

# **The Widening Gyre Study Guide**

**The Widening Gyre by Robert B. Parker**

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## Plot Summary

Boston-based private detective Spenser goes to work for a conservative senatorial candidate named Meade Alexander, allegedly to protect him from some vague threats he has received. However, Meade reveals that Spenser will be investigating a blackmail tape showing Ronni, Meade's wife, having an affair with an anonymous man. Meade's opponent in the political race, Robert Browne, is high on Spenser's suspect list because Browne is on the payroll of Boston mafioso Joe Broz, who does not want to see his politician get beaten by a conservative whose wife has been indiscreet. Spenser empathizes with Meade, whose only wish is to protect the woman he loves.

Spenser begins by investigating some threats made against the Alexander campaign by one Sal Pelletier, a cheap thug hired in Springfield by Vinnie Morris, Joe Broz's first lieutenant. While Spenser's clues seem to point to Joe Broz, Spenser believes that the blackmail is too subtle and careful to have been perpetrated by the brutish mob leader. Once the detective hits that dead end, he requests to see the pornographic video of Ronni Alexander. He flies to Washington DC to see the video in the Alexander's home in Georgetown. There he gathers a few clues from the video, but does not know where to turn to next.

While in Washington, Spenser spends time with Susan, his long-distance girlfriend without whom the detective is miserable. Susan calmly insists that she stay in DC, and Spenser has no choice but to rethink his definition of love and rediscover how best to love this woman. While working the case the next day, he recognizes the logo of Georgetown University from Ronni's video, and remembers that Joe Broz's son attends Georgetown. Spenser breaks into Gerry Broz's apartment and immediately recognizes the apartment from the blackmail tape.

Spenser tails Broz as he makes several stops at private homes the next day, then watches as two underage girls arrive at Broz's apartment and then leave several hours later, obviously intoxicated. Spenser stops one of the girls and impersonates a police officer, and the girl confesses that Broz sells cocaine and often trades the drugs for sex. She also reveals that Broz hosts what he calls "granny parties", orgies between local housewives and his college friends. At the next "granny party", the girl sneaks Spenser in and he takes several photographs. Using those photographs to convince one of the women who participated in the orgy, Spenser confirms what the girl confessed to him.

The next day Spenser is taken to a meeting with Robert Browne, who demands that the detective stop harassing Gerry Broz. Spenser realizes that if Browne is protecting Gerry, then Joe Broz must not know about his son's extracurricular activities. Spenser flies back to Boston and meets with Broz and Vinnie Morris, offering to bury the entire escapade if they will merely destroy the blackmail tapes. Broz arranges a hit on Spenser, which Spenser survives with a bullet wound in his leg.

Spenser, joined by fellow enforcer Hawk, makes a deal with Broz to compromise: Broz will destroy the tapes, and Spenser will not hunt him down for trying to have him killed.

Spenser and Susan reunite and reach a tentative peace when Spenser tells Susan that no matter what she has to do to find herself, he will always love her.



# Chapter 1-2

## Chapter 1-2 Summary

Spenser sits alone in his office and watches the Boston streets below him while he drinks a tall glass of whiskey. F.X. Farrell, called Fix Farrell, enters Spenser's office and offers him a job as a bodyguard for Senatorial hopeful Meade Alexander. Alexander is running against Robert Browne, a politician known to have mafia connections, and Alexander recently received death threats. Spenser takes the highly-paying job.

Spenser meets Meade Alexander and his wife Ronni. Ronni is a beautiful, demure blonde. Alexander is a conservative Christian, and even though Spenser does not subscribe to his faith, Alexander agrees to hire the witty detective. Spenser then introduces himself to the other two police officers who had been protecting Alexander.

## Chapter 1-2 Analysis

The first chapter introduces Spenser, a witty, unflappable private detective. Spenser is drinking even though Fix Farrell says that he has never heard that Spenser is a lush. Spenser's uncharacteristic consumption of whiskey hints that there may be something troubling Spenser. However, Spenser puts his personal life aside and agrees to take the job protecting the politician even though he does not care to follow politics.

The second chapter introduces the Alexanders and further develops Spenser's lack of respect for authority figures. He does not tell the Alexanders what they want to hear, but rather remains entirely himself throughout the entire exchange, witticisms and criticisms included. He flatly says that he does not agree with the Alexanders' religion, and while Meade and Ronni are both surprised by Spenser's candor, they both agree that his honesty is a positive trait.



## Chapter 3-4

### Chapter 3-4 Summary

Spenser accompanies the Alexanders on their campaign schedule. First, Meade speaks at the University of Lowell on the necessity of protecting family values from such threats as drugs, pornography, and feminism. Spenser notices a young couple reading on the grass outside the auditorium. Then, Alexander and his wife travel to the Haverhill Republican Women's Club, an industrial plant where the workers compliment Mrs. Alexander's physique, and finally to a shopping mall where Alexander comforts an upset Caucasian woman who is angry about integration, saying that the government should not interfere with public education. Finally, the campaign travels to a reception at a Hilton hotel, where Alexander works the room and his wife helps herself to glass after glass of cheap wine. As soon as Fix Farrell notices that Ronni is drinking heavily, he wraps up the party and takes the Alexanders to their hotel for the night. Spenser joins Mr. and Mrs. Alexander for dinner at their hotel. Ronni continues to drink heavily throughout the meal, and she begins to slur her words and hum along with the harp music in the elegant French restaurant. Meade asks Spenser what it is he believes in, if it is not religious faith. Spenser replies that he believes in love.

### Chapter 3-4 Analysis

The perfect senator and his perfect wife appear to have some secrets—Ronni's drinking elicits a rote response from Farrell, suggesting that this is not the first time that the team has had to handle her drinking. Alexander also cannot politicize his position on public education when challenged by a liberal constituent. Although they purport to be a perfect couple, he handsome and pious, she obedient and loving, in fact both individuals have been carefully shaped for public consumption. Meade Alexander's wife quickly reveals herself to be politically dangerous, but Meade does not chastise her for her excessive drinking. Instead, he gently guides her through the event and dinner, never judging or apologizing for her.

Spenser's attention drifts to a young couple he sees during Alexander's speech. Perhaps his fixation on the two lovers reveals why he has been drinking so heavily. Spenser tells the Alexanders that he believes in love instead of in God, an admission that further establishes that he may be lovesick.



## Chapter 5-6

### Chapter 5-6 Summary

At a reception in Springfield, Spenser meets two college students who have been accosted by two thugs while campaigning for Alexander at a shopping mall. The thugs told the college students that they just wanted to send Alexander a message. Spenser returns to the mall with the youths, and soon the thugs return. Spenser sizes them up and identifies them as cheap muscle, then quickly dispenses of them with very little effort on his part.

Spenser and Meade Alexander sit in a restaurant. Spenser informs Alexander that the thugs who threatened the college students have been taken care of, and Alexander thanks him for his work. Then, Alexander confesses that he is in trouble. His wife has had an affair and someone has made a videotape of one of her encounters. He is being blackmailed with that tape. Alexander is overcome and leaves the restaurant; Spenser pays the bill and departs.

