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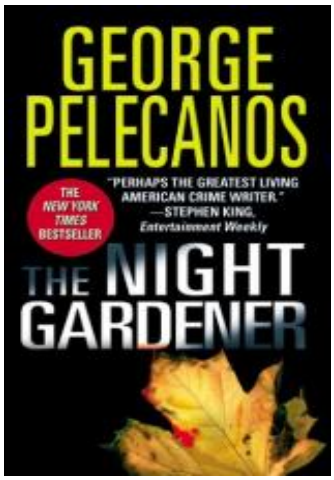
The Night Gardener

by George Pelecanos



About the Book

Gus Ramone is "good police," a former Internal Affairs investigator now working homicide for the city's Violent Crime branch. His new case involves the death of a local teenager named Asa whose body has been found in a local community garden. The murder unearths intense memories of a case Ramone worked as a patrol cop twenty years earlier, when he and his partner, Dan "Doc" Holiday, assisted a legendary detective named T. C. Cook. The series of murders, all involving local teenage victims, was never solved. In the years since, Holiday has left the force under a cloud of morals charges, and now finds work as a bodyguard and driver. Cook has retired, but he has never stopped agonizing about the "Night Gardener" killings. The new case draws the three men together on a grim mission to finish the work that has haunted them for years. All the love, regret, and anger that once burned between them comes rushing back, and old ghosts walk once more as the men try to lay to rest the monster who has stalked their dreams. Bigger and even more unstoppable than his previous thrillers, George Pelecanos achieves in **The Night Garderner** what his brilliant career has been building toward: a novel that is a perfect union of suspense, character, and unstoppable fate.

Discussion Guide

1. The Night Gardener has been described as a novel about ?three cops --- one good, one bad, one broken.? Do you think this description fits? Why or why not?

2. Who killed Asa Johnson? How might his life have been saved? Do you believe that Terrance Johnson?s strictness and disapproval of his son were factors in Asa?s death?

3. Rhonda Willis ?spent a good part of her day communicating with her sons via their cells? (page 51). Discuss the extent to which the detectives? personal lives intersect with their work. Do Rhonda?s and Gus Ramone?s preoccupations with their families ever affect their performance on the job?

4. Discuss the circumstances in which Doc Holiday?s career as a cop ended. Is Holiday justified in attributing at least part of the blame for his downfall to Gus Ramone?

5. Discuss Gus?s visit to the principal?s office at his son?s school (page 253). Does Gus go overboard in defending Diego? Is Gus too accepting of his son?s transgressions? Discuss the ethics of Gus?s position that he has a right to send his son to a public school in Montgomery County.

6. Is it ultimately significant that, like the names of the Night Gardener?s victims in the 1980s, Asa?s name is a palindrome? Why?

7. The Night Gardener has a large cast of characters. Which character did you find to be the most compelling, and why? Did you find that your favorite character changed in the course of reading the novel?

8. Discuss Gus and Regina Ramone?s marriage. Which, if any, of the tensions in their marriage are attributable to the fact that they are an interracial couple?

9. When T. C. Cook died he was planning a break-in at the home of Reginald Wilson, whom he suspected of being the Palindrome murderer. Was it wrong for Cook to continue trying to solve the case after his retirement? Was it wrong of Doc Holiday to encourage him?

10. Compare the interrogation of William Tyree, a murder suspect (chapter 6), with the interrogation of Aldan Tinsley, who?s suspected of illegally selling a gun (chapter 32). Are both suspects treated fairly --- as you would want to be treated ? by the police?

11. Near the end of **The Night Gardener** Gus Ramone says, ?I lost the idea a long time ago that I was accomplishing anything. Occasionally I put assholes away for life, knowing they can?t kill again. That?s how I speak for the fallen few. But as far as solving goes? I don?t solve shit. I go to work every day and I try to protect my wife and kids from the bad things that are out there. That?s my mission. That?s all I can do? (page 352). Do you think Gus really believes this about his work as a detective? Or is he making these statements just for Doc Holiday?s benefit?

12. Popular music is the subject of much discussion among the male characters in **The Night Gardener**. Discuss music?s role in the novel.

13. George Pelecanos sets his fiction in and around Washington, D.C. How does the city shape the events of **The Night Gardener**?

14. Is Gus Ramone a good detective? A good husband? A good father? A good man?

Author Bio

George Pelecanos is the bestselling author of 23 novels and story collections set in and around Washington, D.C. He was a writer and producer on HBO's "The Wire," "The Pacific," "Treme," "The Deuce," "We Own This City" and the feature

film *D.C. Noir*. He lives in Silver Spring, Maryland.

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