UNLOCKING THE MYSTERY OF THE FATAL GAME IN KAREN M. MCMANUS' ONE OF US IS NEXT

THESIS



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ABSTRACT

Putri, N. D. (2023). *Unlocking The Mystery of The Fatal Game in Karen M. McManus' One of Us is Next*. English Literature Department, Faculty of Adab and Humanities, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. Advisors: (I) Dr. Wahju Kusumajanti, M.Hum., (II) Sufi Ikrima Sa'adah, M.Hum.

This study aims to unravel the mystery surrounding the game of truth-or-dare in Karen M. McManus' *One of Us is Next* by examining the novel's plot. The novel narrates a story of an invitation raised to participate in a mysterious game called truth-or-dare. The person who becomes the game's target can select either 'truth' or 'dare.' If the targets select 'truth,' they must tell the truth; if they select "dare," they must complete a dare. However, if they choose neither option, the game's creator will reveal their secret to all their friends. The game keeps reaching its highest point till a mysterious death occurs because of it. This study focuses on two research formulas: (1) the description of the truth-or-dare game in Karen M. McManus' *One of Us is Next*; (2) the journey of the characters discovering the creators and motivations behind the truth-or-dare game in Karen M. McManus' *One of Us is Next*.

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, describing the findings. Additionally, the data utilized in this study comes in the form of words and sentences. The researcher employs the perspective of New Criticism to explain how the characters in the novel *One of Us is Next* reveal the culprits and the motives behind the truth-or-dare game and pays attention to Joyce G. Saricks's genre formula of mystery to derive greater accuracy in the findings. As secondary data sources, the researcher also uses books, journals, and other articles to support her research.

The findings of this study indicate that the truth-or-dare game assigns targets with specific criteria based on what the game creators intended. In addition, the game also has rules such as choosing between 'truth' or 'dare' and revealing secrets if the target chooses not to participate. Then, the pattern of the characters' actions follows a mystery formula, which includes the committing of the crime, the analysis of the clues, the suspect's interview, and the revelation of motive. Finally, the game creator's motivation is to exact retribution. The game is designed to prevent the suspect from being suspected of committing a crime. In addition, the reason for selecting a particular target is to show their ability in technology and intelligence.

Keywords: Mystery, New Criticism, Formula, Plot, Game

ABSTRAK

Putri, N. D. (2023). *Unlocking The Mystery of The Fatal Game in Karen M. McManus' One of Us is Next*. English Literature Department, Faculty of Adab and Humanities, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. Advisors: (I) Dr. Wahju Kusumajanti, M.Hum., (II) Sufi Ikrima Sa'adah, M.Hum.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap misteri seputar permainan truth-ordare dalam novel *One of Us is Next* karya Karen M. McManus dengan mengkaji plot novel tersebut. Novel tersebut menceritakan sebuah kisah tentang undangan yang diajukan untuk berpartisipasi dalam permainan misterius yang disebut kebenaran atau tantangan. Orang yang menjadi target permainan dapat memilih 'truth' atau 'dare'. Jika target memilih 'truth', mereka harus mengatakan yang sebenarnya; jika mereka memilih 'dare', mereka harus menyelesaikan tantangan. Namun, jika mereka tidak memilih salah satu dari pilihan tersebut, pembuat game akan mengungkapkan rahasia mereka kepada semua teman mereka. Permainan terus memuncak hingga kematian misterius terjadi akibat dari permainan itu. Penelitian ini hanya berfokus pada dua rumusan penelitian: (1) gambaran tentang permainan truth-or-dare dalam *One of Us is Next* karya Karen M. McManus; (2) perjalanan karakter menemukan pencipta dan motivasi di balik permainan truth-or-dare dalam *One of Us is Next* karya Karen M. McManus.

Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, yaitu mendeskripsikan temuan. Selain itu, data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini berupa kata dan kalimat. Peneliti menggunakan perspektif New Criticism untuk menjelaskan bagaimana karakter dalam novel *One of Us is Next* mengungkapkan pelaku serta motif di balik permainan truth-or-dare dan memperhatikan formula genre misteri Joyce G. Saricks untuk mendapatkan tingkat keakuratan temuan penelitian yang lebih baik. Sebagai sumber data sekunder, peneliti juga menggunakan buku, jurnal, dan artikel lain untuk mendukung penelitiannya.

Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa game truth-or-dare menetapkan target dengan kriteria tertentu berdasarkan apa yang pembuat game inginkan. Selain itu, game ini juga memiliki aturan seperti memilih antara 'truth' atau 'dare' dan mengungkap rahasia jika target memilih untuk tidak berpartisipasi. Kemudian, pola aksi para tokoh mengikuti formula misteri yang meliputi tindak pidana, analisis petunjuk, wawancara tersangka, dan pengungkapan motif. Terakhir, motivasi pembuat game adalah untuk membalas dendam. Permainan ini dirancang untuk mencegah tersangka dicurigai melakukan kejahatan. Selain itu, alasan pemilihan target tertentu adalah untuk menunjukkan kemampuan mereka dalam teknologi dan kecerdasan.

