

Sweet and Deadly Study Guide

Sweet and Deadly by Charlaine Harris

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Sweet and Deadly Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	6
Chapters 3-4.....	8
Chapter 5.....	10
Chapter 6.....	12
Chapters 7-8.....	14
Chapter 9.....	16
Chapter 10.....	18
Chapter 11.....	19
Chapters 12-13.....	21
Characters.....	23
Objects/Places.....	28
Themes.....	30
Style.....	32
Quotes.....	34
Topics for Discussion.....	36



Plot Summary

Sweet and Deadly is the first novel by mystery writer Charlaine Harris. It is a novel of secrets and murder with a little romance thrown in for good measure. The heroine of the novel, Catherine Linton, is in the depth of depression after the loss of her parents. On an innocent afternoon excursion, Catherine finds the dead body of a family friend, an event that drags her from her self-imposed isolation. Catherine is convinced the death of this woman is connected to the deaths of her parents, and she is determined to find the culprit. *Sweet and Deadly* is a mystery full of Southern charm that will delight readers of all ages.

Catherine drives outside town to spend a Saturday morning shooting her gun when she finds the dead body of her father's nurse. Catherine is in a state of shock until the next morning when it occurs to her that this murder could be related to the death of her parents. Catherine's parents died six months previously when someone tampered with their car. However, the sheriff does not think the two episodes are related, leaving Catherine with the idea that there could be two murderers loose in her small town. The sheriff tells Catherine that the nurse was blackmailing people in town and that she may have taken medical equipment from Catherine's father's office. Catherine later learns that this equipment had been used for the nurse to perform abortions. This information forms a motive, leaving Catherine taking a closer look at the people she has known all her life, wondering how many of them have secrets they would kill to hide.

Catherine returns to work on Monday, after spending much of the weekend with her boss, Randall. Catherine works for the newspaper. Her fellow reporter, and tenant, Tom, is charged with writing the story on the discovery of the body. Tom is fresh out of journalism school and excited to finally have a story to write that has some teeth to it. However, Tom has trouble getting anyone to talk to him, especially the sheriff. This does not stop Tom. Tom continues to annoy everyone in town trying to find out who killed the nurse.

Old friends of Catherine's come out of the woodwork over the next few days. First a neighbor, Miss Molly, brings a casserole to Catherine in a thinly veiled attempt to get fodder for gossip. When Catherine returns the dish, she spends a nice evening with Miss Molly and her husband, Carl. Carl is concerned for Catherine, worried about how isolated her house is. Carl insists on walking Catherine home. When he drops her off, Carl asks about the medical records her father left behind, and Catherine tells him they are in the attic of her father's office, the house that Tom rents. Another friend, the local librarian, visits Catherine and also expresses concern about Catherine's safety.

A few nights later, Catherine is home alone doing some housework when the buzzer between Tom's house and Catherine's begins to ring. Catherine thinks it is a joke on Tom's part at first, but decides to investigate. Catherine walks into the house and finds Tom badly beaten. He dies while Catherine is checking his pulse. The sheriff is called and his first thought is that Catherine is responsible, but no one really believes that Catherine is strong enough to beat a young man like Tom to death.



While making her statement on Tom's death, Catherine is urged to visit her family's old maid, Betty. Catherine makes the visit and learns that three days before her father's death, Betty overheard her father having an argument in his office with an unknown man. Later, Catherine takes this information and puts it together with a few other small clues and figures out who the killer is and why. Catherine thinks her neighbor, Carl Perkins, has leprosy, that her father diagnosed it, and that her father had insisted on reporting it to the health officials. Carl did not want this to happen, so he killed Catherine's father to keep it from happening. Later, the nurse, who had also overheard the conversation, began blackmailing Carl. Carl killed her in an attempt to stop the blackmail, but he was unable to find the evidence. Catherine knows the evidence is in Carl's medical file at Tom's house and this is why Carl killed Tom.

Catherine goes to Tom's house and retrieves the file. However, when she climbs down from the attic, Catherine finds Carl waiting for her. Catherine runs away, but Carl is close on her tail. Catherine runs out into the street, remembering her gun that she has had with her the whole time. Catherine turns, takes aim and fires, but misses. Catherine fires again and kills Carl.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Sweet and Deadly is the first novel by mystery writer Charlaine Harris. It is a novel of secrets and murder with a little romance thrown in for good measure. The heroine of the novel, Catherine Linton, is in the depth of depression after the loss of her parents. On an innocent afternoon excursion, Catherine finds the dead body of a family friend, an event that drags her from her self imposed isolation. Catherine is convinced the death of this woman is connected to the deaths of her parents and she is determined to find the culprit. Sweet and Deadly is a mystery full of Southern charm that will delight readers of all ages.

Catherine drives out to some land her family owns on the outskirts of town so that she can shoot her gun. Catherine pulls into a little driveway in front of dilapidated shack that is on the verge of falling down. In the yard in front of the shack, Catherine sets up some old cans and begins shooting her gun. After she empties the gun, Catherine takes a break to load the weapon and to recover her strength. It is very hot and the heat is making Catherine tired. While sitting there, Catherine's eyes wander to the door of the shack, and she sees something. It is a hand. Catherine goes to the doorway and sees a body covered in blood. Catherine becomes frightened and runs to her car.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Catherine Linton is introduced in this chapter. Catherine is a strong woman, as symbolized by her fearlessness with a gun. Catherine appears to be a loner, preferring her own company to anyone else's. Catherine is also a woman of means as exemplified by the fact that she owns property outside of town that she rents out. These things combine to give a picture of Catherine to the reader that makes her a sympathetic character. The fact that Catherine lives in the South impresses the reader with the suggestion of a morality that is common to this setting.

Catherine finds a body in the dilapidated shack on her property. The body is badly beaten and in such bad shape that Catherine can only see that it is a woman and little else. Catherine does not recognize the woman. This could be important later when the police begin to investigate the death. Also important is the idea that the person who reports a crime is often suspected of committing it, so the reader must have this thought in mind, as Catherine rushes away from the scene. The next few chapters will reveal to the reader how others picture Catherine's part in this death and how it will impact her life.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Catherine drives out the dirt road that leads to her property toward the highway, passing two houses on the road in the process. Catherine later thinks that she could have stopped at the one occupied house there, but in her shock she drove straight to the sheriff's office in town. There the receptionist recognizes Catherine's state of mind and calls to the sheriff. Catherine tells her story, answering questions, such as whether she recognizes the person. Catherine says no. Catherine had thought she would be able to go home after reporting the body, but the sheriff informs her that she must go back out to the property to show him the body and to be present for the coroner's jury. This whole situation reminds Catherine too much of the day her parents died six months ago, and she is beginning to go into a shock-like state just like she did all those months ago.

