

Walkin' After Midnight PDF (Limited Copy)

Joe Ricker



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Walkin' After Midnight Summary

"Eclipsing Shadows: Unraveling Fate in the Noir Glare"

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About the book

In the gritty and shadow-cloaked world of "Walkin' After Midnight," Joe Ricker intricately spins a yarn that collides the fringes of society with the echoes of human conscience. This compelling narrative winds through the seedy alleyways and bleary-eyed dives of a city lost in its own malaise, where twilight reveals a heightened duality between despair and redemption. Ricker, with a keen sense of realism and raw storytelling, explores the underbelly of humanity, unearthing the complexities of survival amidst betrayal and the rare glimmers of hope that pierce the darkness. The protagonist's solitary journey traverses a night fraught with danger and moral ambiguity, positioning readers on the cusp of adventure and introspection. "Walkin' After Midnight" challenges its audience to venture through the elusive shadows of noir, compelling them to question—what price is worth paying for salvation?

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About the author

****Joe Ricker****, heralded as a master of grit and raw narrative, seamlessly melds the shadows of noir fiction with an authentic, unyielding portrayal of life's gritty underbelly. A story weaver grounded in the real truths of both beauty and brutality, Ricker possesses an empathetic insight drawn from his enriching and varied experiences, which span law enforcement, teaching, and numerous eclectic roles that augment his storytelling abilities. Known for delving into the darkness that envelops the human spirit, Ricker's prose breaks away from conventional storytelling, offering readers a brutally honest, unfiltered narrative style. His works consistently capture those on society's fringe, exploring themes of redemption, survival, and hidden beauty amidst adversity, resonating with audiences who appreciate narratives untamed by conformity. With "Walkin' After Midnight," Joe Ricker continues to fortify his place in contemporary literature, captivating readers with stories that linger long after the final page.

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Chapter 1 Summary: Walkin' After Midnight

The chapter, "Walkin' After Midnight," unfolds in a small town setting where the impending winter creates an air of unease among the locals, particularly the farmers. The protagonist, Oscar, reflects on his past and the concept of burying things, both literally and metaphorically, as he recalls his childhood memories with his dog. He draws a parallel between the cycle of seasons and the secrets buried in the ground, only to resurface as spring thaws arrive.

One evening in late fall, Oscar meets a mysterious woman at a local bar; she exudes an allure despite visible signs of past violence. Wearing a green dress that blends into her surroundings, she sings a familiar tune on the jukebox, drawing Oscar's attention. Their conversation reveals her name, and they share a shot of whiskey despite Oscar's initial reluctance.

In the days following their first encounter, Oscar, who works at a farm, crosses paths with the woman at the diner where she serves broken eggs and cold hash, perhaps a reflection of her chaotic life. Their interactions reveal her past trauma from a car accident, leaving her memory fragile. Oscar observes her habitual cycle of work, drinking, and seeking comfort with various men. As he learns more about her, including her love for hopping trains, a desire to be the one to provide the solace she seeks begins to grow within him.



Oscar contrives to be at the same places as the woman, subtly infiltrating her world. On a fateful night, following hours spent wooing her with her favorite songs and drinks, they leave the bar together. He hopes to offer her comfort under the guise of watching a meteor shower by the reservoir.

Under the moonlit sky, they share an intimate moment on Oscar's car hood. As a shooting star streaks across the sky, Oscar confesses his wish to help her escape her demons. However, his words are met with hostility; she retreats into the woods, leaving him to confront the reality of her deep-seated pain. As Oscar kneels beside her lifeless form, a mix of serenity and betrayal marks her expression. Realizing her peaceful yet haunting departure, Oscar resolves to return in the spring, hoping to find solace when the earth, and perhaps his own heart, thaws once more.



Chapter 2 Summary: Baggage

BAGGAGE

In the early hours before dawn, Sarah carefully prepares to leave a relationship that has turned cold and distant. She gathers her essentials—ID, cash, keys—ensuring everything is in place for her silent departure from a man who once enchanted her. Leaving through the darkness, memories of his gentle touch now replaced by painful reminders of his detachment, she retrieves her luggage hidden nearby and makes her way down the street, determined not to look back at the life she's leaving behind.

As the sun slowly breaks the horizon, bringing light to the dim houses, another story unfolds. Sheldon, a young man with a nervous disposition, is sitting in a car parked in a quiet, residential neighborhood, waiting for instructions from Mr. Wax, his enigmatic superior. They've been traveling south from Chicago, navigating through several cities in a covert operation that Sheldon barely understands. Mr. Wax, a man who avoids flying, leads the operation, leaving Sheldon to handle the logistics of driving and following orders.

Their mission, orchestrated by Mr. Glenn—the unseen mastermind—has brought them to New Orleans, where "baggage" needs to be dealt with and



disposed of. Sheldon is chosen for his ability to go unnoticed, a skill honed by his generally overlooked role in life, known more for errands than for involvement in high-stakes operations. Uncomfortable in the oppressive heat, Sheldon reflects on his past actions, including the three lives he's ended with cold precision, wondering about the fleeting nature of life and love.

As the oppressive heat swallows the morning, Sarah makes her way down the street, her resolve steely and her destination unknown. To Sheldon, she appears as a glimpse of something unattainable, her presence a sharp reminder of the life he doesn't lead. He watches her, captivated by the firmness in her stride, and wonders about her journey.