.

Keywords: Misteri, Kritik Baru, Formula, Plot, Permainan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Inside Cover	i
Inside Title Page	
Approval Sheet	
Examiner Sheet	
Declaration	
Acknowledgment	
Abstract	. viii
Abstrak	
Table of Contents	
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Background of The Study	1
1.2 Problems of The Study	3
1.3 Objectives of The Study	3
1.4 Significances of The Study	4
1.5 Scopes and Delimitations	4
1.6 Definition of Key Terms	5
CHAPTER II REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	6
2.1 New Criticism	6
2.1.1 Character and Characterization	7
2.1.2 Plot	8
2.1.2.1 Exposition	8
2.1.2.2 Rising Action	9
2.1.2.3 Climax	9
2.1.2.4 Falling Action	9
2.1.2.5 Resolution	10

2.2 Mystery Genre	. 10	
2.2.1 Amateur Detectives		
CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHOD	. 13	
3.1 Research Design	. 13	
3.2 Data Collection	. 13	
3.2.1 Research Data	. 13	
3.2.2 Data Sources	. 13	
3.2.3 Instrument		
3.3 Data Collection Technique		
3.4 Data Analysis Technique	. 15	
CHAPTER IV ANALYSIS	. 16	
4.1 The Description of The Game	. 17	
4.1.1 The Rules of The Game	. 18	
4.1.2 The Target of The Game		
4.2 The Revelation of The Game Creator	. 27	
4.2.1 Motivated Investigator	. 34	
4.2.2 Evaluating The Clues	. 42	
4.2.2.1 Investigating The Identity of The Suspects	. 42	
4.2.2.2 Looking for The Background Information of The Suspects		
4.2.2.3 The Suspects' Confession to The Police	. 52	
4.2.2.3.1 The Relationship Between the Two Suspects		
4.2.3 The Motive of The Game Creator		
4.2.3.1 Taking A Revenge		
4.2.3.2 Proving Ability		
CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS	. 61	
REFERENCES	64	

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

A literary work has its classification, which makes it distinct and easy to identify. A literary work is famous if its theme, method of presenting language techniques, and writing style conform to a pattern currently popular with its readers (Trismanto, 2018). Popular literature is one of the literary works with its characteristics. It consists of literary styles originating in the masses' needs, ways of thinking, knowledge, issues, and preferences. Thus, a popular literary work will have its own pattern. The pattern could also refer to the formula. John G. Cawelti then describes a formula as a narrative composed in a structure or employing dramatic techniques used in many individual works (Cawelti, 1976). So, the formula is a pattern literary writers employ to tell stories. The pattern or formula in a literary work will eventually give rise to a particular genre.

Joyce G. Saricks define a genre as any sizeable collection of fiction writers and specific titles that share similar characteristic and appeal created following a particular pattern (Saricks, 2009). In short, genre refers to each classification or grouping of literature according to specific features. There are many different types of genres. One of them is a mystery. A mystery is anything which it is unclear why and for what purpose something can occur. Mysteries are built around a puzzle in which the author hints about the solution while trying to disguise specific details so that the mystery cannot be resolved too easily (Saricks, 2009). In mysteries, an unexplained death or a crime to be investigated are typical elements (Saricks, 2009). Mystery in fiction typically explains how a phenomenon

or a crime can be explained rationally. Hence novels revolving around a mystery tend to emphasize the plot.

The novel's plot is a collection of interrelated events that construct its storyline. The "plot" of a dramatic or narrative work consists of the events and actions that happen in the story (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). The mystery genre drives the plot since it focuses on characters trying to solve the cases. Thus, literary works of the mystery genre tend to stress the plot, as it concentrates on the characters' experiences and responses to the situation.

One of the novels focusing on solving a case is Karen M. McManus' *One of Us is Next*. The novel, published in 2020, is the sequel to *One of Us is Lying. One of Us is Next* is told from the first-person point of view by three people. The three narrators are Maeve Rojas, Knox Myers, and Phoebe Lawton, who are students at Bayview High School. *One of Us is Next* by Karen M. McManus recounts an incident that occurred to Bayview students a year after the revelation of the death of one of the students in the preceding novel. A year after the incident, Bayview High School faced a mystery case that ruined the lives of several students. This work attracts the interest of the researcher because it offers intriguing issues. This novel's author describes the plot and how the characters solve problems and are structured through various clues that lead researchers to explain the novel's formula.

In this study, researcher only found one previous study that used the novel *One of Us Is Next* as its subject. A study in the novel *One of Us Is Next* was conducted by Danette DiMarco in 2021. This study examines the intersectional injustice in Karen M. McManus's mystery book. DiMarco explores the

relationship between adults and all forms of oppression and dominance suffered by adolescents in three works – *One of Us is Lying, One of Us is Next, and Two Can Keep a Secret* - by the same author (DiMarco, 2021). The findings of DiMarco's research for this book demonstrate that the oppression of teenage characters is always navigated by all adult characters who appear in the novel. The research also shows that all the adult characters who appear in it have made mistakes that impact the teen characters. After reading the results of previous studies closely, researcher has not discovered someone who investigated the plot in the novel. Therefore, the researcher in this study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the genre of the novel *One of Us is Next*. As noted in the preceding explanation, genre study highlights the novel's plot. Hence researcher only focuses on the construction of the plot in the novel.

