exhibit unnatural control. This attempt at control can backfire. Shad's cockroach is eaten. When Lorelei's snake is kept by the Lings, she has no luck trying to control her replacement snake.

Metaphorically, many of the characters of the novel could be considered pets of other characters. Dilbeck could be considered the "pet" of the Rojos and Moldowsky. Moldowsky, in turn, is kept by the Rojos to do their dirty work. The Rojos have their Jamaican laborers available for anything they might need, like Killian's murder.

The metaphor may also extend to the interplay between the strippers and their customers. The customers buy table dances or friction dances from the dancers. They buy or perhaps rent the girls for a few minutes at a time. On the other hand, the girls try their hardest to sniff out the guys with money and relieve them of everything in their wallets. Who is the master and who is the pet in this arrangement?

Renewal

Renewal is a theme common to both Erin and Shad. At the outset of the novel, Erin is working at the club to pay the bills and her attorney for a custody case that is going nowhere. Darrell has the deck stacked against her with the judge. Before losing her job because of Darrell, Erin worked for the FBI as an administrative assistant—a fancy name for a secretary. She was no agent, but she possessed the inquisitive mind of an agent. She does some detective work when she steals Rita's mail to learn Darrell's new phone number. That exercise in detective work goes badly however, when she parks too close to the business she is staking out to catch Darrell. Erin's detective work improves when she works with Garcia to trap Dilbeck. Ultimately, after she is successful with Dilbeck, she quits stripping and starts a new life, applying to the FBI to become an agent.

Shad is not happy with his career as a strip club bouncer. He reads *The Metamorphosis*, a symbolic act of change. He tries to change his life with the cockroach-in-the-yogurt trick, but is unsuccessful. He learns from Garcia that sometimes the best you can do is set things in motion and see what happens. Practically every other character in the novel does just the opposite. They try to control

what they shouldn't, whether that is an exotic animal or fabricating a lawsuit. After Shad learns this lesson from Garcia, he ignores the centipede in his donut and is rewarded by a far richer payday of a rear ender by a Rojo truck. Shad is now free to start his new life, far away from strip clubs.

Style

Point of View

Striptease is told in the voice of an omniscient third party that knows the thoughts and emotions of all the characters. The narrator is a neutral observer who merely tells the story with no particular feelings or fondness for any of the story's principal characters. *Striptease* is modern fiction, written in a real, direct style. The narrator allows the reader to decide the relative virtues and shortcomings of the characters with no added influence.

The focus of the narration swings between a few of the major characters. For the most part, the narration is centered upon Erin. At other significant times, the narration centers on Shad, Moldowsky, Mordecai and Darrel. The narration often focuses on one of these characters when they are hatching one of their schemes. Shad, for example, has the narrative spotlight when he plans to insert a cockroach in a cup of yogurt. Moldowsky is focused upon as he schemes to save Dilbeck from the scandal. Mordecai is featured as he plots to take advantage of the champagne bottle incident. Darrel is the focus of narration when he plots to keep Angela from Erin.

It is interesting to note that as critical a character he is to the main plot, very little of the point of view of the story is seen through the eyes of Congressman Dilbeck. This is likely a stylistic choice to emphasize the point that Dilbeck is a pawn. He is the errand boy of the Rojos. He is controlled by his lust and desire. He is led along like a young child. Besides reacting to his base sexual desires and making the fateful decision to smash Guber over the head with a bottle, Dilbeck makes few choices and does very little in the novel. The one exception to this is the brief period during which he believes he is in love with Erin and spurred to make three rousing campaign speeches.

Setting

The novel is set in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, a community not far from Miami. The story centers around Erin's workplace, the strip club first called the Eager Beaver and later called Tickled Pink. The club is a rundown, somewhat seedy bar, struggling in the face of heated competition from a club down the street. The competition forces the owner to try new gimmicks like cream corn and pasta wrestling to attract customers. It was once a dive strip club whose clientele was mostly bikers and other rough types. Recent years have been somewhat kind to the business as wealthier types began to patronize the club. Gone are the bikers, having been replaced by bankers. The other rough guys have been replaced by lawyers and politicians. What was once a strip club is now a gentlemen's club. Frequenting such a club has become popular and acceptable behavior.