But as quickly as the moment comes, it evaporates. Mr. Wax awakens in the backseat, casually placing a silencer-equipped pistol to Sheldon's head, a chilling reminder of the dangerous reality he's embroiled in. The fleeting intrigue and thoughts of serendipity fade, replaced by the pressing tension of the moment as the story spirals into uncertainty and danger.



Chapter 3 Summary: Ice Shack

In the chilling chapter titled "Ice Shack," the tension gradually builds as we follow the narrator and Jimmy, two men with a history intertwined in both friendship and darker deeds, walking across a frozen lake. The setting is bleak and perilous, as falling through the ice means a fatal plunge into icy waters—a fate Jimmy narrowly escaped during their childhood. Back then, the narrator saved Jimmy from drowning in Square Pond, a traumatic event that cemented their bond.

As adults, their relationship is strained by secrets and obligations. Today's mission, dictated by the Boss, involves taking Jimmy out to meet Louie at an ice shack positioned on the precarious, frozen expanse. Jimmy is laden with debts, and the narrator's internal conflict is palpable as memories of his recent betrayal—an affair with Jimmy's wife—haunt him. This affair weighs heavily, compounded by the knowledge that the child Jimmy's wife carries is not his, but the narrator's.

Reaching the ice shack, the atmosphere is tense. Louie is already present, and a sinister plan is in motion: to murder Jimmy and dispose of his body in the lake's dark void. The cold acts as both a physical and emotional barrier, slowly seeping into the narrator's consciousness.

However, the narrative takes a dramatic turn. Instead of executing Jimmy,



the narrator shoots Louie, shattering the silence with a gunshot. The description is vivid and grotesque as Louie falls, writhing in the snow, until a second shot silences him forever. This act of defiance leaves both men aware that they are now fugitives. Collaboratively, they dispose of Louie's body through the ice's gaping maw—a foreshadowing of what could have been Jimmy's fate.

In the aftermath, with Louie disposed of and the murder weapon exchanged for car keys, the narrator instructs Jimmy to flee, banished forever from the area. The narration ends with Jimmy accepting his fate and the knowledge that he can never return, setting off towards the unknown, as the frozen landscape around them remains silent once more. This chapter showcases themes of loyalty, betrayal, and the inevitable consequences of a life entangled in deception and crime.



Chapter 4: Fisher of Men

The chapter "Fisher of Men" paints a vivid, almost visceral atmosphere, opening in a decrepit bar at the corner of Highland and Grove. The scene is saturated with imagery that evokes decay and desperation, escorting the reader into a setting that is a refuge for lost souls. This bar, reeking of stale bodily emissions and primal despair, serves as the crossroads for Vanessa Fisher and Ty's fated encounter. Patrons, the flotsam of evolution's harshness that replaces survival instincts with grief, faith, or guilt, populate this dim sanctuary. It is within this context that Vanessa, a character of enigmatic allure with an innate air of danger, finds Ty—a man marked by life's cruelties yet maintaining a certain handsomeness and mystery, evident in the scar on his neck and his deep-seated solitude.

Vanessa epitomizes a fallen angel—beguiling yet ominous. Her request for a surprise fire shot ignites their incendiary connection, and they quickly become enmeshed in a dangerous dance, leading them away from the bar's oppressive ambiance onto the cobblestone streets. Despite their haphazard journey, both through the night and their shared vulnerability, an understanding blooms—though superficial. Vanessa is oblivious to Ty's traumatic past: the scar resulting from a failed suicide attempt after his brother's tragic death, yet she intuitively orbits around his pain like a moth to flame.



Their trajectory leads them to Ty's unadorned sanctuary, where silence hangs as heavily as the walls are bare. Vanessa assumes command, adeptly binding Ty with knots—a skill, she hints, learned from her father, though her true intentions only emerge after their pseudo-intimate interlude.

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Chapter 5 Summary: Ecdysis

Chapter Summary: Ecdysis

The chapter titled "Ecdysis" unveils the emotional and psychological journey of James, a man haunted by his traumatic past and desperately seeking closure. James lives in an apartment haunted by memories, as it belongs to Miller, the man who murdered his mother. His life revolves around sketching, a silent expression of his internal struggles. He is compelled only to draw either the woman who has quietly become significant to him or Miller, the face of his nightmares.

The narrative introduces Kim, a barista at a local coffee shop, who enters James' life like a soothing balm. She is intrigued by his silence and the sketches he often shows her instead of words. Through her kindness and patience, she offers him moments of respite from his haunting past.

James' internal struggle is evident through his vivid flashbacks to the night his mother was killed, an event that paralyzes him with guilt and a sense of cowardice. The narrative reveals that the reason he returned to the apartment is to reconcile with his past and confront Miller. His sketches are more than art; they are a cathartic release and a way to silently communicate the chaos inside him.



The rain acts as a recurring motif of change and cleansing throughout the chapter. It first accompanies the turmoil in him and later becomes the backdrop for a transformative outing with Kim, where their bond deepens. They seek solace in an evergreen forest, away from their usual surroundings, where a new world full of life and potential begins to take form. Kim's introduction of professional sketching tools represents an acknowledgment of James' potential and a gift of encouragement.

Back in his apartment, James is reminded of his pent-up desire for vengeance against Miller and the burden of his silence. Kim, unaware of his history, provides a semblance of normalcy that is starkly contrasted by James' fixation on confronting Miller. With the arrival of Miller to collect rent, a long-awaited confrontation unfolds.