1.2 Problems of The Study

In line with the background above, the problems of the study are formulated as follows:

- 1. How is the game 'truth or dare' described in Karen M. McManus' *One of Us is Next*?
- 2. How do the characters reveal the 'truth or dare' game creator in Karen M. McManus' *One of Us is Next*?

1.3 Objectives of The Study

In line with the problems of the study above, this study aims to

1. To describe the game 'truth or dare' in Karen M. McManus' *One of Us is Next*.

2. To follow the character's journey in revealing the creators and the motive of the 'truth or dare' game in Karen M. McManus' *One of Us is Next*.

1.4 Significances of The Study

This study's results are expected to benefit both theoretical and practical concerns. Theoretically, this study is supposed to give an insight to the reader about the mystery genre. Some people who unfamiliar with genre studies believe mystery is always associated with the occult and the supernatural. In fact, the mystery is something whose truth remains unclear. Besides, this study is also supposed to provide readers with an understanding of how the plot constructs the entire story in the novel so they can grasp its meaning. This is because an excellent plot will attract the reader's emotional interest in reading more thoroughly, leading to a better understanding of the story's content. Practically, this study intends to fill a gap in the previous research on this novel, allowing future researchers to use it as a reference. Furthermore, the researcher aims to convey at retribution can have negative consequences, as it may cause harm to anyone, even individuals who are not directly involved in the problem.

1.5 Scopes and Delimitations

The scope of this study is the novel *One of Us is Next* by Karen M. McManus. This novel was published in 2020 and has several issues that can be investigated. However, this study focuses solely on the plot that constructs the novel's storyline to expound on the mystery game "truth-or-dare" and depicts the characters' journey to discover the game's creator. Then, this study also seeks the game creator's motivation for creating the game.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

In order to clarify the key terms used in this study, some definitions are put forward:

Mystery is something unusual or unknown that has not been clarified or figured out yet (*MYSTERY English Meaning*, n.d.).

Plot is a literary concept that refers to the series of events that comprise a narrative or the central aspect of a story (Wibowo & Lestari, 2019).

Formula is a standard or recognized method of doing or producing something (FORMULA English Meaning, n.d.).



CHAPTER II REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 New Criticism

The New Criticism was one of the most effective approaches to literary analysis experienced by twentieth-century readers. It was the method through which people learned to read, evaluate, and understand literature for decades (Dobie, 2012). According to Charles E. Bressler, New Criticism is the literary analysis approach that provides readers with a formula for determining the correct interpretation of a work based on the text itself (Bressler, 2011). The New Criticism considers literary texts as a system with a complete structure. Hence, the New Criticism the text should stand alone because the approach has a textual focus.

The New Criticism was more directly conceived as a reaction to the focus on the biographical and historical context of works, lessening the stress on the literature itself (Dobie, 2012). So, this literary critique was created to focus on the literary work itself, ignoring the author's influence and its historical context. The practice of New Criticism emphasizes reading texts closely and appreciating order (Dobie, 2012). In New Criticism, close reading aims to determine the true meaning of a text being analyzed. In addition, this practice seeks to examine and describe precisely, thoroughly, and deeply the interconnections and interweaving of literary elements such as plot, character, and theme that comprise the overall meaning. In this study, the researcher employs the concept of New Criticism to demonstrate how the characters in *One of Us is Next* expose the culprits behind the game "truth or dare." Under the perspective of New Criticism, the researcher

applies close reading to the novel *One of Us is Next* in order to determine how cases can be solved.

2.1.1 Character and Characterization

Characters are the people or objects that populate the story's world.

According to Abrams and Harpham, characters are the individuals who are shown in a play or story, and the reader assumes they have certain ethical, intellectual, and emotional traits based on what they say and how they say it, as well as their actions (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). Characters are typically designed with unique traits and characteristics. The character is not only recognizable by age, physical appearance, look, wardrobe, or action but also by their inner disposition (Rondonuwu, 2020). So, characters play a crucial part in a narrative since they make it conceivable and bring it to life.

A writer then constructs a characterization to bring a character to life in a story or drama. Baldick argues that characterization is how people are portrayed in stories and plays. The portrayal of characterization can be done directly or indirectly. Direct characterization includes describing or commenting on a character's traits, while indirect characterization has the reader infer characteristics from a character's actions, speech, or appearance (Baldick, 2001). So characterization is an attempt by the author of a story or play to show who the character is or what kind of person they are. As a result, the researcher in this study also focuses on the employment of characters and characterization because characters play an essential part in conveying the culprit's motivations in the novel. The characters play an important role in the disclosure of the crime happening.