### Chapter 5-6 Analysis

As much as Ronni's dirty secret may be public knowledge, so might Meade's campaign be corrupted. Why are these thugs harassing the kids? They have no political agenda. Spenser proves his physical strength and skill, as well as further establishing his wit and observational acuity. Ronni Alexander's indiscretions come to light in this chapter, in which Mr. Alexander confesses to another man that his wife has cheated, and that this humiliating personal tragedy has been recorded for posterity. Alexander's love for his wife, already established with the tenderness that he shows her even when she grows intoxicated and loopy in public, is deepened by his unwavering devotion and obvious heartbreak over the woman who has violated his trust. Spenser, at first flippant over dinner, empathizes with Alexander as soon as he realizes the source of the politician's scandal. Spenser's kindness further suggests that he too may be suffering from a personal betrayal.





# Chapter 7-9

## Chapter 7-9 Summary

Alexander and Spenser walk through the rain and Alexander fills in the private detective on the incident. A VHS tape was mailed to the Alexander home from Boston, and the tape showed Ronni having sex with a man in a bedroom. Alexander warns Spenser that Ronni is not to find out about the tape. If he has no alternative, Alexander says that he will drop out of the political race rather than let his wife know that she has been used in this way.

Spenser returns to Boston and immediately visits a friend who works at the Boston Globe. Reporter Wayne Cosgrove agrees to give Spenser everything that the newspaper has on Congressman Robert Browne, Meade Alexander's opponent. Cosgrove senses a story in Spenser's investigation, and the two men agree to meet for dinner and drinks later that night. Spenser returns to his office and looks at a picture of Susan, then goes out to eat lunch and drink whiskey. He returns home for a nap, and then decides to exercise through his exhaustion and worry. Finally, he goes to the Ritz to meet Cosgrove. The two men make small talk, and Cosgrove asks Spenser about Susan. Spenser says that she is out of town.

Spenser and Cosgrove eat dinner together at the Ritz. Cosgrove gives Spenser a large manila envelope full of press clippings on Robert Browne and then fills Spenser in on Ronni and Meade Alexander. Alexander is as pure and beholden to his faith as he appears to be, and Ronni is known to be a drunk. Cosgrove says that Fix Farrell is a classic politician from the days when rousing a rabble would get the job done, but at least the city councilman knows who he is. Cosgrove excuses himself to meet his wife, and Spenser has a drink alone in the bar before going home for the evening.

## Chapter 7-9 Analysis

Spenser pulls no punches with Meade Alexander, asking him if his wife has had multiple affairs or only one. This kind of confrontation is both hurtful and necessary if Spenser is to do the job that Alexander wants him to do. Meade proves his unwavering love for his wife once again, and also proves that love can be as destructive as it is strength-giving.

Spenser starts to work his project as he does any independent investigation. He gathers information and waits for it while maintaining his physical strength during off time. However, both the picture of Susan and his statement that she is out of town put a name to the lugubrious cloud that has hung over the detective's head in the form of excessive amounts of Irish whiskey and alternating empathy and cynicism about love.

Spenser's friendship with Cosgrove is a mutually beneficial one. Spenser can tap Cosgrove's extensive Boston Globe archives, and Cosgrove knows that Spenser can give the newspaper a tip if a large story breaks. The two men enjoy each other's



company, and Spenser learns a great deal more about the Alexanders. Meade Alexander may be a joke to many well-educated liberals from urban centers of Massachusetts, but to the large conservative slice of that state's population, he is wildly popular. His opponent, Robert Browne, has good reason to consider Alexander a threat.



# Chapter 10-11

## Chapter 10-11 Summary

Spenser begins to pore over the clippings that Cosgrove gives him. In his office, he occasionally looks up at Susan's photograph, and even speaks to it from time to time. He takes a lunch break and then continues reading aimlessly. He ponders what it means to be a good man and the meaningfulness of politics. Finally, in the late afternoon, Spenser stumbles across a photograph of Robert Browne and Vinnie Morris, the right-hand-man for Boston Mafioso Joe Broz. Spenser goes home, where he makes dinner and drinks a bottle of wine. He tries to sleep, but ends up lying awake in the early morning hours, thinking about life and death.

The next day, Spenser pays a visit to Martin Quirk, a police detective with whom he is friendly. Quirk agrees to give Spenser the names of the two thugs who harassed the college students at the shopping mall, and allows Spenser to read Joe Broz's file. Spenser finds nothing in the file to link him to Robert Browne, but he does notice that Joe Broz's son goes to Georgetown University, close to where Meade and Ronni Alexander live while Congress is in session. Spenser leaves the Police Department and drives to Springfield to talk to the thugs again.

## Chapter 10-11 Analysis

This chapter deals largely with Spenser's loneliness and its effect on his thought process. He wishes multiple times that he had someone to talk to while he digs through the research. He even speaks to a photograph and ponders getting a dog that will wag its tail when he talks to it. Although Spenser stumbles upon a good lead, he struggles to remain focused on the task at hand, and his mind wanders often. He wonders if any man is ultimately good, and what the purpose of goodness is if every man ends up dead. These thoughts reveal a great hopelessness that is the by-product of too much time alone. Even when he finally discovers his lead, Vinnie Morris, he does not celebrate. Instead, he goes home and drinks too much wine. Spenser's drinking habits reveal a great deal about his state of mind: he functions because he must function, but as soon as he is off-duty he begins to drink in order to avoid the poignancy of his thoughts and fears. While Spenser is on the case, however, he can compartmentalize his conflicted feelings about Susan and diligently pursue leads on Meade Alexander's blackmail. His friendship with Quirk showcases Spenser's personality: he is both witty and persuasive, and smooth and irritating to the cop.



# Chapter 12-13

## Chapter 12-13 Summary

Spenser drives to Springfield and calls on one of the two thugs, Sal Pelletier. Sal remembers Spenser and tries to run away, but has to stop because he is not very athletic. Spenser asks Pelletier who sent him to bully the college kids, and Pelletier hesitates to tell the detective, but once Spenser punches him in the face, he give a name: Louis Nolan. Pelletier also tells Spenser where to find Nolan—in his nearby home. Spenser drives to Nolan's home and tells the man that Vinnie Morris sent him. Nolan invites Spenser in and Spenser confirms that Vinnie Morris, acting on Joe Broz's authority, asked Louis Nolan to hire some muscle to send Alexander a message. Nolan believes that Spenser is working with Joe Broz, and is visibly nervous around Spenser until the detective departs.

Spenser returns home and finds Paul Giacomin on his couch. Paul and Spenser have a quasi-father-son relationship, and Paul has come to visit Spenser over his Thanksgiving break from college at Sarah Lawrence. The two men eat dinner together and drink beer, then Spenser begins to drink whiskey, to Paul's surprise. They discuss Susan, who is in Washington DC doing an internship with a children's hospital. She has been gone for months. Paul tries to comfort Spenser, but Spenser admits that he desperately misses Susan, and that he is hurt that she does not seem to miss him.