Belle Glade, the farming community that is home to the Rojo empire, also figures prominently as a location in the novel. Belle Glade is where the Rojos have worked the land with their sugar cane farming to the point that it will soon be unusable. Unusable as farm land, that is. When they can no longer grow sugar cane on the land, they will develop it into subdivisions and retirement communities with golf courses. The characters of the novel repeatedly visit Belle Glade as a means to gauge and understand the vast wealth and power of the Rojos.

Language and Meaning

Language of the novel is plain and direct, reflecting the subject matter of a single mother turned amateur detective who works in a strip club. The language reflects the gritty realism of the novel and its characters. The language is appropriate to late 20th Century American urban life. The focus of the language of the novel is on conversations and interactions between the characters. Dialogue predominates the novel. Points of extended descriptive narration are few and far between.

Some descriptive language is important to the novel. Throughout the work a theme is drawn between Erin and the captivating powers of her dancing. Snake-like characteristics are associated with her dancing and personality. She hypnotizes and mesmerizes all the men who dare gaze at her and this is reflected in the descriptive language of the novel. Erin is a pretty girl, to be sure, but the language demonstrates that her attractive power is attributable to her dancing moves more than her looks.

Structure

Striptease is divided into thirty-three chapters and an Epilogue. The story is told in linear fashion with periodic flashbacks within chapters. The Epilogue informs the reader of the future happenings of each of the main characters.

Quotes

"'You assaulted a man.' 'Democrat or Republican?'" Chapter 1, p. 5.

"'All men have weaknesses, mine is of the fleshy nature.'" Chapter 1, p. 5.

"...an attractive woman could get whatever she wanted, because men were so laughably weak. They would do *anything* for even the distant promise of sex." Chapter 3, p. 24

"Times were tough, and a roach was a roach." Chapter 5, p. 48.

"Erin was constantly reminded of the ridiculous power of sex; routine female nakedness reduced some men to stammering, clammy-fingered fools." Chapter 8, p. 79.

"'A dead judge is a dead judge.'" Chapter 15, p. 146.

"'Severe head trauma,' 'That's a champagne bottle you've got there. Korbel, if I'm not mistaken.'" Chapter 16, p. 153.

"'Please make Mr. Dilbeck's problem go away.'" Chapter 16, p. 158.

"'What a deal these bastards get. All the water they want for practically nothing. Imported slave labor for the harvest. Then they get to sell the crop at jacked-up prices, courtesy of the U.S. Congress. And when they're all done, they're allowed to dump the stink straight into the Everglades.'" Chapter 19, p. 185.

"'Shave me, Erb. Shave me all over.'" Chapter 20, p. 204.

"'Now look how the business is changed,' 'My dancers are practically unionized, thanks to your friend Erin. They pick their own songs, pick their own hours. Meanwhile my liability premiums are tripled on account of all the bankers and lawyers and CPAs hanging out at the joint. Every time there's a fight I nearly have a fucking coronary, wondering which yuppie asshole's gonna sue me next.'" Chapter 24, p. 234.

"'What's that on the stereo?' 'Dean Martin. Music for lovers.'" Chapter 25, p. 246.

"'...Mr. Orly... I've pretty much had it ... I'm suffocating in this world.'" Chapter 29, p. 298.

"'Please touch it' 'I'm a dancer, sweetie, not a urologist.'" Chapter 30, p. 310.

"'...I gave up on being a hero a long time ago. Sometimes the best you can do is set things in motion.'" Chapter 32, p. 326.

Topics for Discussion

Discuss traditional male and female gender and power roles and how they are treated in this novel.

Explain why Moldowsky is doomed to fail in his attempts to cover up the murders of Killian, Mordecai and Joyce.

Explain the significance of Erin's dance music.

Explain the relevance of snake-like qualities attached to Erin's character.

Why must Shad quit his job as a bouncer at a strip club?

Why are the circumstances surrounding Moldowsky's death appropriate to his character?

What significance does the color red have to Erin's character?

Why don't the Rojos suffer for their misdeeds the same way Moldowsky and Dilbeck do?

Why does Jerry Killian think that Erin saved his soul?