2.1.2 Plot

As mentioned in Chapter 1, a story's plot consists of a series of occurrences. A plot is the sequence of events and situations chosen and structured to emphasize relationships between incidents and interest the reader or audience's attention about an event in a story (Baldick, 2001). Arbain mentioned in his study that the author's intelligence and memories are embedded in the plot, which is why the plot plays such an essential role in the novel (Arbain, 2016). The plot is a crucial component of a story since it guides the reader in determining its meaning and how to interpret it. It is a unified composition. However, it can appear to be an unchanging grid, giving the author of a fictional work godlike power over the characters (Childs & Fowler, 2006). Therefore, plot not only explains what occurs in a story, but also how and why it occurs.

According to Gustav Freytag, the plot of a story can be described as a narrative structure composed of a beginning, middle, and ending. Then, it is divided into five distinct sections, similar to the standard five acts of a theatrical production. The section includes an introduction, a rise, a climax, a return, and a catastrophe (Freytag, 1863). The five sections form a structure in the story's plot that makes it perfect and well-expressed to the readers.

2.1.2.1 Exposition

The beginning of the narrative contains exposition. Freytag refers to the exposition as the introduction. According to Freytag, the introduction or exposition is the beginning of a narrative that typically describes the protagonist's setting, time, nationality, and relationships (Freytag, 1863). The exposition or introduction is commonly understood as the initial segment of a play or narrative,

in which the characters and their situations are presented, frequently through references to prior occurrences (Baldick, 2001). In essence, exposition refers to an event that triggers a conflict and serves as the primary means of introducing the key fictional elements of a narrative, such as setting, place, time, and characters.

2.1.2.2 Rising Action

The stage of rising action marks the initial emergence of complexity.

According to Freytag, the rising action stage is characterized by the commencement of the act itself, the manifestation of the main character's traits, and the arousal of interest (Freytag, 1863). The rising action delves into the central struggle of the plot leading up to its highest point moment, or it can be called the climax. During this particular stage, various actions and events occur that ultimately culminate in a state of conflict.

2.1.2.3 Climax

A literary climax refers to a specific moment of increased intensity within a work of literature (Baldick, 2001). Climax represents an essential point in the story where the level of tension reaches its maximum threshold. According to Freytag's dramatic structure, the climax is the point in the narrative where the culmination of the rising action is most intense and definite (Freytag, 1863). The significance of the climax in the narrative lie in its function as the point at which the protagonist's central conflict is unveiled, rendering it the core of the issue.

2.1.2.4 Falling Action

The falling action is the sequence of events that occurs after the climax. At this point, the main character is grappling with the aftermath of the crucial

moment in the narrative. Furthermore, the falling action is intended to culminate in the story's conclusion, commonly called the catastrophe.

2.1.2.5 Resolution

According to Freytag's plot structure, the final stage is the resolution or completion of the plot, which contains the closing action (Freytag, 1863). At this point, the conflict has been entirely resolved, and the character undergoes closure. Furthermore, this phase is anticipated to settle any unresolved plot points, culminating in a conclusion that may be either happy or sad.

2.2 Mystery Genre

As previously expounded in chapter one, the concept of mystery pertains to an unresolved aspect of reality that remains vague or enigmatic. According to Saricks, mysteries are structured as puzzles accompanied by hints of the solution, but the author conceals specific details to prevent a simple resolution. The audience and investigator become invested in the mystery to solve it (Saricks, 2009). In short, the mystery genre centers around the initiation of a crime and its subsequent investigation, which serves as the narrative's core and presents a puzzle that captivates readers.

Several Mysteries contain more than simple, pattern-based puzzles. Most of these works entail complicated stages of narrative and character exposition that require a gradual revealing of concealed information, resulting in the eventual resolution. Also, the investigator's role is significant because this genre's primary goal is to investigate the clues and figure out the puzzle. Hence, the portrayal of investigators in the mystery genre plays a crucial role in advancing the plot of a narrative.

2.2.1 Amateur Detectives

As previously explained, the primary objective of the mystery genre is to figure out the solution to a given case and reveal the root of the issue, so it requires a systematic process or formula to solve it. Joyce G Saricks states that a mystery novel adheres to a particular structure. Saricks argues, "Novels that fall within the Mystery genre follow a particular pattern: a crime is committed, an investigator pursues the clues, interviewing suspects and drawing conclusions, then the crime is solved, and the culprit is brought to justice." (Saricks, 2009). In specific literary works, this particular structure can attain a greater complexity. However, the most frequent formula is as described above.

Apart from observing specific patterns, research about mysteries can also be done by following the investigators who lead the reader to conclude about a case that has occurred. Focusing on investigator types, according to Saricks, is the easiest way to evaluate the mystery because these characters' personalities drive the plot and readers' interest in the book (Saricks, 2009). The amateur detective is one kind of investigator in a mystery. Most individuals who engage in amateur detective work perceive their investigations as puzzles to be solved. According to Saricks, these detectives are not experts with specialized training in investigating techniques; they are prone to "fall into" a case featuring a person they know, and they typically work on a single case at one time (Saricks, 2009).