## Chapter 12-13 Analysis

Spenser can use both brains and brawn to elicit information from his willing or unwilling informants. With Sal Pelletier, he warns the sloppy enforcer that he can get physical before he actually does, an act of mercy that street thugs do not expect. Spenser uses his fists judiciously, a trait that separates him from many of the violent, lawless men that he chases. Then, Spenser uses his wits to be welcomed into Nolan's home as a representative of a powerful mob leader. Nolan believes Spenser because he looks like a mob enforcer, and therefore he reveals far too much about the power structure of which he is a member. Spenser leaves his house without having thrown a punch, and yet with the knowledge that Joe Broz, the man who owns Robert Browne, is sending people to threaten Browne's political opponent.

Paul Giacomin is the only man that Spenser can feel vulnerable with, and Paul notices a change in Spenser. He speculates that Spenser is especially hurt because Susan is one of only two people that Spenser deeply loves, and that Spenser's vulnerability is intensely scary to him. The source of Spenser's heartache and drive to drink immoderately is finally uncovered. Susan, a psychologist, his longtime girlfriend, and best friend, has moved to Washington DC to take an internship with a children's hospital. Spenser interprets her action as an insult to their relationship and an affront to his own vulnerability with her. He is angry and sad, afraid and proud. Paul is the only

other person with whom he can discuss his heartache, and Paul respects his father-figure's private nature while refusing to ignore Spenser's obvious unhappiness.



# Chapter 14-15

## Chapter 14-15 Summary

Vinnie Morris and another mobster named Ed arrive at Spenser's office, and Morris sends Ed out for coffee. Morris and Spenser discuss Browne and Alexander. Spenser admits that he went to Springfield to ask around about Broz's muscle there, and Morris admits that Robert Browne is on Broz's payroll. Next, Morris admits that they are the people blackmailing Alexander with the video of his wife. He threatens to make the video public, and Spenser counters with a promise to reveal Robert Browne's mafia ties if that happens. Morris departs, and Spenser thinks about the strange meeting. He knows that there is more to the story, and unhappily calls Meade Alexander to request to watch the movie of his wife.

Spenser travels to Washington DC, and arrives at Alexander's home in Georgetown. Meade Alexander instructs Spenser to lock the door before he watches the tape, and then to lock the door on his way out again. Spenser watches the tape, which shows Ronni Alexander dancing and then engaging in intercourse with a young man. On the first watch, Spenser merely takes in the events on the tape. Then, he rewinds the tape and pauses it at various points in order to gain clues about where this tape was made. The man wears sunglasses throughout the interlude, but has a very expensive haircut. Spenser notices that the windows are open and sunlight is streaming into the bedroom, and therefore determines that the bedroom's windows must face west. He then notices a mug holding pens and pencils on the desk, and cannot identify any print on the mug, but notes that it appears to hold a crest of some sort. Spenser turns off the television and leaves, embarrassed and frustrated that he collected so little information and hurt Meade so much.

## Chapter 14-15 Analysis

Spenser is both cool and calculating in the presence of a known violent enforcer for the most powerful mob in Boston. The two men converse almost casually about the case, and even threats are so delicately and hypothetically worded that they seem theoretical instead of practical. Spenser's instinct, however, tells him that Morris's version of the events in question only scratches the surface of a much more complicated crime. Not only is Joe Broz known to be a brazen, bold criminal and therefore disinclined to surreptitiously blackmail a politician, but Spenser knows that if all Broz wanted was to secure Browne's position, the video would already be public knowledge.

Spenser empathizes with Meade Alexander. While he watches the blackmail tape, Spenser's throat tightens and he grows first angry, then deeply sad. Ronni Alexander has an affair and it completely shatters her husband, but on this tape she is happy, drunk, and carefree. Spenser does garner a few pieces of information from the tape, but

he departs the house feeling sad that he could not learn anything more definitive, especially at the high emotional cost that Meade has paid.



# Chapter 16-17

## Chapter 16-17 Summary

Spenser returns to his hotel room at the posh Hay Adams hotel and calls Susan at the hospital to let her know where he is. He considers going for a walk, but does not want to miss Susan's return call. He watches the news, and then Susan knocks on his door. He is overwhelmed by her presence, and the two make love. After, they drink champagne and talk about Spenser's case with the Alexanders. Susan empathizes with Ronni.

The next morning, Spenser drops Susan off at the hospital and walks around Georgetown thinking about his case. In a market, he samples gourmet local foods and talks to a Georgetown student in a t-shirt bearing the school's mascot. Suddenly, Spenser realizes that the Georgetown crest is the one he saw on the mug in Ronni Alexander's blackmail video. He then remembers that Joe Broz's son attends Georgetown University. He looks up Gerry Broz's address and breaks into the man's apartment. Broz's apartment is the same one in the video. In order to make the invasion appear to be a random burglary, Spenser steals some cash, some cocaine, and a pair of diamond cufflinks. He throws the diamonds and the drugs into the river and returns to the market for some lunch.

## Chapter 16-17 Analysis

Spenser feels longing and intense anxiety while waiting for Susan to call him back. When she finally arrives, he cannot remember his anger toward her or sadness. Instead, all he feels is relief to be with her again. They celebrate their reunion with physical love and conversation. Spenser is happy to be with Susan again, and the two of them complement each other very well. Susan is elegant but down-to-earth, and Spenser is basically macho with a sheen of pedigree. He brings out her baseness and she his elegance.

Spenser discovers both the where and the who of this blackmail. Gerry Broz, son of Boston Mafioso Joe Broz, videotaped Ronni Alexander inside his own apartment. However, Spenser is now tasked with the feat of understanding the why of the crime, as well as producing an incentive for the gangsters to stop blackmailing Meade Alexander.





# Chapter 18-19

## Chapter 18-19 Summary

Spenser returns to the market and enjoys a sandwich and coffee for lunch. He returns to his hotel room and calls Martin Quirk, who is not in, so he speaks to Detective Belson instead. Belson informs Spenser that Gerry Broz has no record with the Boston Police Department, but gives the detective a physical description. Next, Spenser calls Cosgrove at the Boston Globe, who also is not in. Finally, Spenser makes a phone call for a dinner reservation with Susan, and then he goes back out into Washington DC to follow Gerry Broz until his date with Susan. Gerry Broz leaves his apartment after supervising the replacement of the glass window that Spenser broke. Spenser recognizes the college student from the video. Broz goes to the library, where he studies until the evening falls and Spenser departs to prepare for his dinner with Susan.

Spenser and Susan go to Rive Gauche for dinner. The restaurant is mostly empty but for a boisterous family seated near the couple. As soon as they order their meals, Spenser and Susan begin a discussion of Susan's time in DC. Spenser believes that she is placing her work above her personal life. Susan explains that this work is a way for her to discover her personal life, totally free from anyone else's identity. The two realize that they don't understand each other entirely, but even though the realization is heartbreaking, they still enjoy their delicious food.

## Chapter 18-19 Analysis

Spenser doggedly pursues every lead he has, and his best lead at this point is the very man who he believes has perpetrated the blackmail. Once he discovers that the boy's bedroom is the site of Ronni's indiscretion, Spenser parlays that information into further development by touching base with his contacts in the Boston Police and the Boston Globe. However, there is no substitute for hands-on research, and Spenser ultimately spends the bulk of his day on a stakeout at the Georgetown library.