In this climactic moment, James prepares for the encounter by placing a gun strategically, evoking a sense of impending danger. When Miller enters the apartment, there is a palpable tension as if time momentarily suspends, carrying with it echoes of past trauma. In a clever twist, James disarms the actual threat by removing the bullet and deceives Miller. Without resorting to murder, James forces the man who ruled his nightmares to face vulnerability and fear—a symbolic yet powerful form of retribution for James.



The chapter concludes as James seems to shed the skin of his old self—the significance of the title "Ecdysis"—emerging from the confrontation with a new semblance of self, profoundly impacted by both Kim and the resolution of past demons. Ending the chapter is an uncertain but hopeful promise of transformation derived from facing one's fears and the silent understanding shared with those who see beyond words.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Transformative Power of Facing Fears

Critical Interpretation: In 'Ecdysis,' James' confrontation with Miller symbolizes the transformative journey that comes from facing one's fears. By choosing a courageous yet non-violent resolution, James exemplifies that true strength lies in confronting the roots of one's nightmares head-on without perpetuating cycles of violence. This act of bravery, symbolized in the safeguarding of his integrity rather than succumbing to vengeance, inspires a profound transformation within him. Much like shedding old skin, he emerges stronger and imbued with renewed hope. This narrative teaches you that facing your fears and trauma is not just about bracing for battle, but about creating a path toward healing and growth, embracing change, and moving beyond past shackles. James' journey encourages you to embody courage, embrace resilience, and find solace in actions that align with personal integrity and peace, paving the way to a new beginning.

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Chapter 6 Summary: Grip

Chapter Summary: GRIP

In the chapter titled "GRIP," we meet Emily Grant as she emerges from the woods, clearly distressed and physically battered. As she navigates through a landscape marked by the remnants of rain-soaked autumn leaves and a distant church steeple, we grasp the gravity of her situation. Emily is a young girl who has just endured a traumatic event, hinted at by her disheveled appearance and the fresh wounds on her legs and face—the result of a crash and presumably an escape.

Emily's journey is fraught with physical pain and a deep well of emotions. The story reveals her vulnerability as she grapples with fears of parental disappointment and the schoolyard cruelty she might face due to her appearance. Her reflections on mundane worries, such as unbrushed teeth and her carelessness with safety belts, ground the chapter in a child's perspective. The mysterious reference to a "hand over her mouth" alludes to a disturbing encounter, adding a layer of complexity to her experience.

As Emily approaches her home, the tension builds. Her mother, marked by desperation and unwavering maternal instinct, reaches Emily first amongst a group of men who had presumably come looking for her. The mother's



embrace provides Emily with a sense of safety and warmth, in stark contrast to the cold and frightening ordeal she has just escaped. The chapter closes with Emily observing the calendar, its marked days a silent testimony to a lost normalcy, hinting that her life has irrevocably changed with the events that transpired in the woods. This sets the stage for further exploration of the circumstances leading to and following her distressing experience.

Chapter Title	Main Characters	Setting	Key Events	Themes
GRIP	Emily Grant	Woods, near Emily's home	<p>Emily emerges bruised and battered from the woods. She reflects on her fears and emotions after a traumatic incident.</p> <p>Details like fresh wounds and a hand over her mouth suggest a disturbing encounter. Emily's mother, alongside a group of searchers, finds her outside their home.</p> <p>The chapter ends with Emily observing a calendar as a reminder of the changes in her life.</p>	<p>Trauma and Recovery</p> <p>Childhood Vulnerability</p> <p>Safety and Protection</p> <p>Loss of Innocence</p>



Chapter 7 Summary: Circumference

In "Circumference," we are introduced to the interwoven fates of Mae Vaughn and Kensey Waite through a tense narrative filled with suspense and revelation.

Mae Vaughn rides a midnight bus, reflecting on her past as she burns a tattoo of Kensey's name off her skin, signaling her desire to sever ties with him. Her journey is one of escape, marked by fear and the haunting shadow of an impending confrontation.

Meanwhile, Kensey is released from prison, a world of cold metal and cement that had contained him for years. His release is portrayed as a return to a society where the dangers he faced inside linger ominously outside. He reunites with Tank, a friend marked by literal and emotional scars from their shared past. Through their drive around the city, the narrative paints a vivid picture of Kensey's old haunts and the underbelly of the urban landscape.

As the story unfolds, we discover Kensey's entanglements with a Somali drug network and the troubled legacy of betrayal by Mae, who had testified against him in his trial. Fixated on revenge and retrieving hidden money, Kensey, with Tank's reluctant assistance, delves into a world filled with violence and deception, aiming to reclaim what he perceives as justice.



Simultaneously, Mae tries to expunge Kensey from her life, yet her sense of paranoia runs deep, especially after receiving a call informing her of Kensey's release. Her actions reveal her struggle with guilt and fear, underscored by memories she can't erase.

The climax of the story sees Kensey and Tank embroiled in a deadly confrontation with the Somali dealers, a chaotic scene culminating in gunfire and betrayal. The narrative tension escalates when Tank, left alone, finds Kensey's lifeless body, setting up a tragic realization of a plan gone awry.

The tale circles back, as Mae, fleeing through Maine, revisits past dreams and promises made with Kensey. She retrieves hidden money from their symbolic haven, Emden Pond, a reminder of their shared history. In a bittersweet twist of fate, Mae ends the story seemingly reunited with Kensey, her past catching up with her under the guise of fulfillment, as both characters come full circle in a chilling reconciliation of fate.