As amateur detectives typically have personal involvement in their cases, they are not qualified professionals and do not receive compensation for their services. Notwithstanding their lack of professional qualifications, amateur

detectives often possess skills that enable them to resolve a case successfully. Amateur detectives often depend on their intuition and understanding of human behavior, rather than employing a systematic inquiry, to uncover the veritable essence of the crime and the perpetrator (Saricks, 2009). Therefore, crime novels highlighting amateur detectives are often characterized by a lighthearted and genial attitude toward criminals. However, some amateurs approach their cases and investigations with a heightened level of dedication, meticulously pursuing leads with the same level of accuracy as experienced investigators (Saricks, 2009). Amateur detectives are more concerned with evaluating clues to solve the case.

Based on the description above, the researcher in this study investigates the mystery of truth-or-dare games and how the characters, as amateur detectives, reveal the game creator. The researcher then utilizes a close reading approach emphasizing analyzing the plot while carefully considering the mysterious genre formula rules mentioned above to obtain precise analytical outcomes.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. According to Fraenkel, a qualitative descriptive method elaborates deeply on the essence of a relationship, an action, or a condition (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Furthermore, a narrative format was used to present the study's findings. As a result, this method assists the researcher in thoroughly examining and elucidating a phenomenon related to the data.

3.2 Data Collection

The following explanation will elucidate the techniques employed in gathering, analyzing, and displaying the data in this investigation, thereby ensuring its academic foundation.

3.2.1 Research Data

The present study employs textual excerpts from a literary work, including words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, to comprehensively investigate a particular phenomenon. This approach is grounded in the literature-related context of the research. The data is subjected to meticulous refinement to facilitate its utilization in addressing the research questions in this study.

3.2.2 Data Sources

This study employs both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data source is Karen M. McManus's novel *One of Us Is Next*. This study concentrates solely on words, sentences, paragraphs, and novel conversations

about the truth or dares game and related incidents throughout the novel.

Additionally, the researcher utilizes secondary data sources to obtain more information for her research. The secondary data sources include relevant journal articles, books, web articles, and previous research theses.

3.2.3 Instrument

Fraenkel stated that in certain types of qualitative research, there may not be a required tool, such as a standardized test or a rating scale. In this particular research technique, the researcher assumes the role of the primary instrument for data collection (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Consequently, as the researcher evaluates the literary work that focuses on words, sentences, paragraphs, and dialogues, the researcher takes herself as the role of the research instrument in this investigation.

3.3 Data Collection Technique

To collect data for this study, the researcher followed several procedures, including:

- 1. The researcher read Karen M. McManus's novel *One of Us Is Next* attentively.
- The researcher then collected the words, phrases, and conversations related to the game Truth or Dare and the characters' journey to finding the suspect behind the game in the novel.
- 3. The researcher creates a data table and classifies the data based on the pattern of the mystery genre and the plot elements to interpret and comprehend how the characters reveal the suspect behind the game and the motivation of the game's creator.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

To conduct this research, the researcher processes the data in several steps, including:

- The researcher examines the plot using a new criticism lens and close reading to determine how the narrative develops from the crime's beginning to the perpetrator's discovery.
- 2. To obtain accurate research results, the researcher continues to consider the mystery patterns developed by Joyce G. Saricks.
- 3. The researcher concludes her research findings.



CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the researcher tried to answer the research question concerning the mysterious game that appears in the novel and how the characters attempt to identify the culprit of the mysterious game. As stated in the previous chapter, the researcher analyzes this research from the lens of the New Criticism theory. The researcher then employs close reading focusing on plot analysis, paying close attention to the above-described mysterious genre formula rules to acquire accurate analysis results. Before entering a detailed analysis, the researcher has to explain the novel briefly to help the reader grasp the concerns raised.

The novel *One of Us is Next* describes the condition of Bayview High School one year after a student's death incident. In the previous novel by the same author, *One of Us is Lying*, a character named Simon dies due to a peanut allergy. Simon was a student who invented the rumor-spreading application 'About That' to spread rumors about his friends. Normalcy returned to Bayview High School when the mystery surrounding Simon's death was solved. Nevertheless, a year after Simon's death, a new incident occurred. The novel *One of Us is Next* is narrated from three different characters' perspectives. The narrators are Maeve Rojas, Knox Myers, and Phoebe Lawton. After last year's tragedy, Bayview High School was again surprised by the appearance of a mysterious game whose creator is unknown. An invitation to participate in the game was delivered by broadcast message to all students' numbers at Bayview High School. The game's

appearance ruined some students' lives at Bayview High School. The game took a victim and drove him to die after playing a game conducted by the game's creator.

Due to the rules made by the game's creator, students desire to avoid even more destructive consequences. Therefore, they voluntarily follow the game's flow. However, the game grew worse because one of the players died. Maeve, Knox, and Phoebe, who become the victims, investigate the criminal's motivations for inviting Bayview High students to play this mysterious game. The three narrators begin an inquiry to identify the true culprit to prevent a recurrence of something even worse.