The discussion between Spenser and Susan reveals a great deal about both their individual identities and their identity as a couple. Spenser shows himself to be vulnerable and quick to extreme judgments. For example, he tells Susan that he believes that only shallow people find their identities through work. Susan, in turn, is a strong-willed, highly insightful person who refuses to yield to Spenser's requests to come first in her life, and also refuses to get angry when he goads her about how deeply she has immersed herself in this new life. Their relationship unfolds as a conversation that does not completely translate. Spenser understands why Susan needs freedom, but does not understand why she needs freedom from his love; similarly, Susan understands Spenser's heartache, but also finds it threatening to her decision to be independent. The two are on unsteady ground.



# Chapter 20-21

## Chapter 20-21 Summary

Spenser continues to surveil Gerry Broz, with little result. One day, however, Broz speaks to a couple of young teenage girls before making several stops at private residences. A few hours later, once Broz has returns home, the young girls arrive as well, looking excited. Hours later, they reemerge from Broz's building, visibly intoxicated. Spenser follows the girls and, once they separate, picks one of them up and puts her in his car. Linda starts to cry when Spenser searches her handbag and discovers her ID and cocaine. Spenser accuses her of possession, underage alcohol consumption, and participation in a sex orgy. Then, he convinces her that he does not want to get her into trouble, but she has to tell him everything she knows about Gerry Broz.

Linda tells Spenser that Gerry Broz traffics in sex and cocaine. Linda was there to watch Gerry and his friends have sex with older women who wanted drugs but could not afford them. She watches through the one-way mirror that Broz has installed in his bedroom and bathroom. Spenser convinces the young girl to meet him back at this spot the next morning, and he will sneak into the party after Linda and her friend Margy go in. Linda is hesitant, but Spenser reminds her that he can have her arrested for cocaine possession, and she agrees.

## Chapter 20-21 Analysis

The predatory way that Spenser picks Linda up could be disturbing if Spenser were not an admirable and well-intentioned man. However, Linda's youth and vulnerability both help her in this situation, because Spenser takes pity on her. He is aware of how questionable such an act is, and realizes that more and more often he struggles to define what is right and what is wrong. Spenser manipulates Linda using fear and her trust for police officers. She divulges valuable information about Gerry Broz and his friends' operation, and Spenser then uses that information to get himself a front-row seat to the next "granny party".



# Chapter 22-24

## Chapter 22-24 Summary

Spenser meets Susan for a drink and they discuss Spenser's work that day. The two take a walk around Washington DC, and Susan muses that every action is truly selfish, and in that light, her relationship with Spenser is selfish for both of them. Spenser disagrees with her.

The next morning, Spenser meets Linda and the two drive to Gerry Broz's apartment, where they make plans for sneaking Spenser into the "granny party". Linda and her friend Margy help Spenser gain entry to Gerry's apartment, and, through the one-way glass, Spenser sees two older women engaged in sex acts with Gerry and his friend. He takes several photographs and leaves, returning Linda's learner's permit before he goes. A few moments later, the two older women leave the apartment and Spenser follows them in his car, planning to repeat the previous day's strategy.

Spenser stops one of the women who has just engaged in a sex orgy at Gerry Broz's apartment. He shows her one of the Polaroid photographs of herself, and she agrees to speak with him. Cynthia Knox is the wife of a powerful Washington bureaucrat who buys cocaine from Gerry Broz. Spenser informs her that she has probably been photographed or videotaped by Broz, and that he is trying to destroy Broz's blackmail videos without embarrassing any of the people on the tapes. Cynthia is deeply sad and Spenser suggests that there are better ways to work out sadness than to become a sexual object.

## Chapter 22-24 Analysis

Susan believes that Meade Alexander's unselfish willingness to quit politics in order to spare his wife is, in reality, selfish. Such a sacrifice would give him unlimited self-gratification and a sense of superiority to his adulterous wife. Spenser, however, has been impressed with Meade's dedication to Ronni, and finds Susan's view pragmatic but pessimistic. Susan and Spenser's largely philosophical conversation about other people takes a sharp turn when Spenser asks Susan to apply her views to their relationship. She argues that Spenser loves her because he enjoys believing in love, and that she loves him because his love is so unconditional. Spenser passionately disagrees. Their ability to speak calmly and nearly clinically about their own personal heartache reveals a deeper capacity for distancing themselves from emotional conflict, a necessary trait in both a detective and a psychotherapist.

However, Spenser finds himself sympathizing with the women in Gerry Broz's bedroom. He finds their nakedness intensely vulnerable, because they look like real women with real, unaltered bodies. Although he must keep his emotions on a leash when dealing with his personal life, he uses his humanity and even his pity to guide him in how best to



deal with his case. Spenser's sensitivity with Cynthia Knox is endearing and reveals his ability to reserve judgment. He has just witnessed a woman perform acts that are usually reserved for prostitutes, but he still believes that she is classy, beautiful, and complicated. Moreover, he wants to protect her from any possible blackmail attempt, and he wants to protect her husband from the devastation that haunts Meade Alexander. Susan's influence is clear on Spenser's evaluation of Cynthia; he insinuates that the woman engages in the orgies because she wants to punish herself, not because she needs sexual gratification.



# Chapter 25

## Chapter 25 Summary

Spenser visits the houses that he saw Gerry Broz visit several days earlier, claiming to be a government agent building a case against a major drug trafficker. Only a few of Broz's customers give Spenser Gerry's name, but Spenser still considers his efforts fruitful, especially once two men begin to follow him from place to place. They follow him back to his hotel, but are gone by the time Spenser reemerges to collect Susan for the evening.

Spenser accompanies Susan on a shopping trip to the Mazza Mall and admires her ability to shop efficiently and ruthlessly. Then, the two stop in at a Hamburger Hamlet for dinner, where they discuss Spenser's case. Spenser is still baffled as to who is really running the blackmail operation. Susan and Spenser make plans to visit the National Gallery, and Spenser marvels at Susan's beauty.

## Chapter 25 Analysis

Spenser and Susan again show how well they complement each other when they go shopping and then out for a beer and hamburgers. Susan's genteel nature and Spenser's salt of the earth demeanor balance each other, and the two make concessions for the other's passions. Clearly, they enjoy each other's company and value each other's opinions. However, Spenser notices, not for the first time, that Susan is slightly more distant than she used to be. Her energy is split between her relationship and her personal growth, and Spenser finds the effect both beautiful and scary.

Regarding the case, Joe Broz's style is showy, violent and impulsive; the blackmail undertaking has been subtle and cautious throughout. The only fact that leads back to the gangster is Vinnie Morris's visit to Spenser's office, and that fact that Morris arranged for the two thugs in Springfield to hassle Alexander's campaign team. Susan suggests that it is possible Morris is acting for Gerry instead of Joe, and Spenser knows that he will have to talk to Joe Broz at some point soon.



# Chapter 26-27

## Chapter 26-27 Summary

The next morning, Spenser notices that the two men are following him again, more closely and aggressively this time. He pulls over to speak with them, and they ask him to come see Congressman Browne. Spenser joins them and they drive to Browne's office. Browne greets Spenser and asks him to halt his investigation of Gerry Broz. Spenser refuses. Browne threatens that both he and Joe Broz can cause a lot of trouble for Spenser, and Spenser realizes that Joe Broz does not know about his son's activities. If Joe knew, Spenser would not be sitting in Browne's office, but rather in the back of Joe Broz's car. Incensed and afraid, Browne ends the meeting.