Back at the property, Catherine shows the sheriff and his deputies where the body is. While the law men examine the body and the crime scene, Catherine sits on a stump and tries to pretend she is anywhere else. Cars begin to arrive. Catherine recognizes the new doctor who took over her father's practice shortly after his death. Catherine does not like this young man. The doctor tried to hit on her when she was showing him her father's office. Then another car pulls up, and Catherine sees that it is her neighbor, Carl Perkins. Carl is the county coroner, among other things. Carl speaks to Catherine for a moment before the sheriff calls him into the shack. The sheriff then comes over to Catherine and demands to know why she denied knowing the victim. It turns out Catherine has known the victim all her life. She is Leona Gaites, Dr. Linton's nurse for more than thirty years.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Catherine is in such a state of shock that she drives straight to the sheriff's office rather than stopping at the nearby houses. The reader puts this shock down to the fact Catherine found a dead body until she mentions that her parents passed away six months ago. This information makes Catherine more sympathetic to the reader as it exposes a vulnerability that makes her more likable and introduces the theme of grief. It might come up again as the plot begins to unfold as it is an important part of Catherine's back story, and because the impact of this grief is an important part of Catherine's core character.

When Catherine returns to the scene of the crime, the author picks this moment to introduce more characters to the story. First is the town doctor. This doctor has taken the place of Catherine's father who was the town's doctor before his death. The fact that Catherine's father was the local doctor is interesting, because it better establishes Catherine's place in the social hierarchy of the town and the fact that she dealt with selling her father's practice suggests that she has access to medical supplies that might



become important later in the development of the plot. Second, Catherine runs into the county coroner who also happens to be her next door neighbor. Carl Perkins is described as a friendly man who lives large, as suggested by Catherine's description of his home. Carl is not only the county coroner, but also a local business man and this also suggests that he is a man for whom reputation and community are everything. These character traits will be important factors in Carl's motivations as the novel continues. Finally, Catherine learns that the body she found is that of her father's long-time nurse. This news is clearly a shock to her and the sheriff since Catherine denied knowing the victim.



Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary

The sheriff, James Galton, stares at Catherine with suspicion until he realizes that she is just as shocked as everyone else. Galton is relieved by Catherine's reaction. Catherine is interviewed by the coroner's jury and then Galton has her driven back to the station to give her statement. Before she leaves, Carl speaks to Catherine once more. Carl apologizes to her for the fact that she found the body and then asks if she has settled all her father's affairs with the young doctor. Catherine answers in the affirmative before leaving the scene with one of Galton's deputies. The young black man who takes Catherine's statement turns out to be the son of the Linton family maid from Catherine's childhood. This makes them both uncomfortable despite Catherine's deep affection for Betty.

Catherine returns home, almost surprised to find the place in the same, normal condition it was in before she left. Catherine takes a long shower and then settles into a chair with a beer, left over from a visit from her tenant, Tom. While sitting there trying to find something to occupy her mind, Catherine is surprised to see her boss at the newspaper, Randall pull into her driveway. Catherine lets him in, nearly spilling her beer in her nervousness, and then breaking down into tears. Randall consoles her, the expression on his face alerting Catherine to the idea that his feelings for her ran deeper than just an employer-employee relationship. Before Catherine can absorb this fact, Tom arrives at her back door. Both Randall and Tom have heard what happened that morning and want to know all the details. Tom is excited because he is a budding investigative journalist. Catherine tells them all she knows. When the three of them begin to speculate on a motive, Catherine announces that it must have something to do with the death of her parents. Catherine's parents were murdered when someone tampered with their car before they left to make a trip to Arkansas.

Chapters 3-4 Analysis

The sheriff briefly thought Catherine might have lied to him and this makes him suspicious of her innocence. However, her reaction to the news of the body's identity reassures him that she did not lie. This and the fact that the sheriff allows her to leave with one of his deputies tells the reader that he does not see her as a suspect. Before Catherine can leave, Carl Perkins talks to her once more. Carl apologizes to her for finding the body, which seems like a neighborly thing to do. Then Carl asks if she has completed the business of selling her father's practice to the new doctor to which Catherine answers that she has. This too seems to be simple friendliness since the novel is set in a small town in the south and these are the types of places where everyone knows everyone else's business. However, as the plot continues to develop, the reader might look back on this conversation with a little more suspicion. Finally, Catherine makes her statement at the police station and discovers that the deputy is the



son of her parents' long-time maid. This is important only because of the tenseness of the situation and the possibility that this character may return as the plot continues to develop.

Catherine goes home and right away is joined by two new characters. The first is her boss at the newspaper, Randall. Randall is clearly concerned for Catherine, and she sees in his eyes for the first time that he has affection for her. Catherine is clearly surprised by this, causing the reader to be curious about the back story on these two. Then Tom joins them. Tom is Catherine's tenant and coworker. Tom is clearly an ambitious reporter, hoping for a scoop on Catherine's ordeal that morning as he sees it as the most exciting thing to happen in that town since he moved there several months earlier. Catherine tells them her story and, when they begin speculating on what might have caused Leona's death, Catherine suddenly announces that her parents were murdered. This is new information to the reader and it begins a line of questioning into the idea that the two murders might be related. This idea will be further pursued in future chapters.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Catherine wakes the next morning and begins to notice things around her that she had not noticed before. Catherine had isolated herself so much and had been so depressed after the deaths of her parents that she had not been interested in the things around her. Now Catherine decides that will change. Catherine begins to think she might change the draperies in the house and buy new clothes to impress Randall. The thought of Randall excites her. Catherine has never thought of him as a lover, but now the idea is very exciting and helping to draw her out of the depression that has threatened to drown her since her parents died. However, the memory of finding Leona begins to allow some of that darkness back in. Catherine begins to think about Leona's death, once again wondering if it had anything to do with her parents' death. Perhaps Leona had overheard something in her father's office that got them both killed.

While Catherine is eating breakfast, Sheriff Galton comes to her door. Catherine is not happy to see him, but she politely lets him in. Galton asks Catherine when she last saw Leona and if they were close. Catherine admits that Leona helped her move some of her father's things that the new doctor did not want up into the attic of his office when she was preparing to rent it to Tom, but she had not seen her after that. Catherine did not particularly like Leona so she would not have sought her out. Galton then asks if it is possible that Leona took some medical equipment from the office without Catherine's knowledge. Catherine says it was possible. Catherine also tells Galton that she saw her sharecropper, Martin Barnes, out near her property the morning she found Leona. Finally Galton tells Catherine that Leona appeared to have been blackmailing people around town. Not only this, but Leona's sole heir was Dr. Linton, which makes Catherine her heir.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Catherine has begun to come out of the depression she has been in since her parents died. This could be due to the shock of finding Leona, but the reader might also suspect that it has something to do with the realization that Randall might be falling in love with her. The idea of a new romance is exciting and Catherine seems to be open to the possibility. Catherine has known Randall all her life, thanks to the fact that their mothers were friends. However, Catherine has never thought of Randall in this way until she sees the way he looks at her after he comes to check her welfare the day she found Leona. This has caused Catherine to see Randall in a new light. The reader, who has been tainted by other mysteries, must wonder, however, if this romance is doomed before it has begun. After all, anyone could be the person who killed Leona and possibly Catherine's parents. On this vein, Catherine also wonders if Leona's death has anything to do with her father and mother's death, suggesting a direction for the story to go in the next few chapters.