4.1 The Description of The Game

This novel starts with an unknown person's broadcast message introducing a game. The person sent a message encouraging students at Bayview High School to participate in a game. The anonymous sender also sent a link to the phone numbers of all Bayview High School students. This explanation is mentioned in the following quotation.

"Ugh, are you kidding me? This again?" "What?" Brandon asks, pulling out his own phone. "Unknown number, and guess what it says?" I put on an affected voice. "Still missing About That? I know I am. Let's play a new game. I can't believe somebody would pull this crap after Principal Gupta's warning." Brandon's eyes flick over his screen. "I got the same thing. You see the link?" (McManus, 2020, p. 32)

As evidenced by the preceding quotation, every student's phone number at Bayview High School received an invitation to play a game from an unknown number. The game recalls Simon Kelleher's old gossip app because the sender mentioned a popular gossip app named 'about that' at Bayview High School a year ago. After the incident featuring Simon Kelleher, the principal of Bayview

High School prohibited students from engaging in such matters involving gossip and other such things. Instead, a broadcast message inviting all Bayview students to play a game was sent out. Bayview High students called the sender of the message 'Unknown.' Unknown mentioned that Bayview students are still enthusiastic about games involving gossip and other such things. Then, 'unknown' invites all Bayview High School students to engage in a new game that retains Simon's gossip app's core concept.

4.1.1 The Rules of The Game

After sending a message to all the students in Bayview, the sender also shared a link to a website containing 'truth or dare' rules. The rule of the game can be seen in the quotation below.

"Pay attention, Bayview High. I'm only going to explain the rules once," I read. "Here's how we play Truth or Dare. I'll send a prompt to one person only—and you can't tell ANYONE if it's you. Don't spoil the element of surprise. It makes me cranky, and I'm not nearly as nice when I'm cranky. You get 24 hours to text your choice back. Pick Truth, and I'll reveal one of your secrets. Pick Dare, and I'll give you a challenge. Either way, we'll have a little fun and relieve the monotony of our tedious existence." (McManus, 2020, p. 32)

The quotation explains the rules of the game that students at Bayview High School will play. The game is called truth or dare, and every student at Bayview High will receive a prompt or short message within 24 hours to pick between truth or dare. The game's creators, whom students typically call 'unknown,' will deliver random messages to each student at Bayview High School one by one. Hence, students cannot select whether to participate since they do not know who will be contacted first. If the player chooses truth, the "unknown" will reveal one of their secrets, whereas if they pick a dare, they will be challenged. The secret revealed

by the 'unknown' was not known by Bayview High students. The "unknown" also did not reveal where he obtained the secret.

Students at Bayview High are also unaware of the forthcoming challenges given. The 'unknown' also said this game is for entertainment, so living in Bayview does not become monotonous. Then, the media used to reveal the secret of Bayview High School students now uses broadcast messages, unlike the gossip application made by Simon. The workings of the media used to uncover secrets are also different. As explained above, to reveal the rumors, the sender, or "unknown," creates a text group with Bayview High student phone numbers. 'Unknown' will wait for the player he chooses to answer his question first about picking a truth or dare. Then, if the player does not respond to the prompt within 24 hours, the 'unknown' will announce it in the text group. The 'unknown' will then disclose the player's secret within the group text. The Bayview student may comment together there. The messages regarding the offer to play continued, although it appeared that no one responded due to a Bayview High School principal's rule. The message then proceeds to contact the target.

4.1.2 The Target of The Game

After explaining the game's rules that he created, 'unknown' contacted oneby-one the targets, he invited to participate. The first target of Unknown was Phoebe Lawton. Unknown messages were sent to Phoebe, as shown in the quotation below:

"When I pull my head back to look at the screen, there's another message from an unknown contact. But this time, there's no simultaneous text tone from Brandon's pocket. *Phoebe Lawton, you're up first! Text back your choice: Should I reveal a Truth, or will you take a Dare?*" (McManus, 2020, p. 33)

Phoebe Lawton became the first player chosen by the unknown to choose between truth and dare. She has 24 hours to reply to the message. Phoebe can choose between truth, which means one of her secrets will be revealed by the unknown, or dare, which means she must do a challenge. This game is very detrimental because there is no agreement between the player and the maker. The players seemed forced to do the game. There is no consent between the 'unknown' as the game maker and the player.

Phoebe did not respond after receiving an invitation to play truth or dare. It is evident from the following quotation.