Spenser and Susan spend an idyllic weekend together at the National Gallery and in Spenser's hotel. On Monday, Spenser drives her to work and leaves her with a feeling of incompleteness. Dissatisfied, he returns to Boston and immediately drives to Joe Broz's office. He sits down with Vinnie and Joe and tells them everything he knows. Joe had no idea that his son was running this operation, and he chastises Vinnie for keeping this information from him. Spenser asks only that the tapes of Ronni Alexander be destroyed. Broz suggests that he could just as easily have Spenser killed, and then ends the meeting.

## Chapter 26-27 Analysis

Spenser has exercised more psychological than physical muscle throughout his investigation, and his encounter with Robert Browne proves no different. Spenser expects the two men to confront him physically, but instead they merely escort him to a meeting. Once there, Spenser throws no punches, but rather intuits exactly why this meeting has to take place. In doing so, he frightens Browne more than any physical threat could. Back in Boston, however, Spenser knows that his psychological acuity may not be enough. His meeting with Joe Broz ends with a death threat, and the detective knows that such a threat is difficult to think your way out of.



# Chapter 28-29

## Chapter 28-29 Summary

Paul Giacomin returns to Boston for Christmas with his girlfriend Paige. The three of them eat dinner and drink wine, and once Paige goes to sleep, Spenser and Paul discuss Susan. Paul reiterates that Spenser's standards for himself are unrealistically high, that he could date another woman or demand more from Susan, but Spenser stands firm. He knows that something has to change in order for his relationship with Susan to function.

Early the next morning, Spenser wakes up and decides to go for a run. He brings along a small gun in case Joe Broz decides to have him killed. While he runs, Spenser comes to a sort of realization that he can love Susan deeply and settle for being second to her work. Just then, Spenser sees two of Broz's men standing next to the footpath pointing guns at him. Spenser shoots both men and takes a bullet in the thigh. He gets into the thugs' car to drive himself to the hospital, but passes out and crashes into a roadside partition. He wakes up in the hospital with Boston Police Detective Martin Quirk.

## Chapter 28-29 Analysis

Paul and Spenser's relationship is very intimate, and Paul is one of only two people who know exactly who Spenser is and why he acts the way that he does. His observations about Spenser's character are, therefore, astute, insightful, and uncomfortable for Spenser to hear. Spenser, however, cannot waver in his convictions. He knows that he loves Susan completely, and to love her less would mean surrendering an aspect of his character that he is unwilling to let go: his integrity and his personal belief in love.

These thoughts come to a head during Spenser's morning run, when he realizes that Susan's desire to do her work well is a positive trait, and that he can respect and love her even if she puts her work first sometimes. Ironically, at this very moment of psychological clarity, Spenser must defend his physical life by killing two of Broz's men.



# Chapter 30-31

## Chapter 30-31 Summary

Quirk asks Spenser for information about what happened on the jogging trail. Spenser only comments off the record, and once he does he tells Quirk everything. Quirk says that he will let it be known that if Spenser dies, the Boston Police will make Broz's operation significantly more difficult. Spenser knows, however, that if Joe Broz wants to kill him he will keep trying. As Quirk leaves, Spenser's friend Hawk arrives.

Hawk and Spenser are old friends, and they discuss the case further. Hawk agrees to stay at the hospital and watch out for Spenser while he recovers, mostly because he does not want their mutual friends to make fun of him for letting Spenser get killed while Hawk is sleeping. The two men agree that Joe Broz would rather let the issue go than have to deal with Martin Quirk, Spenser, and Hawk all trying to cripple him.

## Chapter 30-31 Analysis

Spenser seems completely composed when he wakes up in the hospital, a testament to his confidence and his ability to think rationally under pressure. Not only does he maintain his composure, but he also considers the consequences of telling Martin Quirk the details of the investigation without first ensuring that they are, in fact, off the record. Because Spenser's life is still in danger, the detective knows that he must remain vigilant. Hawk is a major help in that regard, as he is an intimidating figure to behold even when he is not in action. Luckily, although this physical confrontation leaves Spenser temporarily incapacitated, he can still reason psychologically, and he knows how to resolve the situation from here.





## Chapter 32-33

### Chapter 32-33 Summary

Spenser and Hawk arrange a meeting with Vinnie Morris and Joe Broz in a public park. The four men meet and arrange a truce in which Spenser stops the investigation and Broz continues business as usual, unharmed by police or private detective, as soon as the tape of Ronni Alexander is destroyed. Broz explains that Spenser's attempted murder was arranged out of his own pride and embarrassment that his son has been involved in such shady tactics, not by Spenser's influence. Therefore, everyone leaves the meeting satisfied and alive.

On Christmas Eve, Spenser and Susan lie together reading at Susan's home in Boston. Susan does not understand how Meade Alexander can remain in his marriage to Ronni without resolving her infidelity, and Spenser predicts that one day Ronni will be involved in a major scandal that will result in Alexander's political annihilation. Only then will Meade and Ronni begin to repair their relationship. Susan asks him how he feels about their own relationship, and Spenser replies that he understands that his love is self-serving, that he loves Susan absolutely and that his love for her can exist even if Susan is not there to receive it.

### Chapter 32-33 Analysis

The resolution of this novel comes in two waves. First, Spenser and Hawk resolve the scandal surrounding the Alexanders by reaching a compromise with a gangster and, more importantly, a father. Broz yields to the compromise only because he must protect his son. Second, once the threat to Alexander's reputation and Spenser's life has been neutralized, Spenser and Susan must resolve their personal conflict.

The difference between the two resolutions is both slight and enormous. Both solutions require the mental and emotional focus of Spenser, and both solutions demand a sacrifice of personal pride; Broz capitulates to a less powerful man, and Spenser accepts that he is at the whim of Susan's attentions. However, the resolution with Joe Broz also required the agreement of two parties, while Spenser's own moment of clarity required only Spenser's full knowledge of himself.



# Characters

## Spenser

Spenser is a Boston-based private detective with a solid reputation among both police officers and mafia kingpins. He is physically powerful, a former boxer who maintains his strength and agility with frequent jogs and long sessions at the Harbor Health Club. More important, however, are Spenser's strength of reasoning and clarity of thought. While he does psychological battle on a daily basis, he participates in only two physical confrontations throughout the novel. He prefers to use his wit, jokes, and knowledge to disarm his opponents.

When Spenser first takes the case of Meade Alexander, he is drinking heavily and often and contemplating the nature of love. Ultimately, it is revealed that Spenser is terribly lonely without his longtime girlfriend, Susan, who has taken a job in Washington, DC. Spenser must come to resolution with this relationship, and in doing so he must either accept or reject his own self-image. Spenser perceives himself to be both a romantic and a warrior. He loves Susan passionately and entirely, but he does so in part in order to feel like a romantic. He stolidly withstands the time away from the woman he loves because to admit that he is hurting would be to concede that he is fallible. The detective has inordinately high personal standards that make his life much more difficult, yet such desire for excellence also makes him an admirable detective and friend.

