



READING GUIDE

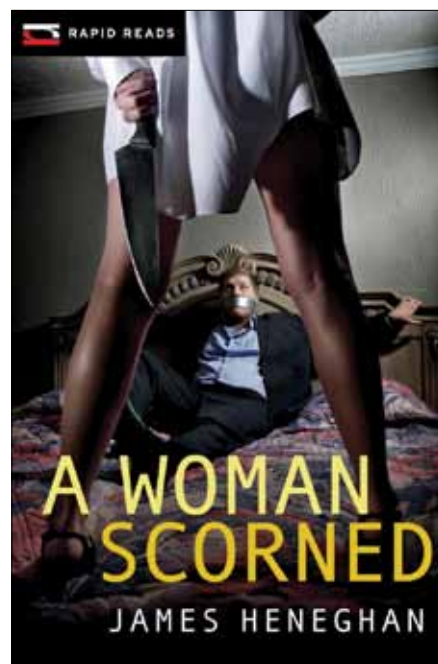
A WOMAN SCORNED JAMES HENEGHAN

Reading level: 4.5

Interest level: Adult

Themes: mystery, infidelity, murder, politics

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Summary

A Woman Scorned begins in the middle of Councilor George Hamilton Nash's midlife crisis. Married to his high school sweetheart for 21 years, Nash announces to his wife that he's moving into his own high-rise condo to explore "new life experiences"—notably, sexual relationships with a number of other women.

One night, George Nash returns home to find one of his mistresses—the reader is not sure who—naked in his bed. He climbs in to join her, titillated as she ties him up. Once tied, she gags him and slices his arm deeply, then watches him bleed to death. When Nash is dead, the mystery woman removes the ropes and all evidence of murder, stages the scene to look like suicide, and places a suicide note on the bedside table.

Angry with her husband for dumping her, Nash's wife Moira becomes the first suspect. Another is his longtime associate Joanne Drummond, a partner in one of Nash's businesses (and sometimes his bed), whom Nash had discovered to be fraudulently mismanaging clients' money.

Sebastian Casey, reporter for the *West End Clarion*, becomes interested in the case of the dead councilor and decides to pursue his feeling that something isn't right. He knew Nash, and can't imagine that a man with all of Nash's advantages would ever have reason to kill himself.

A hardworking, straightforward man, Casey is waiting for his girlfriend Emma to return from Ireland, where she has been for the past number of weeks as she cares for her ailing mother. But that's not all she's been doing: Emma confesses to Casey that she's become involved with an old flame while back home. She apologizes and promises she loves Casey, but her admission leaves him jealous and heavy-hearted. He just wants his girl back.

Throughout the story, Casey talks his suspicions through with his colleague, Deb Ozeroff, who, along with details from the police investigation, helps him puts pieces of the puzzle together. Together they interview Moira, Nash's widow, who offers them a clue to another woman named Cally who used to call the couple's house every now and then.

Casey's search for Cally has him speaking with a variety of police investigators, as well as to a second of Nash's business partners, who agrees Nash was never the suicidal kind. Another city



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councilor points him in the direction of Nash's pretty young secretary, Pauline Parker. Casey meets with her on several occasions, but Pauline doesn't strike him as the murdering sort.

In the midst of his amateur sleuthing, Casey meets Margaret Mullen, the council secretary. The two are undeniably attracted, but Casey chooses to remain uninvolved, despite his girlfriend's infidelity. As his relationship with Mullen deepens, Casey meets the woman named Cally—Councilor Angela Calista Brill—who is also added to the growing suspect list.

Casey's continued contact with Pauline Parker dispels his suspicions about Councilor Brill, but introduces the idea that Margaret Mullen may have been having an affair with Nash. When the evidence begins to point in her direction, Casey doesn't believe it. But when he makes a significant connection between the shoes she had been wearing at their first meeting and the shoes worn by the woman caught on security tape in the hallway of Nash's condo, he knows it's her.