"Tsk, no response from our first player. That means you forfeit. I expected better from you, Phoebe Lawton. No fun at all. Now I get to reveal one of your secrets in true About That style. Crap. I guess this is really happening. Though, how bad could it be?" (McManus, 2020, p. 41)

Phoebe Lawton failed to reply to messages left by 'unknown' within 24 hours. The 'unknown' had hoped that Phoebe would respond to his message and make a decision, but Phoebe did not. Later, the 'unknown' said that Phoebe was made to feel bad for not participating in the games he or she devised. Then, "the unknown" announced that he would reveal Phoebe Lawton's true secret in the same manner as Simon Kelleher's rumor-spreading application "about that," which Simon Kelleher created to expose the secrets of Bayview students a year ago. As previously explained, 'unknown' will use the message sent to the group text, including the phone number of every Bayview High School student in this circumstance. All Bayview students will know Phoebe's secret—a secret that not even Phoebe is aware of—from 'the unknown.'

"Phoebe slept with her sister Emma's boyfriend. More texts appear, one right after the other. What's that, Bayview? You didn't know? Shame. You're behind on your gossip. Here's a little advice for the next time we play: Always take the Dare" (McManus, 2020, p. 42)

The above quote shows Phoebe's secret, revealed by the 'unknown' to all Bayview High students. According to the message, Phoebe Lawton had allegedly slept with her sister's boyfriend. Phoebe has kept a secret from everyone at Bayview High, which is revealed by the 'unknown.' Students at Bayview High School were unaware of the secret. The term sleep indicates that Phoebe Lawton engaged in sexual intercourse with her sister's boyfriend and cheated on her sister.

After sending a message about Phoebe's secret, the 'unknown' seemed to laugh at what happened to Bayview High students. The message sent by the unknown seemed to be sarcastic and said that Bayview High students did not know about the latest gossip. Then unknown told all students at Bayview High to always choose a dare for the next game. Unknown did not reveal why he suggested everyone should choose a dare.

The revelation of Phoebe's secret by the game maker impacted her relationship with her older sister.

"Stop saying his name!" Emma's shriek is so piercing that it startles me into silence. "I don't want to hear it. I hate him, and I hate you, and I never want to talk to either one of you again as long as I live!" (McManus, 2020, p. 58)

In the quotation, it is stated about the dispute that Phoebe and Emma experienced about the problems they faced. Due to a secret that the game maker reveals about Phoebe sleeping with Emma's boyfriend, Emma does not want Phoebe to mention her boyfriend's name again. She shouted for her to stop. Emma thought her sister and ex-boyfriend had seriously betrayed her. Phoebe could not reply to Emma's

statement even though she did this when Emma and Derek broke up. Emma and her ex-boyfriend have no relationship again. Phoebe was forced to remain silent and consider her actions became the worst possible. She felt like the worst sibling ever. As Emma continued her sentence, Phoebe was quiet. She also said that she hated Derek and Phoebe. Then she said that she did not want to speak a word to either of them for the rest of her life. Emma felt she hated them, so she could not talk to them.

In addition to the conflict with her sister, Phoebe experienced bullying at

Bayview High School because of the secret revelation in the following quotation.

"Don't get greedy just cause you're hitting that," Sean says. "There's plenty of Lawton love to go around. Right, Phoebe? Twice as nice. Sharing is caring." He's cackling now. "Listen to me, Bran. I'm a poet and I know it." (McManus, 2020, p. 51)

The quote reveals that Sean, a student at Bayview High, made fun of Phoebe for thinking she and her sister could switch turns having sex with him. Sean tells Phoebe that having sex together is fun. However, Sean's tone remained mocking and sarcastic, as if he were making fun of Emma and Phoebe's sibling relationship. Sean said that sharing was good, but the context in the quotation was having sexual intercourse together. Sean noted that Phoebe and Emma frequently shared a variety of interests and that they also often engaged in sexual activity together with someone else. Sean then began to chuckle about it. Sean did not care about Phoebe's feelings; he kept surrounding her and making fun of her for what she had done without investigating the facts and relying solely on rumors. The effects of the disclosure of secrets ruined Phoebe's life. She believed nobody was on her side.

Not stopping because he saw one of his targets being destroyed, 'unknown' continued to play the truth or dare game he had made. He indicated that he would call the next player to return to playing in the game. Then, the 'unknown' contacted the next target and forced him to choose between telling the truth or doing a dare. This is apparent in the following quotation.

"DARE: Put the Bayview Wildcat mascot's head onto the Wing Zone chicken. STATUS: Achieved by Sean Murdock. Congratulations, Sean. Nice work. The second text comes with a photo of the Wildcatslash-chicken. Up close, like it was taken by somebody standing right next to it" (McManus, 2020, p. 71)

The quote above shows that the game of truth or dare continues. Sean is the next player contacted by an unknown. As the message states, Sean chose Dare in the game. 'unknown' then challenged Sean. Sean got the challenge of putting the Bayview Wildcat mascot's head onto the Wing Zone chicken. Sean removed the necklace from the Wing Zone chicken balloon and attached the Bayview Wildcat mascot's costume head. Sean managed to do the challenge given by the 'unknown.' This is evidenced by a photo where he is changing the head of the chicken. Bayview students seemed to enjoy the game and said that Sean was excellent. In contrast to Phoebe, who criticized, many people praised Sean for his accomplishment in doing the dare from the 'unknown.' Because of this, the game's creator found it enjoyable and compelled himself to continue the game.