## Susan

Susan is a highly educated psychologist who has been in a long relationship with Spenser. Before the beginning of the novel, she moves to Washington DC in order to take a job at a children's hospital. Her main motivation in moving away from Boston is not professional, however. Susan needs to be on her own, to establish her identity independent of any other person. She feels as though men have always made decisions for her, and that people always perceive her as a partner in a man's life. Spenser cannot understand her personal quest, but has no choice but to give her the time she needs to feel comfortable in her own life.

Susan's careful, empathetic logic is a pleasing complement to Spenser's often judgmental or reckless train of thought. She influences Spenser more than he realizes, especially when Spenser deals with emotionally fragile individuals. Quietly strong and unwaveringly convicted, Susan will not be deterred or convinced to return before she is ready.

## Meade Alexander

Meade Alexander is an extremely conservative politician running for a senate seat for the commonwealth of Massachusetts. He campaigns on family values, Christian



principles, and right-wing social reform. He is also married to a woman who drinks excessively and has extramarital affairs. He hires Spenser to deal with a blackmail tape of Ronni with a young man, but his motives are not political. Meade wants to shelter his wife, the woman he loves, from the public scandal and humiliation that would ensue if such a tape were to be made public. Meade would give up his entire career to spare Ronni that experience, even after he has watched her betray him. Although Meade is nearly a caricature of a conservative politician, he expresses his humanity in his unwavering, illogical devotion to his wife.

## **Ronni Alexander**

Ronni, Meade Alexander's wife, is at first sight the perfect political wife. She adores her husband, speaks softly but with conviction, and appears to be the conservative, virtuous woman that a man like Meade would marry. However, Ronni struggles with alcohol, drugs, and affairs. While her drinking problem is relatively common knowledge, the drugs and affairs are certainly not, and Ronni never knows how far her husband and Spenser go to keep it that way. In fact, Meade insists that Ronni never know anything about Spenser's investigation or the blackmail tape.

## **Paul Giacomin**

Paul is Spenser's close friend and surrogate son. A college student at Sarah Lawrence, Paul studies dance, visits Spenser on holidays, and has a relatively peaceful life. He is one of the few people in Spenser's life who can access the detective's deepest thoughts and fears, and his observations about Spenser's conflict with Susan are insightful and accurate. Ultimately, Paul wants Spenser to be happy.

## **Wayne Cosgrove**

Cosgrove is Spenser's contact at the newspaper, "The Boston Globe". Cosgrove gives Spenser valuable information and background clippings on the Alexanders and on Robert Browne, the congressman who is running against Meade Alexander.

## **Robert Browne**

A congressman for the commonwealth of Massachusetts, Browne serves his state almost as much as he serves Joe Broz, the organized crime boss who makes substantial campaign contributions. Browne meets Spenser only once, when he tells the detective to stop his investigation of Joe Broz's son and unwillingly gives away more information than he means to.



## Joe Broz

Joe Broz is the boss of organized crime in Boston. He runs a very successful crime syndicate and is known to be a showman, violent and unafraid of making a scene. Vinnie Morris advises Joe Broz in his daily work, and advises him to make such a scene once Spenser approaches the organization with damning evidence against Broz's son, Gerry, who goes to Georgetown University.

## Vinnie Morris

Morris is Broz's first lieutenant, an imposing and coolly calculating gangster. Morris works exclusively for Joe Broz, but when he discovers what Gerry has been doing in Georgetown, he attempts to clean up the mess without having to engage his boss's attention. Unfortunately, Spenser foils his plan and Morris must admit his error to Joe.

## Martin Quirk

Quirk is Spenser's contact within the Boston police department. A busy, well-regarded detective, Quirk has a smart mouth, especially when dealing with Spenser. However, Quirk is also intensely loyal and does not mind doing Spenser a favor or two outside the law so long as he knows that Spenser's intentions are true.

## Sal Pelletier

Sal Pelletier is one of the thugs who accosts two college students campaigning for Meade Alexander. Hired by Louis Nolan at the request of Vinnie Morris, Pelletier quickly gives up all the information he has when Spenser confronts him. He is large, boisterous, but physically weak and very sloppy in his work.

## Louis Nolan

Vinnie Morris approaches Nolan to hire two people to send a message to Alexander's campaign. Morris wants to scare Alexander into dropping out of the race, but Nolan hires two incompetent and physically insufficient men. Spenser gleans information from Nolan by pretending that he is a messenger for Vinnie Morris.

## Gerry Broz

Gerry Broz, Joe Broz's son, is a college student majoring in political science and a cocaine dealer. He sells drugs to many affluent and influential people in Washington. He also caters to the minor market, selling cocaine to girls as young as sixteen in exchange for sexual favors. Broz also stages what he calls "granny parties", sex orgies with older



women who want a thrill along with their drugs. Gerry Broz runs his operation without his father's knowledge until Spenser uncovers it.

## Linda

Linda, a sixteen-year-old girl, helps Spenser gain access to Gerry's granny party once Spenser detains her and discovers cocaine in her purse. Linda believes that Spenser is an under cover police officer, and cooperates with him so that she will not get into trouble for possession of drugs.

## Cynthia Knox

Cynthia Knox is one of the older women who participates in Broz's orgies. She is beautiful and classy, and feels both sated and stained by her experiences with Broz. She knows that she is unhappy and dissatisfied with her life, and her solution is to punish herself with drugs and casual, demeaning sex. Spenser urges her to find another solution, and she agrees to help him with his investigation in any way she can, so long as her reputation remains intact.



## Objects/Places

### Murphy's Irish Whiskey

Spenser's drink of choice, which he has begun to drink straight out of the bottle.

### VHS Tape

The blackmail tape shows Ronni Alexander having sexual intercourse with an anonymous man. Meade Alexander receives the tape in the mail along with a threat to release it to the public if he does not drop out of the race.

### Boston Globe

The large Boston newspaper is widely well-regarded. Spenser taps their resources for background information through Wayne Cosgrove.

### Springfield

A small city in Boston where Spenser meets Sal Pelletier, the thug who accosts the young Meade supporters. In Springfield, Spenser discovers that Vinnie Morris is connected to the threats against Alexander.

### Georgetown

A picturesque, historic neighborhood of Washington DC, where Gerry Broz lives, attends school, sells cocaine, and videotapes sex orgies.

### The Hay Adams Hotel

Spenser stays at this posh hotel while he is in Washington DC so that Susan will be comfortable. They spend much time in the hotel, eating room service and talking about their relationship, Susan's work, and Spenser's case.

### Mazza Mall

Spenser accompanies Susan on a shopping trip to the Mazza Mall and admires her ability to consume at Neiman Marcus.



## **Robert Browne's Office**

Browne asks Spenser to meet him in his office, a pseudo-elegant chamber with faux-mahogany paneling on the walls. Spenser is not intimidated by the august decor of the room, and Browne fails in his attempt to call Spenser off of Gerry Broz.

## **Cocaine**

Gerry Broz sells cocaine in Washington DC to both bureaucrats and youths. Cocaine is a powder stimulant that rose to popularity in the United States in the 1980s, when this book is set.