"Circumference" is a tale of desperation, redemption, and the ironies of fate, exploring the complex web of relationships and choices that bind the characters in an eternal cycle.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: Desire for Liberation and Starting Anew

Critical Interpretation: Mae Vaughn's decision to remove Kensey Waite's tattoo encapsulates a powerful metaphor for the yearning to liberate oneself from the past. As you navigate life's labyrinth, this act serves as a poignant reminder of how embracing change, despite its challenges, can become a powerful catalyst for growth. Mae's journey illustrates that true liberation often demands confronting the shadows of your past and making the conscious effort to shed emotional burdens. Her brave steps symbolize the profound empowerment and hope that arise from choosing to let go, seek healing, and forge a new path forward, unshackled by old ties.

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Chapter 8: Closer

In the chapter "Closer," Audrey encounters Hobbs, the man who killed her younger brother Jack years ago in a drunk-driving accident. Audrey, now a librarian, is haunted by the memory of Jack's death, which Hobbs seems to have shown no remorse for, having evaded a more serious charge due to lack of evidence. The sight and smell of Hobbs reignite Audrey's unresolved grief and anger. At home, she seeks comfort from her partner, Chance, a man with a past involving violence who she met in the library. He served time for manslaughter after a bar fight, and they have since formed a bond.

Driven by the confrontation with Hobbs, Audrey begins to succumb to her desire for empowerment and control. She visits a gun store and purchases a revolver, wrestling internally with her motivations yet undeniable in her determination. The ease and necessity of obtaining the firearm are surprising to her, paralleling her sense of duty to act on her long-buried rage.

Audrey calls off work and quietly confronts Hobbs at his trailer, where she shoots him, partly avenging Jack's death and feeling a grim sense of catharsis. She returns home visibly shaken, and confesses the murder to Chance, trusting him to guide her through the aftermath. Chance, understanding the gravity of her actions and the risk involving his past, devises a plan for Audrey to avoid suspicion. He suggests framing the incident as a domestic violence act to divert the investigation from her crime



against Hobbs. In a dramatic assertion of his love and willingness to protect Audrey, Chance persuades her to shoot him as part of the ruse, ensuring her safety even if it means his temporary sacrifice.

This chapter provides a raw exploration of unresolved trauma, justice, and the lengths individuals go to protect loved ones. Audrey's encounter with Hobbs sets off a series of impulsive actions, illustrating the destructive potential of bottled emotions and the complexities of seeking closure through violence. Her relationship with Chance exemplifies a uniquely intimate connection forged through shared understanding and the ultimate trust test amidst dire circumstances.

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Chapter 9 Summary: The Fallen

Summary of "The Fallen"

In the bleak depths of a crumbling urban landscape, Jeremy, a disgraced detective, finds himself trapped in a cycle of surveillance and despair. Tasked with gathering evidence against Rick Stallings, a notorious drug dealer, Jeremy witnesses a world where human desperation manifests in the ugliest forms. Despite his efforts to collect incriminating photographs, the operation always feels elusive, largely due to pressure from his captain, who insists on building an airtight case. As Jeremy documents the sordid dealings from a decrepit apartment, he becomes an unwilling observer of domestic abuse, addiction, and the heartbreak of young Benny, Stallings' son.

Jeremy's personal demons haunt him throughout the investigation. Recently sober, his thoughts often wander to his own crumbled family life, including his wife's departure and his battle with the bottle. He draws unwanted parallels between Benny's plight and his own troubled childhood, particularly the harrowing memory of his father's suicide, which still casts a long shadow over his life.

The neighborhood, characterized by dereliction and despair, offers little comfort as Jeremy lumbers through his routine—buying coffee from



O'Connor's, a corner store run by a man with his own scars from past debts. The desolation of the city mirrors Jeremy's internal turmoil, yet he continues to follow orders, identifying drug buyers only to remain frustrated by the lack of immediate action against Stallings.

Tragedy strikes when Benny accidentally shoots himself with his father's revolver. The incident confronts Jeremy with the rippling consequences of his inaction and the realization that he's become complicit in the cycle of victimization he's been tasked to interrupt. Overcome with guilt, his resolve wavers, recalling how chance and circumstance inexorably weave moments of horror into the fabric of human experience.

Deceptively nefarious turns unfold when Jeremy discovers that his captain has been orchestrating a corrupt scheme, with fellow officers Evans and Kittredge deeply involved. The trusted captain manipulated Jeremy's investigation as a cover for eliminating Stallings while maintaining the flow of drugs in the city. Jeremy's attempt to bring justice ends in betrayal, leaving him beaten and framed for a murder he did not commit.

As the narrative concludes, Jeremy, resigned to his fate, is led to his demise—fittingly bleak under the moonlit shadows of fir trees. He accepts his end as a pawn in a larger game of corruption, finding solace only in the anonymity of his death, which erases his footprints, leaving a life as forgotten as Benny's tragic fall.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: Facing Moral Complexities and Personal Redemption

Critical Interpretation: In the midst of this grim narrative, a pivotal moment emerges—Jeremy's recognition of the profound impact inaction has on lives both young and blighted. This key point speaks volumes about the importance of confronting moral complexities and finding personal redemption. As you maneuver through the labyrinth of life's challenges and ethical quandaries, Jeremy's story urges you to refuse passivity and silence in the face of injustice. Instead, it inspires you to press forward with moral courage, striving to disrupt the cycles of oppression and build pathways of healing and transformation, not just for yourself, but for those desperately in need of an advocate. Just like Jeremy, you may grapple with personal burdens and external pressures, but this key point emphasizes that redemption lies not in avoiding the storm, but in your continued effort to sow seeds of positive change, however daunting the terrain may seem.