When Sheriff Galton comes over, Catherine is hoping to find Randall at her door. Instead she is forced to deal with the unpleasantness of Leona's death once more. The sheriff gives Catherine a great deal of information through his questions. The most important information is the fact that Leona was blackmailing people. Blackmailing is an ugly business and could be a motive for murder. However, if this is the motive, Catherine must wonder if that means that it is separate from her parents' deaths after all. It also makes Catherine wonder how many people in her small town have secrets bad enough they would be willing to pay blackmail money. This idea introduces the theme of secrets as well as giving the suggestion of a motive that will propel the next few chapters. Also important in Galton's information is the fact that Leona was using medical equipment for something, possibly illegal. This makes the reader think that Leona might not have been a nice person, but instead a person willing to do almost anything to make a buck. Catherine also gives the reader the information that Leona helped her put away some of her father's things that the new doctor was not interested in. This information is important as it brings Leona into Catherine's back yard, suggesting that the killer might use this information to hurt Catherine or someone close to her.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Catherine gets a phone call from Sally Barnes, the daughter of her sharecropper, Martin Barnes, and an old high school acquaintance. Sally wants to express her condolences for Catherine's terrible experience the day before. No sooner does Catherine hang up than the doorbell rings. Catherine hopes it might be Randall. Catherine opens the door to find Miss Molly, Carl Perkins' wife, there. Catherine is disappointed, so her reception of her visitor is not as pleasant as it ought to be. Miss Molly has brought Catherine some gumbo, as if finding a body is on par with a funeral, but she is clearly there to get fodder for gossip after seeing the sheriff's car parked outside. Catherine is polite but evasive, sending Miss Molly away with no information. Then the phone rings again. Catherine does not want to talk to anyone, so she decides to leave the house rather than be rude in ignoring the phone. Catherine goes to visit Tom at the little house in her backyard.

Tom lives in a house that was Dr. Linton's office for many years. It is difficult for Catherine to be in this house and see it as it is now rather than filled with her father's office equipment. Tom asks her about the house and she tells him how her father bought it to be close to his parents who lived in the main house where Catherine lives now. Catherine then shows Tom a buzzer next to the front door that is connected to the master bedroom in the main house which Dr. Linton's patients once used to call him when they had an emergency in the middle of the night. Tom jokes that he might use the buzzer to call Catherine, but Catherine makes him promise never to use it in that way. Tom then tells Catherine that he has broken up with his fiancée so she tells him that the receptionist at the paper has a crush on him.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Living in a small town, word of a tragedy travels fast, and Catherine finds that out. First a friend from high school she has not spoken to in years calls. Then her neighbor brings her food as if someone in the family has died. From Miss Molly's questions, Catherine thinks she is looking for gossip and sends her away unsatisfied. This episode seems trivial, but the reader will come to remember it later in the novel. Catherine would like a visitor, but she would like it to be Randall, not all these people she has not spoken to in months. The phone rings again, but Catherine is not ready to deal with so much attention after having been isolated for so long, so she goes to visit Tom.

Tom and Catherine are not close friends, but the reader gets the impression that they like each other well enough. However, Catherine is uncomfortable visiting him in his home as it was once her father's office, and she has a great number of memories associated with it. Tom asks about her father and why he would have his office so close to home and Catherine explains how he wanted to be close to his ailing parents.



Catherine also points out a buzzer her father had installed so his patients could summon him in the middle of the night, but she makes Tom promise never to use it. This will come up again later in the novel at a crucial point in the narration. Finally, Catherine and Tom discuss Tom's love life, finally putting an end to any speculation that Catherine might have feelings for Tom when she stirs him in the direction of the receptionist at the newspaper.



Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary

Randall comes to Catherine's house and invites her out to the levee. Randall takes Catherine to a section of the levee where high school lovers have always congregated. Randall and Catherine talk for most of the afternoon and Catherine realizes she has feelings for Randall. Randall has always been someone Catherine was aware of since her mother and his mother were friends, but only now has she seen him as a romantic figure. Catherine feels comfortable with Randall in a way she has not felt with a man in a long time. Randall is familiar. Randall is also accepting of Catherine. Catherine has not dated much since a college date was overheard making fun of her personality, so her affection and comfort with Randall is as much a surprise to her as it might be to Randall.

On Monday, Catherine goes to work, eagerly anticipating seeing Randall. Randall asks her to a movie on Friday, and Catherine readily accepts. Catherine then gets to work as Mondays are usually a busy time at the paper since they go to press Tuesday afternoons. Catherine is the social editor, so she handles the wedding and birthday party stories. Catherine finishes all her pieces except one. Sally Barnes' baby had a party, but the picture has not arrived yet. Catherine puts it aside and takes the rest to the typesetter. While in the typesetter's office, Catherine sneaks a peek at the story Tom has written about Leona's death. Catherine finds the article well written, even if Tom misquoted her. Then the typesetter, Jewel Crenna, turns to Catherine and asks if she told the sheriff that Martin Barnes had been on the road to the shack Saturday morning. Catherine says she did and is surprised when Jewel expresses a wish that Catherine had not done that as Martin's wife now believes he was having an affair with Leona. In reality, Jewel tells Catherine, he has been having an affair with her, Jewel.

Catherine extricates herself from Jewel's office and goes back to her desk. There the press mechanic joins her and begins to talk about Leona and how she was a godless woman. The man then announces that Leona was performing abortions from her house. Catherine is uncomfortable with this conversation partly from the direction it is going and partly because Leila, the receptionist, is in the room listening. Catherine politely ends the conversation and the mechanic leaves. Leila then confides in Catherine that the rumor is true, that she had an abortion from Leona. Catherine is shocked by all these secrets suddenly making themselves known to her, especially from Leila who has never seen Catherine as a confidant. Now Leila is telling her this huge secret as if it is nothing. It seems Leila is more concerned with Tom and the fact that he is finally showing interest in her. However, Leila is concerned that Catherine and Tom are involved, making it clear to Catherine that she is jealous of their relationship. Catherine tries to make the younger girl feel more secure about Tom while at the same time trying to get her to go away before she tells Catherine any more secrets.



Chapters 7-8 Analysis

Catherine and Randall go off for the day, and Catherine realizes that she is falling in love with Randall. Catherine has known Randall all her life but she just now has begun to see him as a romantic figure and likes what she sees. Catherine readily agrees to go on a date with Randall the following weekend. This begins a relationship that the reader saw budding a few chapters back. However, again the reader must be looking at this relationship with concern since Catherine has no way of knowing who the killer is. It could be Randall or Tom or Carl Perkins for all she knows and the reader must be concerned with Catherine's safety as she begins this new relationship.