## **Granny Party**

Broz's nickname for the sexual encounters that he arranges between his college-aged friends and middle-aged housewives.

## **.25 Caliber**

Spenser jogs with this small handgun, and it saves his life when Broz's henchmen attempt to assassinate him.



# Themes

## Physical versus Psychological Strength

Spenser's power is both physical and psychological. His first altercation is a physical one, between himself and two thugs hired by Vinnie Morris to frighten Meade Alexander. Spenser's boxing skills and agility allow him to dispense of the two out-of-shape men in rapid succession. Spenser dedicates a lot of time and thought to his physical health, jogging by the Charles River, working out at the Harbor Health Club, and constantly reminding himself to drink less coffee and eat well. Therefore, when he finds himself in the second of only two physical conflicts in the novel, he is prepared to act on instinct. His corporeal strength allows him to survive both a gunshot wound and a car accident, and his finely honed instincts leave his assaultors dead.

However, Spenser spends the majority of the novel locked in psychological skirmishes. Professionally, he has a major case with the potential to destroy many lives. Personally, his relationship with Susan is disintegrating and he cannot convince her to make reparations her first priority. Although the physical battles are the observable ones, the psychological struggles are more important to the plot of the novel. Spenser observes and deduces, draws conclusions, and takes chances in order to gain more knowledge, not more muscle mass. Ultimately, Spenser's keen intuition and willingness to compromise outweigh his physical fortitude in terms of usefulness.

## Emotional versus Intellectual Logic

Emotional logic controls sympathy, empathy, pity and adoration. Intellectual logic controls connections, conclusions, and accumulation of evidence. Both breeds of logic are crucial to Spenser's resolutions in the novel. Emotionally, Spenser connects with Meade Alexander. Spenser empathizes with the man's obviously broken heart and feels pity and anger towards Ronni for carelessly hurting a good man so deeply. This empathy does not bring Spenser closer to solving the case, but it does cement his resolve to that end. Spenser feels pity for Cynthia Knox and Linda, two women victimized by Gerry Broz, and he adores Susan even as he pities himself for having to live without her. Ultimately, only through emotional logic can Spenser discover that Susan's distance is acceptable to him, that he can love her even as he does not fully possess her.

Intellectual logic, on the other hand, is the main tool Spenser uses to solve the case. Spenser connects the thugs to Vinnie Morris, and then the University at Georgetown to Alexander's home in Georgetown. Intellectual logic shows Spenser that Joe Broz is not subtle enough to run a blackmail like this one, and it supports Spenser's guess that Joe Broz does not even know about his son's activities. Intellect helps Spenser solve the case, but it does not help him with his relationship. In fact, when Spenser tries to





discuss his relationship with Susan in academic terms, they find themselves at an uncrossable impasse: she believes he is selfish and he believes she is shallow.

Both emotional and intellectual logic aid Spenser throughout the novel. Emotions can give insight into personal crises, but they cannot solve mysteries. While intellect pieces together resolution, feelings inspire Spenser to commit himself fully to the investigation.

## **Sacrifice as Selfish or Selfless**

Every major character makes a sacrifice in this novel, and each sacrifice can be characterized as selfish or selfless. Joe Broz has a choice between killing the man who threatens his son's standing and giving up his pride, and he chooses to sacrifice his pride. That sacrifice is selfless, because Joe Broz has nothing to gain by allowing Spenser to go on living. He has only the detective's word that the issue will end with the destruction of the blackmail tape. However, to protect his son and to ensure that his son's wrongdoings remain a secret, Joe Broz happily gives up some of his reputation for unwavering ruthlessness. Meade Alexander makes a similarly selfless sacrifice when he refuses to address his wife's betrayal within his marriage. Although he will have to live with the painful burden for the rest of his life, he would rather suffer privately than see his wife have to bear the pain of humiliation. He sacrifices his self-respect and, probably, the health of his marriage in order to shelter Ronni.

Susan, on the other hand, acts selfishly when she chooses to give up her relationship with Spenser in order to develop her own identity apart from him. She is serving herself by working in Washington DC, and herself alone. That decision tortures Spenser, but ultimately he comes to realize that Susan's selfishness is an asset in their relationship. If Susan does not have a strong sense of self, she is only a fraction of the partner she could be to Spenser. Although the word selfish has many negative connotations, in this instance Susan's selfishness is the only correct choice if she wants to live her life satisfactorily.

# Style

## Point of View

The narrator of the novel is the detective Spenser. He speaks in the first person throughout the novel, balancing inner monologue with outward dialogue. Spenser's voice is distinctive and honest; although he does not always know what he is talking about, he will be the first to admit it. His reliability, therefore, is unimpeachable. He is willing to discuss even the most unattractive qualities in any person, including himself and his loved ones. However, in his point of view, certain characters, namely Susan and Paul, have very few flaws. Spenser discusses Susan's abandonment of him, but from the perspective of a friend as well as a lover. Spenser scoffs at Paul's observations of his vulnerability, but inwardly admires the young man's insight.

Maintaining a constant point of view allows Parker to control the knowledge and foresight of the reader. If the reader only knows as much as Spenser knows, then it is difficult to solve the case before Spenser himself does. Also, by using the first person, Parker invites the reader into the mind of the detective, essentially engaging the reader with the use of the word "I" on a personal level.

## Setting

The novel is set in the American northeast and southeast, specifically in and around Boston and Washington DC. These two cities are cosmopolitan and sophisticated hubs of urban activity that flavor Spenser's predilection for elegant dinners in posh restaurants. The urban setting also legitimizes the presence of a large and powerful mafia, as well as a demanding drug market, both of which play a major role in the plot of the novel. Spenser lives and works in Boston, in an office that has a charming view. He enjoys the landmarks and finer restaurants of the city, and in many places the novel reads almost like travel literature. Susan has moved to Washington DC and lives close to Georgetown University, the site of Gerry Broz's escapades and the Alexander family home.

In 1983, when the novel is set, the United States was entering a new era in terms of social trends and fashion. Cocaine reemerged as a popular party drug and drug use among affluent individuals soared. Fashion became more daring, gay rights became a legitimate issue, and women began to assume more and more powerful positions in their industries. This social context explains Meade Alexander's popularity among a specific population. With the social upheaval and the ever-growing presence of drugs and gay rights, Alexander's message of social reform and conservative values makes a powerful argument to people who fear such changes.



## Language and Meaning

Character voices are distinct and well-colored in this novel. Spenser's voice is more often than not glib and tending toward more advanced vocabulary and hackneyed exclamations of discovery. Reporter Wayne Cosgrove boasts the best vocabulary of the novel because words are his business. Gangsters Joe Broz and Vinnie Morris, on the other hand, men who are accustomed to having their conversations played back for them in a court of law, speak in vague terms that must be decoded by a street-smart sleuth like Spenser. Susan's voice is thoughtful and often jokey; she is comfortable with Spenser and does not need to prove how many words she had to know to graduate from Harvard. Ronni Alexander speaks little, which suits her relatively unexplored character, and Meade Alexander has a penchant for political phrases and euphemisms. Because each character plays a distinct role in the novel, each voice is fully fleshed out.