As Parker fills him in on Mullen's background, Casey realizes the council secretary is not the woman she presented herself to be. When he confronts Mullen, refusing to guarantee he won't go to the police with what he knows, she becomes angry. After they part, Casey is knocked over the head with a tire iron. It's Margaret Mullen. Witnesses catch and detain her until the police arrive. A check of her apartment reveals the shoes and a bloodstained hoodie—enough to lock her away for a long time.

Casey survives the ordeal and, fresh out of hospital, goes to pick his Emma up at the airport.

Questions for Discussion

1. In chapter 1, Casey reflects that the rain in Ireland is softer and more forgiving than the Canadian kind: *Its molecules had greened over eight hundred years of Irish sorrow and suffering.* Explain the meaning of this observation.
2. When we meet Sebastian Casey, he's has enjoyed the carefree life of a single person for years—able to create his own agenda and entertain himself however he wishes. How is it that some people find this so appealing, while others find aloneness terrifying?
3. At the end of chapter 2, Casey's girlfriend informs him she's just slept with an old beau—and it throws Casey for a loop. What is the complicated relationship between love and sex? Can we love two people at once? How would you advise Casey knowing that his significant other has strayed so early on in their relationship?
4. In chapter 3, when Casey asks Councilor George Nash whether he's going to run for mayor, Nash retorts that Casey shouldn't be listening to rumors, especially given his profession. But the media's job is exactly that: to pay attention to rising news, and to make sense of it for the public. Or is it? Discuss.
5. The reader gets a clear sense of Sebastian Casey's views of other people through his descriptions of them. He feels Councilor George Nash and John Burns (Emma's Irish flame) are both self-satisfied egotists. What forms the basis of his decision? How do you think he views himself? Do you think people's personalities are set regardless of their position on the socioeconomic ladder? Or do they change according to perceived advantage?
6. One of the issues being discussed at city hall is backyard chickens. Now that we're several years into the urban agriculture movement in North America, chickens are being brought to animal shelters in record numbers. What are your comments?





7. When George Nash discovers his business partner, Joanne Drummond, has been running an investment scam, his first reaction is to report it to the police. As you see it, would there be a more measured approach for a longtime business partner who also has significant personal investment in the company?
8. In chapter 4, when Casey expresses his anger to Emma about her dalliance with John Burns, she tells him not to be angry—that she’s just a woman and that she made a mistake. Is it ever really “a mistake”? Does this excuse infidelity?
9. When Nash turns up dead, everybody is left scratching their heads. More than once, Casey reflects that Nash’s lifestyle—food, wine, travel, arts, culture, rich friends—should make him the last man to consider suicide. What stereotype is Casey submitting to in this thinking? Can you make a case for it?
10. At the end of chapter 6, which character (living or dead) in *A Woman Scorned* would you most like to meet for coffee? Why?
11. After Emma’s initial confession that she cheated on Casey, both try not to mention John Burns, preferring instead to bury the event. Why do people do this? What are the advantages of this kind of avoidance? What are the risks?
12. In chapter 8, George Nash’s business partner Sam Spencer reflects on Nash’s personality: *George wasn’t the suicidal type, whatever type that is. But he had no reason to kill himself. George was one of the most level-headed guys I know.* What do you understand of suicide? Is it always only people who are wildly unbalanced who kill themselves? What would motivate an individual of sound mind to end his or her life?
13. Discuss male and female stereotypes as they are portrayed in *A Woman Scorned*. Generally, how are women portrayed? Generally, how are men portrayed? As you see it, is there any reason the author has handled the characters in this way?
14. When Casey speaks with Pauline Parker about Maggie Mullen’s relationship with George Nash, he learns the woman had split from her husband and young son ten years prior. “What kind of mother does that?” asks Parker (ch. 15). How do our views of abandonment differ when a mother is involved as opposed to a father? Explain the reasoning for this reaction, and examine its validity.
15. Create a plot map for *A Woman Scorned*. Include the murder, the discovery of suspects, plot development, red herrings and resolution.