At work, Catherine begins to figure out that the people in her small town have more secrets than she ever imagined, touching on the theme of secrets. Catherine learns that her sharecropper has been having an affair with one of her coworkers. Catherine is shocked by this, because she never would have imagined the two of them together and is surprised to be a confidant to this woman she has never really spoken to before. Then Catherine learns from two sources that Leona was performing abortions. Catherine realizes this must be why the sheriff asked if Leona had taken medical equipment from her father's office and also further darkens Leona's character in her eyes. These revelations also prove to Catherine that her neighbors are more capable of hiding secrets than she had thought possible. Also important in this section is Leila's interest in Tom. Clearly the girl is in love with Tom, especially since she turns a jealous eye on Catherine, who finds Tom amusing but too young and ambitious. Leila's interest in Tom will play an important role in the story as it continues to develop in the following chapters, perhaps placing herself in a dangerous situation since there is still a killer on the loose.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Catherine spends the rest of the day attempting to avoid any more conversations that might result in secrets being exposed. When the librarian comes in, Catherine speaks to her briefly. The library is across the street from her home, and the librarian expresses concern about Catherine's solitude living where she does, especially since her most immediate neighbor is out of town and the library is closed in the evenings. Catherine assures her that she feels safe. Later, Catherine speaks to Tom and learns he has been all over town trying to get more information on Leona's murder, but has learned little. Not only this, but the sheriff is refusing to speak to him. However, this does not dampen Tom's determination to learn as much as he can. Catherine sends him to talk to the press mechanic, thinking that maybe if he learns some of the secrets she has today he might figure out who the killer is, or at least have something interesting to write about in next week's edition of the paper.

Catherine runs into Randall on her way to her car. Catherine tells Randall about Leona's blackmailing scam. Randall tells her that it is possible Leona has been blackmailing his mother, because his father once took a bribe from a politician in order to keep the paper running. Catherine tells him he should ask his mother about this possibility, and he tells her he will. At home, Catherine decides to return Miss Molly's casserole dish. When she arrives at their home, Carl Perkins answers the door. Catherine goes inside at his insistence, but when she sees how nervous Miss Molly is being around her, Catherine has second thoughts. However, Carl insists she stay. Miss Molly brings out coffee and is so nervous that she accidentally spills some on Carl, but Carl does not seem to notice at first. Later, while looking at pictures, Catherine notices how much Carl has changed over the years, how he has age spots on his arms and his eyebrows are gone. When Catherine goes home, Carl insists on walking her home to be sure she is safe. Before leaving her at her door, Carl asks if she knows where his son's medical records are because he has asked for them. Catherine promises to get them out of storage in the attic of Tom's house.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Several people begin to point out Catherine's vulnerability living on an isolated street as she does. The concern of her neighbors introduces the theme of fear as they express their concern for Catherine's safety and creating an atmosphere in which Catherine cannot help but be afraid. It also adds some tension to the plot, building the suspense as the reader begins to think the killer might strike again. Perhaps something bad is in store for the main character. Tom is going around down poking into Leona's murder, possibly arousing the attention of the killer. Then Catherine tells Randall about Leona blackmailing someone in town and learns that it is possible Randall or his mother might have been a target. This information not only touches on the theme of secrets as



Randall reveals yet one more secret Catherine was not aware of, but also suggests to the reader a motive Randall might have for being Leona's killer.

Catherine visits with the Perkins. Carl is kind to her, but Miss Molly is clearly nervous. Catherine puts this nervousness down to Miss Molly thinking she had something to do with Leona's death. However, the reader will come to remember this later and know there is another reason for Miss Molly's fear. Carl burns his hand but does not seem to feel it until Molly, who's nervousness is greatly increased by this accident, tells him. Then Catherine notices the changes in Carl over the last few years, putting it down to age. However, again the reader should suspect there is another reason for the changes Catherine notes. Finally, Carl walks Catherine home and asks about his son's medical records, learning that all of the records left behind are in the attic of Tom's house. This exchange seems innocent, but again might be something the reader will come to recall later in the novel.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The next morning, Tom calls and tells Catherine he had to put his car in the shop. Tom wants to know if he can get a ride to work with her. Catherine agrees. Tom tells her his car should be ready by that afternoon, at least he hopes so because he has a date that night. Catherine suspects that his date is with Leila. At work, everything seems quiet until Catherine remembers she needs a picture for her piece on the Barnes' baby's birthday. Just as she is about to call the Barnes home, Martin walks in. Martin tells Catherine how Galton came to his house asking if he had been where Catherine said he was Saturday afternoon. Martin assures her that he admitted he was on the road that morning.

Tom continues to try to talk to Galton about Leona. Carl comes to the newspaper and invites Catherine and Tom to dinner, but Catherine politely declines. Catherine is overwhelmed by the number of visitors she has had and decides to go home for lunch. While there, her phone rings and a woman's voice starts to accuse her of sleeping with her husband. Catherine recognizes Mrs. Barnes's voice and tells her that she should stop accusing people of things she has no proof they have done. Then Catherine hangs up on her.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Tom's car is in the shop, so Catherine gives him a ride to work. Tom admits to having a date that night. Catherine suspects it is with Leila because of her crush on him, and because Tom has been spending a lot of time talking to her the last few days. This is important because the reader should expect this date to take up a little space in the following chapters. Later, Catherine tells the reader how Tom is still making a pest of himself investigating Leona's murder. This too might stick in the reader's mind as the plot continues to move toward solving the case.

Martin tells Catherine how he talked to the sheriff about being out on the road near the shack Saturday morning. This seems insignificant, but it shows the reader that Catherine has been truthful up to this point. Carl Perkins comes to the office and asks Catherine and Tom to dinner, but Catherine turns him down. This too seems insignificant, but Catherine will recall it later with great distress. The phone call Catherine receives touches again on the theme of secrets. Catherine has been drawn into the secret lives of all her friends and neighbors thanks to finding Leona's dead body. This is not a world Catherine is comfortable living in and would rather go back to the way things were, when secrets were kept just that, secrets.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The rest of the afternoon is quiet since everyone but Catherine and Tom are busy printing the week's edition of the paper. Tom learns that his car will not be ready that night as planned and asks Catherine for a ride home. Once home, Catherine spends the rest of the afternoon and part of the evening cleaning her house. When she is done mopping, Catherine steps out on the back porch to leave the mop. While there, Catherine hears a noise that sounds like footsteps. Catherine goes back into the house and then watches the yard from the window until she sees a bird in the yard. Satisfied that this is the source of the noise, Catherine chastises herself for being scared and turns back to her chores. However, a moment later Catherine hears the buzzer in the master bedroom sound. Catherine thinks at first that Tom is playing a joke on her and then she remembers that he promised not to do that.

Catherine grabs her gun and goes to Tom's house to find out what is happening. When Catherine enters the house she finds Tom bleeding on the living room floor. Catherine kneels beside him to check his pulse. While she is checking the pulse, it slowly stops. Tom is dead. Someone comes up behind Catherine and she turns to find Leila standing there in her underwear. Leila begins to scream, and Catherine realizes that she thinks Catherine killed Tom. Catherine slaps Leila to break her hysterics and convince her that she did not hurt Tom. Afterward, Leila gets sick. Catherine helps her dress, removes all evidence of Leila in the bedroom, and helps her up to the main house.