Spenser and Susan's conversations reveal a great deal about their characters. Both have a tendency to intellectually evaluate a situation rather than engage emotionally. Their first conversations in the novel seem more like debates about human nature rather than a fight between lovers. They cite Hobbes and evolution while debating about Susan's identity and the magnitude of Spenser's love. Ultimately, Spenser breaks off the talk by reverting to his more primitive side, with the use of expletives. Both Spenser and Susan spend their lives looking for clues in the words of others, and as such they are both highly attuned to the power of a well-chosen word.

## Structure

The book is divided into thirty-three short chapters. Roughly the first half of the book takes place in Boston, as Spenser pines for Susan and uncovers the blackmail plot as it pertains to the Alexanders. The second half of the book takes place in Washington DC, where Spenser sees Susan, gathers evidence, and fully forms his theory. In the last few chapters, Spenser returns to Boston for the resolution of the crime.

Each chapter is approximately the same in length, and each covers approximately the same amount of plot. The book moves straight forward, without flashbacks or simultaneous sequences. By keeping the chapters short, Parker creates a dynamic narrative that seems to gain ground with every new discovery in every new chapter. The story moves quickly, assisted by bursts of pithy dialogue and the occasional fistfight or light burglary. The narrative structure follows a standard track: Spenser discovers a crime that needs to be solved, and as he grows closer to that solution the pace and intensity of the novel both increase, culminating in a climactic event, followed by a denouement in which Spenser reflects on how he has changed through the story, and what might come next for him.



## Quotes

"When you think about it, silence was rarely silent. Silence was the small noises you heard when the larger noises disappeared." Chap. 1, p. 1

"The audience was a mix of students and faculty, with a few citizens of Lowell who were interested. Outside the auditorium there were pickets representing gay liberation, NOW, NAACP, the Anti-Nuclear Coalition, Planned Parenthood, and everyone else to the left of Alexander. Since, as far as I could tell, there was no one to the right of Alexander, it made for a considerable turnout." Chap. 3, p. 12

"Ronni smiled, helped pour the tea, spoke briefly on the sacredness of marriage bond and her conviction that her husband was all that stood between us and the arrival of the anti-Christ." Chap. 3, p. 14

"'It's Mrs. Alexander.'

I nodded.

'She has, I'm afraid, been indiscreet.'

I nodded some more.

'She has . . . they have. . .' His voice started to clog, and tears began to form in his eyes. He looked down again and breathed in several times, letting the breath out sharply, almost like a sprinter, trying to blow a little extra into his kick. Then he looked up again with his wet eyes and said quite steadily, 'There are pictures.'" Chap. 6, p. 36

"'If it came down to it,' I said, 'would you drop out of the race?'

Without looking up he nodded again.

'And never tell her why?' I said.

Nod.

'And throw your support to Browne?'

Nod.

'I've heard Browne is mob-connected.'

Nod.

'And you'd support him?'

. . . 'I would support Satan to spare her,' Alexander said." Chap. 7, p. 41

"I looked at Susan's picture on my desk. Even filtered through a camera I could feel her energy. Wherever she was things coalesced around her. I made small toasting gesture with the bottle." Chap. 8, p. 45

"What kind of man wanted to be in politics? Was it possible to be a good man and do politics? Maybe not. I drank some of the coffee. Swiveled my chair and stared out the window. Maybe it wasn't possible to be a good man and do anything. The afternoon sun reflected off the windows across the way . . . maybe being a good man didn't amount to anything anyway. It didn't seem to get you much. You ended up in the same place as the bad men. Sometimes with a cheaper coffin. I looked at Susan's picture again." Chap. 10, p. 55



"What's happened to you is that you've left Susan inside, and you've let me inside. Before us you were invulnerable. You were compassionate but safe, you understand?" Chap. 13, p. 72

"The more I thought about things, the more they didn't make any sense. It wasn't Broz's style. It wasn't even Vinnie's. . . Why didn't they just use that film? Why the fancy blackmail? It didn't make sense. Not Broz's kind of sense. It made amateurish sense. But Broz was not amateurish." Chap. 14, p. 81

"Finally she slid out of her last garment and was naked. I thought of Alexander watching this and my throat felt tight. 'You bitch,' I heard myself say aloud in this quiet, ornate room. My voice sounded more sad than angry." Chap. 15, p. 85

"I stepped aside and she came in and put the champagne on the bureau and turned and smiled. I stood and stared at her. There were times when I wanted to strangle her. But never when she was with me. Her presence overcame everything." Chap. 16, p. 90

"Paragraph six of the gumshoe's manual said when in doubt, follow someone. Paragraph seven said when there is time on your hands, follow someone. I had time on my hands and I didn't know what else to do, so I put on my leather trench coat and my new low-crowned cowboy hat that Susan had bought me for my birthday, and headed back to Georgetown." Chap. 18, p. 102

"When I had been a small boy someone told me that the blood in your veins was blue, the way it looked through your skin, and that it only turned red when you exposed it to air. What I felt was one thing when I kept it in. It changed color entirely when I exposed it." Chap. 19, p. 108

"Sometimes the end justified the means, sometimes it didn't. It seemed to me that lately I was having more trouble sorting out when it did and when it didn't." Chap. 20, p. 116

"I love you because I find it compelling to be loved so entirely. You love me because as long as you do you can believe in romantic love." Chap. 22, p. 124

"The women looked naked, in a way that women never do in skin magazines. These women were real, with the fine roughening of the skin here and there, the tiny sag at the breast, the small folds across the stomach that real women, and men, have. It made them more, rather than less, seductive, I thought, because it emphasized their nakedness, and in a sense their vulnerability . . . that kind of vulnerability shouldn't be handed around. It was for someone who loved you and was vulnerable too." Chap. 23, pp. 128-9

"Her face was as it had always been: intricate, beautiful, expressive. In the last year somehow it had also become faintly remote, as if she were listening to a whisper, barely audible, from someplace else: her name, maybe, tiny and hushed. Susan, Susan, Susan." Chap. 25, p. 144



"Running with a gun on the hip is jouncy. But running without one when Joe Broz had speculated about dropping you in the harbor is shortsighted." Chap. 29, p. 162

"Paul understood me in a way that few people did. He was only eighteen but he'd had to rebuild from scratch and understood self-creation . . . he was centered in ways beyond dancing and I understood the effort that had gone into it." Chap. 29, p. 163

"Whether I came first with Susan, or second, I could love her as much as I cared to, or needed to. The trick was to do it with dignity. As I went under the Mass Ave bridge I saw a pale blue Buick sedan parked there and standing beside it were Ed and his fat friend with the vandyke beard. Ed pointed a gun at me. So did Vandyke. With my hands at my side I thumbed back the hammer on the .25." Chap. 29, p. 164



## Topics for Discussion

Is Spenser more of an intellectual or a physical being?

How does Susan's absence from the first half of the novel impact Spenser?

Is Meade Alexander right to stand by his wife without dealing with her infidelity?

Who would you vote for: Robert Browne or Meade Alexander?

Is Joe Broz's decision to have Spenser killed made with emotional or intellectual logic? What about his decision to compromise?

Ronni Alexander is an absent character for the most part. Why does Parker exclude her from the narrative?

What role does the city of Boston play in the novel? What is Spenser's relationship with the city?