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Chapter 10 Summary: Fade

The narrative unfolds around the lives of two central characters, Michael and Marie, intertwined in a world marked by violence, abuse, and a quest for identity. The story is a raw exploration of trauma, survival, and the blurred lines between love and hate.

Michael's childhood is shaped by a harsh upbringing under the care of Ross, a man who tries to instill a twisted sense of masculinity through brutality. Ross uses his aggression as a misguided tutorial for manhood, projecting his inadequacies onto Michael and the dogs he fights, particularly Scrap, the dog that becomes a symbol of innocence and resilience amidst cruelty.

Marie's life is introduced through her self-destructive tendencies. Her need to witness death reflects a deeper internal chaos, a coping mechanism to mask her pain. Her interactions with Michael reveal her philosophy—that love often breeds hate as a shielding mechanism against the inevitable hurt when relationships sour. Their bond is complicated, forged in dysfunction yet offering a semblance of connection in a lonely world.

Michael navigates a transient lifestyle, shaped by rough experiences and encounters with equally scarred individuals like Marie, and her acquaintances Kevin and Max. These encounters bring him back to traumatic memories of his childhood with Ross, drawing parallels between



the neglect and the brutality of his past and the present he navigates with Marie.

During a sequence of criminal endeavors with Marie, Kevin, and Max, Michael finds himself entangled in their destructive trajectory. The narrative's breaking point rises from a heist targeting a former doctor, whose hidden ties to Marie become apparent, casting a shadow over their motives and the violence that ensues.

The narrative oscillates between Michael's past with Ross and his present with Marie, culminating in a moment where he takes an ultimate stand against Ross, symbolically breaking the cycle of abuse. The resolution presents an unsettling ending, juxtaposing moments of perceived power and the inevitable return to vulnerability and the search for redemption.

The story is a harrowing exploration of individuals pushed to their extremes by circumstance, reflecting on the nature of identity and the thin line between victim and perpetrator in the perpetuation of violence. Through visceral imagery and fragmented, poignant reflections, it delves into the complexity of human emotions and the struggle for personal agency amidst chaos.



Chapter 11 Summary: Drink Till You're Gone

The chapter opens with a vivid scene at the edge of the Mousam River, where the protagonist sits in silence, reflecting on a devastating breakup with his wife. He recalls the stark emptiness left in their apartment, symbolized by scattered shreds of newspaper and an ashtray from their first date, now abandoned. The narrative suggests that his wife meticulously planned her departure, leaving only loneliness in her wake.

Reflecting on the past, the protagonist remembers happier times and the gradual unraveling of their relationship, trying to pinpoint when things began to fall apart. He recalls significant moments from his life, including when he became a snitch, which complicates his thoughts as he searches for clarity in a desolate sequence of events. This introspection is interrupted by the grim reality of his situation—he contemplates seeking solace in a bar, a familiar place of escape and temporary amnesia.

At the bar, a confrontation ensues when the protagonist attempts to steal a drink. A violent altercation follows, leaving him bloodied and dazed on the pavement outside. A police officer finds him, and in a haze of pain and recognition, the protagonist is urged to move on. As he stumbles home, he faces a sense of overwhelming despair, recognizing the detachment and isolation that has consumed him.



Once home, he sits in what was once a shared space, now empty of life and love, haunted by remnants of his previous existence. Outside, a car idles ominously, hinting at surveillance or past connections that refuse to let go. As night descends, so does a chilling inevitability—a shift from despondency to an acceptance of his own demise and the shadows of his former life that will soon reclaim him.

In a surreal transition, men and women methodically handle his lifeless body, securing it as efficiently as furniture for disposal. The scene shifts again, revealing the protagonist in a different, intangible realm—a place where the burdens of his former life, including the physical and emotional pain, have lifted. Here, he encounters a U.S. Marshal, a figure of authority but also renewal, who hands him a new identity and a chance to begin anew.

Holding out a picture ID attached to a fresh set of documents, the Marshal advises the protagonist to seize this opportunity for transformation. This closing scene symbolizes a rebirth, a possibility to redefine oneself and escape the shadows of the past. The protagonist stands poised between two worlds, one lost and one not yet realized, with the realization that life, although mercilessly short, offers a glimpse of hope for redemption and a chance to make the most of what remains.



Chapter 12: Sprawl

In the narrative of "Sprawl," we are introduced to Jude, a conflicted man wrestling with the realities of his life. Upon entering the local VFW, a veterans' hub where he's employed as a bartender, he is greeted by Linda, an abrasive figure. She promptly fires him for neglecting duties like cleaning up after shifts, alluding to forgotten chili in Crock-Pots as a hygiene issue. Jude, while outwardly stoic, internally grapples with the consequences of losing this menial job, recognizing the impact it will have on Molly, his pregnant partner. Their relationship began tumultuously in Ohio when Jude and Molly, who was still married to someone else, fled in a pursuit of escape and romance that quickly soured upon the cold, stark reality of their new life in Winton, New Hampshire.