Catherine calls the police and then she calls Randall. Randall and his mother support Catherine while the police begin their investigation and interrogate both Catherine and Leila. Leila lies and tells them that she was in the living room with Tom rather than the bedroom. Catherine does not contradict her. However, when Leila tells everyone how Catherine slapped her, Catherine can see them wondering if she were strong enough to beat Tom to death. Randall comes to her defense. Finally, everyone leaves except Randall. Randall has to make the call to Tom's parents and then he begins to talk out the murders with Catherine. They both begin to hypothesize the possibility that Leona overheard something in Dr. Linton's office that got them both killed and that the killer had gone after Tom as he had stumbled on the same information.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Catherine has to take Tom home, because his car is still not ready. The reader should be reminded that this means his car is not outside his home, possibly giving the impression that he is not home. Then, Catherine hears a noise in the yard and thinks it might be an intruder. However, she sees a bird and convinces herself that it is nothing fearful. Then, she hears the buzzer that is connected to Tom's house sound. Catherine



knows then that something bad has happened since in an earlier chapter Tom promised not to use the buzzer in jest. Catherine goes to Tom's and finds him dead.

Leila is in the house. Catherine calms her down, takes her to the main house, and calls the police. Leila is hysterical but not so much so that she cannot think to lie in order to protect her reputation. This is another secret Catherine must keep, touching on the theme of secrets. The police begin to think that Catherine must be the killer, but Randall convinces them she is not. Finally, Catherine and Randall are left alone. Randall makes the call to Tom's parents. Then, they discuss a possible motive for the killer if all three murders are related. Randall thinks that Leona heard something in Dr. Linton's office. This is an important hypothesis, because it will help Catherine to figure out what really did happen and why.



Chapters 12-13

Chapters 12-13 Summary

The next day, Catherine goes to the sheriff's station to make her statement. Betty's son tells her that Betty wants to see her, so Catherine goes to visit her afterward. Betty tells Catherine that she was cleaning Dr. Linton's office a few days before he died and overheard him arguing with a man Betty could not see. Betty tells Catherine that she could not tell what the argument was about, but that Leona knew because she had her ear to the door the whole time. The only thing Betty heard was mention of some animal that began with an A. Catherine thanked her and left to go to work.

At work, Catherine helps a deputy empty out Tom's desk. Afterward, Catherine develops the film in Tom's camera and then busies herself going through the weekly columns to pick out the ones they would run the following week. Among these columns is a medical column. Catherine reads one of these columns and suddenly a motive for murder jumps into her mind. Catherine looks at the pictures again, making special note of one that shows Randall and Carl Perkins. Catherine leaves the column on Randall's desk and then rushes home. Catherine needs to get something from Tom's house, but his parents are waiting for her when she arrives. Catherine is polite, but rushes them out. Then, Catherine calls Randall and tells him what she has figured out before she goes to Tom's.

At Tom's, Catherine goes into the attic to retrieve a medical file she believes will explain everything. It is Carl Perkins' file. Carl Perkins has leprosy. Catherine believes that her father diagnosed the leprosy in secret, but told Carl it was the law that he had to report it to the health officials. Carl must not have wanted this, because it would ruin his reputation. This is why Catherine believes he killed her parents. Then, Leona must have blackmailed him and Carl killed her not only to stop her, but to get the evidence. When he could not find the evidence in Leona's home, Carl came to Tom's to find it after Catherine told him where the medical files were. Carl must have believed Tom was not home because his car was not there. Catherine comes out of the attic with the files and finds Carl waiting for her. Carl makes a grab for Catherine, but she escapes and runs into the street. Carl gives chase. Catherine remembers her gun in her hand and turns, taking aim. Catherine fires once and misses. The second time she does not. Carl is dead.

Chapters 12-13 Analysis

Catherine speaks to Betty and finds out that her father had an argument with someone a few days before he died. This does not help Catherine at first, but when she reads a column about leprosy, she begins to figure it out. Some of the symptoms include the loss of eyebrows and lesions on the arms, as well as lack of feeling in the hands. All these symptoms are ones that Catherine has noticed in Carl Perkins. Catherine begins

to put everything together, realizing that Tom died as she told Carl Perkins where to find his medical files.

Catherine goes home to find the file so that she can take it to the police and pose her theory to them. However, while Catherine is there, Carl finds her. Catherine runs from him, but Carl keeps up. Catherine then remembers her gun and fires on him, killing him. Carl is the killer. Carl's motive is the fact that he has leprosy and he needs to keep it a secret because his reputation is important to his success in business and as a community leader. This touches on the theme of secrets since Carl's secret is so huge he is willing to kill for it. The mystery is over, and Catherine is safe.



Characters

Catherine Linton

Catherine Linton is a newspaper reporter. Catherine grew up in the small town of Lowfield, Mississippi and has returned there after the death of her parents. Catherine's parents died six months ago in a car accident while driving to Arkansas to visit her for the Christmas holidays. The car accident was caused by someone tampering with the car. Ever since returning home, Catherine has been lost in a fog of grief, cutting herself off from all her friends and neighbors to the point that she does not speak to anyone, even while at work. When Catherine finds the dead body of her father's long time nurse, she is forced to see how isolated she has become. This isolation was a comfort before, but now it seems to be a dangerous separation from safety.

Catherine begins to learn who her true friends are during the investigation of Leona Gaites's death. The most surprising of these newfound friends is her boss at the newspaper, Randall. Catherine has known Randall all her life, because her mother and his were good friends. However, Catherine has never had any interest in Randall until she sees lust for her in his eyes. Suddenly, Catherine becomes infatuated with Randall. Also among her growing list of friends is the reporter she rents her father's old office to, Tom, and her neighbor, Carl Perkins. Catherine trusts these friends as she has always trusted her neighbors in this small town, until clues begin adding up and Catherine begins to realize one of these men is a killer. Upon Tom's death, Catherine learns information that makes her realize why Carl Perkins would kill her father and that Tom's death, a matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, is partially her fault.

Randall Gerrard

Randall is a member of one of the oldest and richest families in Lowfield. Randall's family owns the local paper, making him Catherine's boss. Randall once left Lowfield and went to work for a senator in Washington, D.C. However, the death of his father caused Randall to be called back to Lowfield to run the paper for him. Randall resented this change in his life at first, but soon came to accept it. When Catherine came back to Lowfield, he hired her at the paper because his mother thought he could be of help to her in her time of need. Over time, Randall came to have feelings for Catherine, but lost in her grief she failed to notice.

When Leona's body was found, Randall comes to Catherine's aid. Randall shows Catherine his feelings and they quickly become romantically linked. It is Randall who helps Catherine through the aftermath of finding Leona as well as her conviction that Leona's death is connected to that of her parents. Randall helps Catherine by allowing her to share her feelings and ideas with him. Later, when Tom's body is found, Randall is one of the first to come to Catherine's side, and he serves as a buffer between her



and the police. Randall continues to help Catherine figure out the mystery and is the only person Catherine confides in when she figures out the identity of the killer.

Sheriff James Galton

James Galton is the sheriff in Lowfield. It is to the sheriff that Catherine goes after finding the body of Leona. Galton tries to help Catherine while investigating the murder, assuming from the beginning that Catherine could have something to do with the murder, especially when she denies knowing the body and Galton discovers it is her father's nurse. However, Galton has known Catherine since she was a small child and comes to believe she is not capable of this type of cruelty. Galton begins to investigate and tells Catherine that he discovered at Leona's house that she was a blackmailer and that she might have stolen some medical equipment from Dr. Linton's office. Catherine takes this information and adds to it from rumors about town, using it to help her figure out who killed her parents and Leona.

