

Heartsick by Chelsea Cain

Discussion Questions

Author Bio:

Chelsea Cain lived the first few years of her life on an Iowa commune, then grew up in Bellingham, WA, where the infamous Green River killer was “the boogiemán” of her youth. The true story of the Green River killer’s capture was the inspiration for the story of Gretchen and Archie. Cain lives in Portland with her husband and daughter. (<http://us.macmillan.com/heartsick/ChelseaCain>)

Cain started writing Heartsick to kill time while she was pregnant. (<http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/c/chelsea-cain/>)

The Archie and Gretchen series:

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| 1. Heartsick (2007) | 4. The Night Season (2011) |
| 2. Sweetheart (2008) | 5. Kill You Twice (2012) |
| 3. Evil at Heart (2009) | 6. Let Me Go (2013) |

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like/dislike the book? Why?
2. The story alternates between the current investigation and Archie’s flashbacks to his time with Gretchen. Did you like that setup? Did it help or hurt the story?
3. Archie only semi-hides his prescription drug addiction. Do you think it hurt or helped his investigation? Why do you think his colleagues look the other way?
4. How does Susan’s immaturity/father issues and eccentric style affect the way she interacts with her job as a reporter and with the people she encounters?
5. Archie’s wife still obviously loves him. Why do you think Archie and Debbie got divorced?
6. Why does Archie have a hard time interacting with his ex-wife and children?
7. If you had a child in high school and a serial killer was targeting high school girls, what would you do? How would you deal with something like the “After School Killer?” Is it possible for the average American to be constantly vigilant over a long period of time?
8. Why does Archie continue to visit Gretchen? Is there an emotional component? Do you think it is some sort of Stockholm Syndrome?
9. Why do you think Gretchen took Archie as her 200th victim?
10. Why do you think Gretchen let Archie go?
11. Did you figure out who the killer was before he was revealed by the author? If yes, what tipped you off?
12. In the end, we find out that having a news reporter was “forced” on Archie by Gretchen. Why was Archie so open with Susan? Why does he let her into his life and his tortured past?
13. Do you think Gretchen orchestrated the whole thing? Why or why not?

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14. What was more interesting to you – the high school murders or the Archie/Gretchen interaction? Could the story have existed without both storylines?
15. Is there a type of predator/prey relationship between the victims, serial killers, and the police who hunt them? What about Archie who is a little of both?
16. There are additional books in the “Archie and Gretchen” series. Are you planning on reading them?

References:

- <http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/c/chelsea-cain/>
- <https://www.goodreads.com>
- Harrison, Kathryn. To Die For. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/02/books/review/Harrison-t.html?_r=0
- Maslin, Janet. His Girl Friday Meets a Sadistically Chic Serial Killer. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/03/arts/03masl.html>