The narrative shifts to Kyle, a soft-hearted, asthmatic volunteer firefighter secretly involved with Molly. Their affair began when Kyle responded to a suspected gas leak at the trailer Molly and Jude share. Enamored by Molly's charm, Kyle fantasizes about naming her child if it's a boy. Despite his desire to be with Molly, she fears Jude, describing him as potentially dangerous. When Molly suggests using Kyle's penchant for weapons to orchestrate a robbery at the VFW, with the potential harm to Jude as a bonus, Kyle is hesitant, torn between his feelings for Molly and the moral weight of the scheme.



Returning to Jude, we learn more about his strained existence with Molly in their bleak trailer. She despises their living conditions, and their interactions are tense, often devolving into arguments. Jude, struggling with the day's events, retreats to take an icy shower, further reflecting the coldness present in their relationship. Suspecting betrayal, his anger threatens to boil over, but he calms himself, pondering whether his love for Molly was ever genuine, or merely hollow declarations. Determined to escape the cycle of regret and resentment, Jude decides to leave, purchasing a bus ticket to Birmingham, Alabama, with hopes of a fresh start, unburdened by his past failures.

Meanwhile, Molly is plotting her own departure, spurred by a blend of alcohol and dreams of a more luxurious life. She packs hurriedly, discarding Jude's memories and becoming fixated on the idea of Kyle helping her leave Winton. However, as she drunkenly tries to execute her plan, she locks herself out of the trailer. In her desperation, she attempts to enter through a bathroom window, only to fall and injure herself, the snow quickly burying her blood in silence.

Kyle, conflicted and out of his depth, arrives at the VFW intending to act on Molly's plan. His encounter with Linda and the odd atmosphere make him question his resolve, and an accidental discharge of his weapon triggers a realization of the reality of his situation. Retreating without executing the plan, he rushes toward the trailer, desperate to help Molly, internally wrestling with the fear of what might transpire if he fails her.



Molly, alone and exposed to the elements, seeks warmth and salvation but is unnoticed by passing cars. Her mind wanders as she succumbs to the numbing cold, her dreams of an escape unraveling with each chilling gust of wind. In a tragic turn, Kyle's vehicle, hindered by the storm, inadvertently strikes Molly. Enveloped by the aftermath of the collision, she feels a brief warmth, not from salvation, but from an ending she did not foresee, as Kyle drives on, oblivious to the chain of events he has unintentionally set in motion.

This narrative intricately explores themes of desperation, unfulfilled dreams, and the unintended consequences of human actions, painting a vivid and poignant picture of lives intersecting in a small, forgotten town.

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Chapter 13 Summary: Delivery Man

The chapter titled "Delivery Man" paints a vivid, somber picture of a Christmas day overshadowed by fear, disappointment, and the relentless mention of the notorious "Christmas Killer"—an unidentified assailant with a chilling tradition of killing someone every Christmas for the past eight years. The narrative unfolds in a dimly lit bar where Earl, a disheveled, loner figure, sits absorbed in his solitary reflections and drinks. He is a regular at the bar, where Mike, the bartender, jests with dark humor about the potential danger Earl could face from the killer, hinting at Earl's reputation as a "low-life degenerate."

As the protagonist—a delivery person—watches the interaction, it's evident that Earl is a man detached from the festive spirit, as much as he is from society. When prompted about Christmas plans, he abruptly dismisses it, showing his disdain. The night draws to a close with Mike, ever the convivial host, offering a drink on the house to the protagonist, a small gesture of camaraderie as they both prepare to leave.

The next morning transitions to the protagonist's life as a delivery driver—a role diminished to the backdrop by the faceless excitement of those receiving packages. The ongoing chatter on the radio recounting the tales of the Christmas Killer serves as an ironic backdrop to the cheer the season typically brings. Despite the weight of these grim tales, for the delivery



driver, the day's work continues with a routine, almost mechanical rhythm.

Their final delivery brings them to a snow-covered trailer at the town's edge, where signs of violence—a pool of frozen blood, shattered glass, and a torn glove—hint at an ominous event. When Earl appears at the door, wounded with a makeshift bandage, the scene culminates in a curious exchange after he takes the light package, querying its origin. The delivery driver's cryptic response, referencing the "ghost of Christmas past," alludes to potential darker undertones lurking beneath the surface—a loaded metaphor for grievances and concealed motives. This ending encapsulates how the recognition of darkness within humanity persists, even amidst the warmth of the holiday spirit.

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Chapter 14 Summary: Wood for the Fire

Chapter Summary:

"Wood for the Fire"

Adam sits in a dimly lit club, watching the dancers with a peculiar interest in Persephone, a performer who seems familiar to him. The environment is filled with sensory details, from the scent of new bills to the sweat and smoky atmosphere. Adam's anticipation builds for Persephone's return to the stage, driven by a mysterious connection he feels with her.

Persephone, on her part, remains watchful from the shadows, recognizing Adam from past encounters. She is detached and seeks solace in the spinning dance routine, finding a brief escape from her cold reality. As Persephone performs with a bottle of 151, she commands attention, especially catching Adam's focus. The scene intensifies as a man in a baseball cap watches from the back, his presence ominous and purposeful.

In a different setting, Erin and Phillip navigate their strained marriage, struggling against financial burdens and emotional distance. They attempt to rekindle their romance through spontaneous impulses—a new outfit, a drive



filled with nostalgia, and tenderness—in longing for the warmth of their early days. They seek refuge in shared memories of a now-abandoned theater, a symbol of their past happiness.

The narrative then shifts to Persephone leading Adam into a VIP room, where a provocative dance ends with her offering him a card—an invitation to Room 437—for later in the evening. This mysterious interaction heightens tension and curiosity about their connection.