When Tom is killed, Galton again begins to think that Catherine might be a murderess. Catherine is covered in blood when he arrives at her house. When Leila, the girl who was with Tom when he died, tells Galton how Catherine slapped her when she became hysterical, Galton begins to realize that Catherine is stronger than he gave her credit for. However, Randall convinces him that Catherine did not kill Tom. Catherine is strong, but she does not have enough blood on her person. The person who killed Tom would be covered in blood, but Catherine only has blood on her hands from where she touched Tom to check his pulse. Galton leaves Catherine at home after she promises to make a statement the next day at the station, telling the reader that Galton does not suspect her of the crime any longer.

Tom Mascalco

Tom is a reporter at the Gazette. Tom is fresh out of college and anxious to be an investigative reporter like he might be at a larger paper. However, there are too many reporters and too few papers, so Tom is stuck in a small town paper where few murders or other exciting events take place. When the murder of Leona is made known to him, Tom jumps on the story as if it were the most exciting thing to ever happen to him. Tom investigates the murder thoroughly, annoying everyone in town, including Catherine. However, Catherine must admit that his writing is top notch.

Tom was engaged to a woman in Memphis, but this relationship ended right before the novel begins. Tom then turns his attention on the receptionist at the paper. This girl is young and beautiful but clearly experienced. The night Tom is killed, he makes a date with this girl. However, because his car is in the shop, Tom is forced to invite the girl to his house. While Tom and the girl are in the bedroom, they hear someone breaking into the house. Tom goes out into the hallway to confront the intruder and is beaten to death with a baseball bat. During the fight, Tom pushes a buzzer that alerts Catherine in her house. Catherine arrives at the house just as Tom dies, leaving her as the number one



suspect in the eyes of Tom's girl and the police. However, Catherine is not charged. The next day, Catherine begins to put the pieces of the mystery together and realizes that she is partly responsible for Tom's death. Catherine told the killer where to find medical records her father once kept. These records held the motive for the crimes and were stored in Tom's attic. Since Tom's car was in the shop, the killer thought he was not home and broke in to steal the records.

Carl Perkins

Carl Perkins is one of Catherine's neighbors and a friend. Carl moved to Lowfield from Louisiana as a poor man and made himself rich through business. Carl is proud of his successes and shows it off with the huge mansion he built down the street from the Linton home. Carl is also an important member of the community, holding many political positions in the city, including coroner. It is Carl Perkins who runs the coroner's jury when Catherine finds Leona's body.

Carl and his wife, Molly, worry about Catherine after the murders and express their concerns to her. However, after a time Catherine begins to wonder about Carl's true intentions toward her. While visiting Carl and his wife, Catherine saw marks on Carl's arms that later would reveal to her the true identity of the killer. Carl realizes that Carl has leprosy because of a conversation she is told by the maid who overheard it. Putting that together with the timing of the conversation the maid heard, Catherine realizes that Carl killed her father to keep him from reporting the disease to health officials, making it public. Carl was then blackmailed by Leona which is why he killed her. Finally, Carl had asked Catherine where she kept her father's medical files and she suspects this is why Tom died. Catherine goes to get the files and is confronted by Carl, a confrontation that ends with Catherine killing Carl.

Glenn and Rachel Linton

Glenn and Rachel Linton are Catherine's parents. While on their way to visit Catherine, Glenn and Rachel are killed in a car accident. It is later revealed that someone tampered with their car and their deaths are murder. Catherine takes their murder hard and is stuck in a deep depression for the six months following. However, the death of Leona, the possibility of love, and the hope of finding the killer bring Catherine out of her depression. Catherine begins to investigate the death of Leona and soon realizes her father's connection to the killer, thus discovering the true killer. Dr. Linton was a good doctor who often went out of his way to help his patients. In this case, Dr. Linton taught himself through books how to run a test that would diagnose leprosy in order to keep his patient from the exposure of going to a larger hospital or to the state health officials. However, when the test came back positive, Dr. Linton was forced to report the results, thus making the disease public. This would ruin the reputation of the patient and was therefore motive for murder.



Betty Eakins

Betty Eakins worked for the Linton family until her advanced age made it impossible for her to continue. Catherine remembers Betty fondly even though her opinions on race relations changed while she was in college and was relieved when Betty retired. After Leona's death, Catherine meets Betty's son who has become a sheriff's deputy. They are uncomfortable with each other because of the awkwardness of Catherine's relationship to his mother. However, when Betty wants to see Catherine, her son makes these wishes clear to Catherine. Catherine goes to see Betty and learns that Betty overheard a conversation between her father and an angry man a few days before her father's death. Catherine uses this information to figure out who the killer is and what his motives are.

Leona Gaites

Leona Gaites was Dr. Linton's nurse for most of Catherine's childhood. It is the body of Leona Gaites that Catherine finds on her property at the beginning of the novel. Leona was not a nice person. Catherine always believed that Leona did not like children and the only reason she was ever nice to her was because Leona had a crush on Dr. Linton. After her death, Catherine learns that Leona was blackmailing residents of Lowfield and that she was also performing abortions with medical equipment she stole from Dr. Linton's office. Catherine's opinion of Leona falls even further, but it is this information that aids her in discovering who killed her parents and Tom. It also helps Catherine figure out why and where to find the evidence.

Miss Molly

Miss Molly is Carl Perkins' wife. Miss Molly surprises Catherine when she comes to her house Sunday morning, the day after the discovery of Leona's body, to offer Catherine some food. When Miss Molly begins to ask about the police car she saw outside Catherine's house that morning, Catherine believes she is looking for gossip, but Catherine refuses to indulge her. Later, Catherine returns the dish, intent on proving herself a proper southern woman, but feeling ashamed when she sees how nervous Miss Molly is around her. Catherine believes that Miss Molly believes her guilty. However, when Catherine learns that Carl is the real killer, the reader sees through Miss Molly's behavior and realizes that she must have known the truth all along and had been looking for information on behalf of her husband.

Martin Barnes and Jewel Crenna

Martin Barnes is the tenant who rents Catherine's property outside of town. Martin is an older man with a wife who is a little on the crazy side. When Catherine reports to the sheriff that she saw Martin driving on the road to the shack the day she found Leona, Martin's wife becomes obsessed with the idea that Martin was having an affair with

Leona and then begins to think maybe it is Catherine he was sleeping with. However, when Catherine goes to work the following Monday, she learns from her coworker Jewel, who had a house out near the shack, that she and Martin have been having an affair for a long time. This affair goes to the theme of secrets and causes Catherine to realize how many people in her small town have secrets.



Objects/Places

Medical Files

Catherine's father was a doctor, and Catherine inherited his medical files when he died. The killer is looking for his medical file when he kills both Leona and Tom.

Dr. Linton's Office

Catherine's father, Dr. Glenn Linton, had bought the house behind his parents' home to use as his medical office. After his death, Catherine rents this house to Tom. It is also in this house that Catherine has stored the medical records.

Gazette

Catherine works for the local newspaper, the Gazette. Randall's family owns the paper, and Randall runs it.

Baseball Bat

The killer's weapon of choice is a baseball bat. It is later discovered he took the bat from belongings his son left behind when he moved away.

Tom's Volkswagen

Tom has a Volkswagen that breaks down often. The day before Tom dies, his Volkswagen breaks down, and Tom is forced to put it in the shop. This is why the killer believes Tom is not home when he breaks into his house.

Catherine's Property

Catherine owns property outside of town that she rents to Martin Barnes. It is on this property that Catherine finds Leona Gaites' body.

Pictures

It is while developing some of Tom's pictures that Catherine figures out who the killer is.



Carl's Burn

Carl Perkins burns his hand while Catherine is visiting him but he does not appear to feel it. It is this event that Catherine remembers later which helps her figure out a motive for the murders.

Glenn and Rachel's Car

While driving to visit Catherine in Arkansas, Glenn and Rachel's car fails, causing a fatal accident, due to some mechanical sabotage.

The Levee

Randall takes Catherine out to the levee the day after she finds Leona's body, beginning the romantic side of their relationship.

Jewel Crenna's House

Catherine sees Martin Barnes leaving Jewel Crenna's house the day she finds Leona's body but does not put two and two together until Monday when Jewel tells her about their affair.

Gun

Catherine's father taught her how to shoot a gun when she was little. Catherine goes out to her property to shoot her gun the day she finds Leona. It is with this gun that Catherine kills Carl Perkins at the end of the novel.



Themes

Fear

Fear is a great motivator in most novels, and this book is no exception. Fear paralyzes Catherine when she finds Leona's body, keeping her from identifying the body. This lack of identification of someone she has known her entire life makes Catherine look like a suspect to the sheriff. Fear continues to build for Catherine as several people point out how vulnerable she is in her home with her neighbors on vacation and no one else living nearby. Catherine becomes so frightened that she believes she hears a prowler in her backyard one night. Later Catherine realizes she did hear a prowler despite convincing herself that the noise was a bird hunting in her yard. Catherine does not let this fear keep her from figuring out the mystery of who is killing everyone she knows, despite the fact that the killer is hoping it will.

Fear is also the motivation that propels the killer. The killer, Carl Perkins, is afraid people will learn he is a leper and it will ruin his reputation. Catherine's father diagnosed Carl's disease, but he refuses to keep it from the public, obligated by law to report it to the health department. It is for this reason that Carl tampers with the doctor's car and kills both him and his wife. Later, the nurse who worked in the doctor's office begins to blackmail Carl and this results in her death. Carl needs to get a hold of his medical records to keep anyone else from learning about his dreaded disease. Carl breaks into Tom's house since it was once Dr. Linton's office and where Catherine has stored the medical records. However, Carl is not aware that Tom is home and when Tom surprises him, Carl kills him. When Catherine figures all of this out, she goes to the house to get the records and Carl confronts her. Catherine kills Carl in self defense. If not for his fear of discovery, Carl would not have killed these people, making fear an important theme to the novel.

Grief

When the novel opens, Catherine's parents have been dead for six months, and she is still grieving their passing. Catherine's grief is so profound that she has cut herself off from her friends and neighbors, isolating herself. When Catherine finds Leona's body, her isolation becomes more defined to her. Catherine had not realized how deeply her grief had affected her life until she was forced to look outside herself and see how isolated she had become. Catherine had been so depressed she had not even seen the affection growing for her in her boss. Catherine also did not see the affection her neighbors and friends held for her, nor did she notice the secrets many of these same friends and neighbors hid.

Catherine's grief is understandable. Catherine's parents were young when they died, and their deaths proved to be a murder that was unsolved. Catherine wants vengeance for these deaths and the fact that the sheriff has had no leads leaves Catherine with a



frustrating lack of closure. However, the death of Leona brings Catherine out of her grief long enough to realize that the same person who killed her parents might have killed Leona. This gives Catherine hope. Coupled with this new hope and with the prospect of love from Randall bring Catherine out of her depression. However, when Catherine discovers the dead body of her tenant, Tom, she falls briefly back into her depression. Catherine and Tom were not especially close, but he was a friend and his death is even harder to face when Catherine begins to believe that it is partially her fault. Catherine figures out who the killer is and realizes he went to Tom's house based on information she gave the killer. However, solving the murders and having Randall in her life brings Catherine out of her grief and helps her move on with her life.

Secrets

All small towns have secrets, and the small town that Catherine lives in is no exception. However, Catherine has never realized how many secrets exist until the death of Leona Gaites brings her out of the fog of grief and makes her take a look at the people around her. One secret Catherine stumbles on is an affair taking place between her renter and a coworker. Another secret that catches Catherine by surprise is the love her boss has for her. Catherine has known Randall all her life and never thought about him in that way until she suddenly sees his lust for her in his eyes. Finally, a secret that does not surprise Catherine based on the lady's personality, is that her father's long time nurse was a blackmailer and abortionist.

One of the biggest secrets in the novel is the motive behind the killings that are suddenly taking place all around Catherine. First, Catherine's parents are murdered when someone tampers with their car. Then, Catherine finds the body of her father's nurse only to learn later that her death might have something to do with her parents' death. Finally, Catherine's tenant in her father's old office is killed while she is standing on her back stoop. Catherine stumbles on this secret when the family maid tells Catherine about a conversation she overheard a few days before her father died. The killer has leprosy and he is afraid that his reputation will be ruined when Dr. Linton, Catherine's father, reports it to health officials. This is why he kills Catherine's parents. Later, the nurse blackmails him, so he kills her. Finally, Catherine tells the killer that the medical records are in the attic of Tom's house, so the killer breaks in to steal them only to be surprised by Tom. The killer murders Tom. If not for secrets and an attempt to keep them secret, the killer would not have been motivated to take so many lives and that is what makes secrets an important theme to the novel.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in a limited third person point of view. The point of view is limited to a single character, in this case Catherine Linton, the main character. This limit means that only Catherine's thoughts and actions are reported on through the point of view. The narration never wanders into the minds of other characters, nor does it report on events the main character does not have personal knowledge of. Catherine is the only one who shares her thoughts with the reader, the only one who reports her actions, and the only one the reader sees reacting to the actions of other characters.

This point of view is valuable to this novel because it keeps the reader focused on the main character rather than the thoughts and actions of many different characters. Where in some mystery novels the reader gets access to the thoughts of the murderer, the reader of this novel only has access to Catherine's thoughts, so the reader gets to figure out who the killer is right along with Catherine. Not only does this build the all important intimacy between the reader and the main character, but it also allows the suspense to build at a more exciting rate, dragging out the mystery until the final pages of the novel. It also helps the reader to care about what happens to Catherine which is very important as Catherine finds her life to be in danger in the final pages of the novel. If not for this concern, the final parts of the novel may not have the emotional impact they are intended to have.