A stark scene unfolds with Erin and Phillip's intimate moment interrupted by a police officer, leading to a wrongful arrest fueled by mistaken identity. The encounter with the police escalates into an unsettling confrontation, revealing the capricious power of authority and the vulnerability of those misjudged.

Back at the club, Persephone exits and encounters Phillip, her husband. Their confrontation is fraught with unresolved emotions and the stark reality of her current life. She returns home to a secluded apartment, a space filled with protective measures and anonymity, reflecting her desire to escape her past.

Phillip later attempts to file a complaint about the police harassment, only to be met with bureaucratic indifference. The officer's dismissal exacerbates his frustration and impotence in seeking justice for Erin, who remains



trapped in her own fear and trauma.

This turmoil continues to unfold as Erin attempts to reclaim her agency. She tracks down the cop, Sergeant Wood, that assaulted her, intent on finding closure through confrontation. Her coping mechanism becomes a calculated pursuit that channels her trauma into a quest for justice.

Erin's journey culminates in a showdown with Wood, who confronts her in her apartment. Her survival instincts kick in, resulting in a violent altercation. She sets Wood on fire—a symbolic purging of her torment—and escapes, finding momentary peace in the simplicity of the dawn as she returns to Phillip's embrace.

The final reveal is devastating; coming home should have been a redemption, but instead, it uncovers Phillip's tragic end. Erin's narrative closes with potent grief and the painful realization of irreversible loss, leaving her love unvoiced, a testament to the relentless shadows of their shared past.

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Chapter 15 Summary: Watch

Summary

In a gripping and suspenseful narrative, the chapters unravel around a tense relationship involving Ashley, her estranged husband Murray, and Murray's brother, Marshall.

We meet Ashley, shackled and weary following a mysterious gunshot incident. Her encounter with Detective Parson reveals two crucial pieces of evidence: a diamond ring and Ashley's revolver, suggesting motives of both love and murder. Through flashbacks, Ashley's complex relationship with her lover, Marshall, begins to unfold, alongside her crumbling marriage with Murray. Ashley and Marshall, embroiled in a secret affair, discuss plans to manipulate Murray into a divorce while ensuring Ashley retains financial benefit.

Murray's perspective paints him as a struggling yet perceptive jeweler, who knows more about his wife's betrayal than he lets on. He struggles with a devastating brain tumor diagnosis while trying to maintain his failing business. In a conversation with Marshall, Murray pleads for a loan to salvage his store, but the dialogue hints at deeper tensions and Murray's suspicions about the affair.

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An intricate plot unfolds as Murray cleverly orchestrates a confrontation. He borrows Marshall's coat filled with incriminating items that unsettle Ashley, including a woman's panties and a diamond. The chapter then follows Murray as he tailors his revenge under the guise of normalcy, quietly simmering with the knowledge of his brother's betrayal and his wife's infidelity.

The climax occurs as Murray stakes out a restaurant where Ashley and Marshall's secret becomes public in a dramatic confrontation. As Ashley causes a scene, hurling a plant through the window, Murray calmly plans his next move, resolved to finally bring their deceit into the light.

The narrative shifts to Detective Parson investigating the violent scene at Marshall's office, revealing Murray's chilling premeditated plan. As Parson pieces together the crime with evidence from Marshall's appointment book and transactions, she sees the tangled web of deceit and desperation that led to Marshall's murder.

Concluding the narrative, Murray confronts Ashley in their home the morning after. He reveals the full extent of his terminal condition and the grim reality that their time together is almost up. With a chilling calm, Murray signals the endgame, holding the revolver to his head, ready to escape the life entangled in betrayal and illness, leaving Ashley reeling in



the aftermath of their crumbled lives.

These chapters weave together a story of love, betrayal, desperation, and the ultimate costs of deception, as each character's motive and fate unravel dramatically.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The resilience of staying true to oneself amidst life's betrayals

Critical Interpretation: Life often exposes you to betrayal, reminding you that trust is fragile and often misplaced. In Chapter 15 of 'Walkin' After Midnight' by Joe Ricker, you witness Murray's fortitude in confronting the treachery of both his wife and brother. Despite being plagued by the knowledge of infidelity and his own looming mortality, he acts with a profound self-awareness, maintaining his composure while crafting a crucial moment of revelation. His journey demonstrates how even under the cloudiest skies of betrayal, holding onto your inner strength and convictions can illuminate your path forward. Let this be an inspiration to you — to remain steadfast and true to yourself, for that unwavering spirit, even in times of deception and despair, can be your greatest ally.



Chapter 16: Just Enough

In the narrative "Just Enough," the protagonist reflects on the harshness of life while visiting the grave of Mikey, a significant figure marked by tragedy and loss. Mikey's death, a result of societal rejection and personal despair, looms heavily over the protagonist's psyche. It signifies the struggles faced by those who do not conform to social norms, characterized metaphorically by the act of "crawling" through life.

The protagonist attends Charles's funeral, a man whose life ended in a hospital after a suicide attempt. His story juxtaposes with Mikey's, exploring themes of justice and the randomness of fate. Charles, a former tormentor and bully from high school, embodied by names like "Tina's Wiener" for the protagonist, is depicted as a figure whose own life ceased without the redemption or acknowledgment of his past actions. His futile hanging attempt becomes an ironic act, revealing underlying complexities of perceived control and helplessness.

Throughout this hospital scene, the protagonist and their friends Tina and Jess provide comic relief with vegetable metaphors, likening Charles's bedridden figure to various vegetables. These interactions encapsulate a coping mechanism amidst the tragic environment of a hospital, where life and death are constant companions. The protagonist's friendships offer a glimpse of solidarity and shared understanding amid societal challenges.



The story delves into the protagonist's backstory, revealing familial relationships strained by identity and societal expectations. This individual, who identifies as trans, grapples with acceptance, violence, and the abandonment of their mother. The father, a traditional man, enforces normative gender roles, yet strangely embraces this identity in practical life skills, illustrating complex familial dynamics.

Simultaneously, the protagonist reflects on Mikey's torment at the hands of Charles and his friends, further linking their suicides through circumstances tied to societal cruelty. Mikey's death, like Charles's, was a byproduct of homophobia and societal rejection, compounded by internal struggles. His memory serves as both a haunting presence and a motivation for the protagonist's actions.

The finale reveals the protagonist's intent to exact a form of poetic justice. By acquiring a new come-along, a tool previously associated with Charles's attempted suicide, and recalling the harrowing past events leading to Mikey's death, the protagonist hints at a plan for retribution that aligns with their narrative of justice. Yet, this act isn't depicted as revenge but as a balancing of life's injustices, highlighting themes of morality, identity, and the fine line between victimhood and empowerment.

In a mournful yet resilient tone, the protagonist processes grief and societal



alienation, finding semblance in Mikey's memory and their own journey for acceptance. The narrative closes with an understanding that while death is neither fair nor just, actions to confront past wrongs can provide a sense of closure—what the protagonist deems "just enough."

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Chapter 17 Summary: Dandelion

In the story "Dandelion," the narrative unfolds in a dimly lit corner of a garage where a character reflects on a cigarette lighter left in their car, a stark reminder of past trauma. The setting is cold and claustrophobic, evoking memories of being surrounded by flames. The protagonist associates the lighter with men whose names evoke fear—names that echo in their mind as they remember a harrowing experience in a barn, where they and a companion were engulfed in fire, yet managed to escape with scars both physical and emotional.

The bond between the protagonist and their companion is profound, symbolized by the way they support each other in public, wary of others' reactions to their burn scars. The story reveals the cruelty they endured, with racial and physical abuse depicted in chilling detail. Despite their suffering, they find solace in one another's presence, their skin now a metaphorical leather—hardened yet protective.

Emerging from the garage into the night, they encounter Jude, a familiar figure who welcomes them warmly. Jude's appearance, with his white shirt and black vest, suggests formality and care. He guides them into a flower shop, a haven adorned with vibrant blooms, where a celebratory atmosphere contrasts the grim memories. The shop, filled with colorful flowers, represents renewal and hope.



In this serene setting, a birthday celebration unfolds. Jude presents red velvet cake, a treat savored slowly by the protagonist, each bite a gentle reminder of life's sweetness. The ritualistic cake-eating becomes a cherished moment, a bridge to future celebrations. As the evening concludes, Jude presents a gift—a dandelion puff in a pot, symbolizing wishes and new beginnings. The protagonist blows on it, sending seeds into the air, a poignant gesture of release and aspiration.

"Dandelion" masterfully weaves themes of trauma and resilience, illustrating the enduring impact of past experiences while highlighting the healing power of companionship and small joys. The story closes on a hopeful note, with the dandelion seeds representing dreams spiraling towards the future.

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Chapter 18 Summary: Predator

In this intense excerpt from **Some Awful Cunning**, we are introduced to the characters of Ryan, Melissa, and her young son as they navigate a period of fear and transition. Melissa is visibly traumatized, the fear in her eyes suggesting a history of abuse. This is confirmed by the physical signs of violence on both her and her son--a bruised nose for the child and deep marks around Melissa's neck--clues that lead us to the shadowy presence of Roy, the abuser from whom they're fleeing.

Ryan, dressed immaculately in a dark gray suit, exudes an enigmatic presence. He is orchestrating their relocation, offering them a fresh start. Despite his outward calm, he's marked by his own history, evinced by the absence of a pinky finger, which he attributes to a childhood pet alligator, a conversation that distracts Melissa's son momentarily. This storytelling distracts the child from their current trauma and reveals a softer side to Ryan, though it is clear he is a man capable of carrying out more severe actions when necessary.

As Ryan handles the logistics for Melissa and her son to assume new identities, he reveals the lengths he has gone to ensure their safety. He has provided them with new documents and a fabricated backstory, emphasizing the importance of establishing new memories for a smooth transition. This relocation is part of a professional service Ryan offers, suggesting a



clandestine network that aids those escaping perilous situations.

Privately, Ryan reflects on his past missions, revealing a moral code juxtaposed against the dark undertakings he's been involved in. He has relocated seventeen clients, never betraying them until now, when he was contracted by Victoria Williams and her bodyguard, Wendell, to ensure Roy could escape justice. Instead, Ryan chose to kill Roy, feeling justice for Roy's past abuses towards Melissa. The description of this act is chilling, indicating Ryan's capability for violence when provoked by injustice.

As Ryan leaves Melissa and her son in this new chapter of their lives, he drives towards Dallas to confront Victoria, creating a sense of inevitable conflict. The narrative concludes with Ryan contemplating the metaphorical swamp he navigates through—a world filled with predators, echoing the danger Melissa and her son faced. This excerpt paints a tense and vivid picture of lives affected by violence, ushering the reader into a world where the line between predator and protector is as murky as the alligator-infested swamps Ryan imagines.

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