Setting

The novel is set in a small town in Mississippi. The town is a classic small town, with a sheriff and newspaper that only publishes once a week and publishes stories on children's birthday parties. The town consists of only a drug store, a bank, and the paper. Everyone in this town knows everyone else. This town is also in the deep south, which introduces the racial tensions common to this area. These tensions affect Catherine deeply and characterize her relationship with many of the characters in the novel, most specifically with Betty, her parent's old maid. This relationship is important to the plot development because it is Betty who will come across with some information that will help Catherine solve the mystery.

This setting is important to the novel because living in a small town has an impact on Catherine's personality and behavior. There are many points in the novel when Catherine finds herself forced to act in a certain way because of the traditions of her southern upbringing and the expectations of those around her. An example is when Catherine goes to the Perkins home in order to return a casserole dish loaned to her by Miss Molly. This occasion is important to the plot because it reveals important information to Catherine that she uses to learn who the killer is. However, it would not



have taken place had Catherine not felt an obligation to respond to her neighbor's kindness due to her southern upbringing.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The novel is written with simplicity for the reader in mind. The language also includes many southern touches, such as the dialect of the southern characters as well as slang common to the south. This language is underscored by the actions of the main character, especially when she speaks of or does something that is related to her southern upbringing.

The language of this novel is important because its southern touches helps add to the overall feel of the novel. The novel is set in the south and this is important because the traditions of the south impact the motives behind all the characters, especially the killer. If not for living in the south with the mentality of the southern business man, the killer might not have been quite so concerned about his secret being revealed to those he does business with. People in the south put a lot of value on the character of a person and this killer's medical diagnoses would have affected the way people viewed his character. The language of the novel does not make the novel southern, but it helps the setting and the behaviors of the characters set the mood of the south that is so important to the plot of the novel.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirteen chapters. Each chapter varies in length from a few pages to more than twenty. The chapters are divided internally by dramatic spaces that alert the reader when a change of scene is about to take place or some dramatic information has been revealed. This structure makes the novel easy to read and understand for the reader, making a novel that a devoted mystery reader could possibly read in one sitting.

The novel contains one main story line as well as a few subplots. The main plot follows Catherine in her day-to-day life as she first finds a dead body and then attempts to get on with her life. However, this life is interrupted when Catherine finds yet another body. Catherine begins to worry for her own safety as well as the idea that she will soon be blamed for the murders herself. One subplot is the mystery of Leona Gaites. Leona is the dead body that Catherine finds in the beginning of the novel and also the nurse that worked for Catherine's father most of her life. Leona, it turns out, was also a blackmailer and an abortionist. As these revelations come out, Catherine begins to piece together what happened to Leona, bringing the reader to another subplot. This subplot is the killer and his motivations for murder. The killer is trying to protect a secret that Leona has been blackmailing him over. Attempting to figure out this secret and unmask the killer is what keeps Catherine from falling into a deep depression and what leads to the ultimate climax of the novel.



Quotes

"She passed a dead dog on her way to the tenant shack." Chapter 1, pg. 1

"There was something in that little pool of light penetrating the empty doorway. It was a hand. She tried to identify it as something else, anything else." Chapter 1, pg. 5

"I wish I were invisible, she thought miserably. She became very still and looked down the short length of her legs at her tennis shoes. Of course, if I don't look at them, they can't see me, she jeered at herself, when she realized what she was doing. But it worked for a while." Chapter 2, pg. 17

"She shouldn't have died like that, Catherine thought, as she watched the coroner's jury being heaved across the porch and into the shack. A dog shouldn't die like that. Then Catherine remembered the dog's corpse she had passed that morning. The same person killed them both, she thought with surprising certainty. Driving too fast, to get away from what he did to Miss Gaites." Chapter 3, pg. 20

"She came in the side door from the garage. Her coffee cup and the empty percolator still stood on the counter, waiting to be washed. The hands of the kitchen clock glided electrically smooth on their course. She was almost surprised that the house was the same, so much had passed since she had left it that morning." Chapter 4, pg. 25

"She didn't wonder at his sliding into the position of man to her woman, instead of employer to employee. She accepted the transition without question." Chapter 4, pg. 35

"She staved off the image of Leona's hand until she had finished three cups of coffee, two pieces of toast, and fifty pages of the lady's opulent childhood." Chapter 5, pg. 37

"Could it be Lowfield contained two murderers? That the deaths of her parents and Leona were not related? Sheriff Galton clearly believed the crimes were separate." Chapter 6, pg. 51

"This was not like being with any other man. She couldn't explain to herself how



someone so distant and so taken for granted could have switched positions so easily and naturally. She didn't want to explain, or worry, or wonder; or try to picture how he saw her. She was, for once, quite unselfconscious." Chapter 7, pg. 68

"Catherine spent the afternoon dodging conversations. She didn't want to hear any more secrets or opinions." Chapter 9, pg. 86

"Leona's murder is like kicking over an anthill, she thought. Everyone is scurrying to get under new cover, treading over each other in their haste to escape exposure." Chapter 10, pg. 117

"It was the stealthy aspect of adultery, the sneaking and concealment in the face of someone close to you, that made it seem so...slimy. Though, I suppose, Catherine reflected, the sneaking is more fun than the actual bedding down, for some people." Chapter 11, pg. 119

"He doesn't think I can hit him, she thought with an odd cold rush of amusement." Chapter 13, pg. 177

"A few miles outside of Lowfield, up the highway that led to Memphis, a little boy cried over his supper because his dun-colored dog had been missing for four days." Chapter 13, pg. 179



Topics for Discussion

Why does Catherine not recognize Leona when she first finds the body? Why do you think the killer took Leona to Catherine's property? Does this imply a connection to the murder of Catherine's parents?

How does Catherine know her parents were murdered? Why has their murder not been solved? Who could have killed them? Why does Catherine think the two murders are related? Could Leona have known something that got both herself and Catherine's parents killed? Why did the killer wait so long to kill Leona?

What does Randall do that makes Catherine begin to think of him in a romantic light? Why has Catherine never thought of Randall in this way before? Do you think Catherine's relationship with Randall has an impact on her later actions? Why or why not?

Discuss Tom. What is Tom's role in the novel? Is Tom a romantic rival for Randall? Why or why not? Does Catherine like Tom? Why does Catherine rent her father's office to Tom? What emotional impact does this have on Catherine? Does this interfere with her relationship with Tom? What impact does Tom's death have on Catherine? How does his death help her figure out who the killer is?

Is Catherine responsible for Tom's death? Could Catherine have saved Tom? What is the significance of the buzzer going off in Catherine's master bedroom? Why does Catherine hesitate before responding? Does her hesitation have an impact on Tom's survival?

Why does Catherine not like Leona? Does it have anything to do with Leona's secret feelings for Dr. Linton? How does Catherine's dislike for Leona impact her reaction to finding Leona's body? When Catherine learns about Leona's extracurricular activities, does it cloud her outlook as far as attempting to figure out who killed her?

Why is leprosy such a bad diagnosis? How would this diagnosis have affected the way people treated Carl Perkins? Is leprosy catching? Why did Carl kill rather than admit to the disease? What was Carl afraid of? How would you feel if you knew someone with leprosy?