"The last texts were from Friday night: DARE: Kiss a member of the Bayview Four. STATUS: Achieved by Jules Crandall. Congratulations, Jules. Nice work. Accompanied by a picture of Jules on Nate's lap, kissing him as though her life depended on staying attached to his face. The next player will be contacted soon. Tick-tock" (McManus, 2020, p. 99)

The above quotation indicates that the truth or dare game continues, and Jules participates in this round. Jules decided to go with Dare based on the message sent by the "unknown" at that time. Jules persuaded Dare to kiss a Bayview Four member. The members of the Bayview Four are Bronwyn, Nate, Cooper, and Addy. Jules then succeeds in completing the challenge because she kisses Nate. A picture of Jules kissing Nate and sitting on Nate's lap proves this challenge. Then, in the final sentence of the message, 'unknown' reiterates that the game is ongoing and that he will contact the next player soon.

As the message states previously, 'unknown' accomplishes what it claims to do. Then, he contacts Maeve, his next targeted player. Maeve receives a message requesting that she choose between the truth and a dare.

"She picks up her phone and angles it so she can see the screen clearly, then pales. "Oh no." "What?" I ask. She holds her phone toward me, amber eyes wide. *Maeve Rojas, you're up next! Text back your choice: Should I reveal a Truth, or will you take a Dare?*" (McManus, 2020, p. 110)

As can be seen from the quote above, Maeve must choose between truth or dare, and if she does not answer, one of her secrets will be revealed to all students at Bayview High. Knox, who was with Maeve when she received the message, encouraged her to pick a dare. He says choosing a dare is not bad because he has witnessed two people succeed. Knox believed it to be less painful and harmful.

"Knox is quiet for a while as I read, and then he says, "Maeve if you're worried about unknown then maybe you should just text back *Dare*. Those are harmless." "Jules kissing Nate wasn't harmless." (McManus, 2020, p. 120)

After hearing Knox's suggestion, Maeve then disputes Knox's assertion.

Maeve argues that choosing Dare is similarly terrible. This is proven by the fact

that Jules accepted a challenge that required her to kiss her sister's boyfriend,

Nate. The students of Bayview realize that Jules has a crush on Nate and that Nate
is Maeve's sister's boyfriend. This coincided at the cafe in front of her sister and
everyone else. Maeve informs Knox that even if someone voted for Dare, it would
harm others. After twenty-four hours, it is revealed that Maeve has decided not to
participate in the game. This is demonstrated by the quote below:

"Don't." She groans the word. "I, okay. This is what it said. *Maeve Rojas*, um...." I hear a deep breath, and then the rest of the words come out in a rush. "Maeve Rojas dumped Knox Myers because he can't get it up." What. The. Fuck." (McManus, 2020, p.135)

The above quotation exposes the secret revealed by the "unknown" in the broadcast message delivered to all Bayview High cellphone numbers. When Knox received her call, Maeve was rendered speechless. She stated that she was fine but appeared slightly nervous. This is because she was shocked by the revelation of her secret by 'the unknown.' Maeve feels terrible because her friend is also involved. Maeve inhaled deeply before attempting to convey the message to Knox. According to the message, Maeve Rojas broke up with Knox Myers because she could not wake "it." The phrase is vulgar since it refers to a penis. "Unknown" spreads rumors about how Maeve and Knox's relationship ended. He said that Knox could not give Maeve the pleasures a gentleman should.

Maeve and Knox receive much scorn due to their secret revelation done by the 'unknown.' At school, she and Knox were humiliated by their friends. One of that is the quotation below:

"The first person to greet me at school Wednesday morning is Sean Murdock, and he does it by grabbing the front of his pants. "Climb on any time you want a real man," he leers, thrusting his hips while Brandon Weber cackles behind him. "Satisfaction guaranteed." (McManus, 2020, p. 139)

Maeve is mocked about her problems with Knox, as evidenced by the quotation above. Maeve came to school on Wednesday morning, and Sean Murdock was the first to greet her. Naturally, Sean would be the first to ridicule her, considering his demanding and domineering attitude toward Bayview students. Sean did not meet Maeve warmly or gently; instead, he misbehaved and insulted Maeve. Sean remarked sarcastically and deliberately to Maeve that she could do anything inappropriate at any time, like engaging in sexual activity. Sean informs Maeve that he is willing to have a sexual relationship with her on her terms.

Then, he reaches for the front of his pants. He stated that Maeve could do that with him since Sean believed he was a real guy, but Sean responded sarcastically. While standing behind Sean, Brandon laughed and mocked Maeve, saying, "Satisfaction guaranteed." In addition to receiving a huge amount of ridicule from her friends, Maeve's relationship with Knox is deteriorating due to the game working against her. The bond they had established appeared to be useless and shattered.

"Texts from Maeve are at the top of my message list: *I'm so sorry. I never meant to hurt you. Can we talk?* There's a lot I want to say, but I settle for short and to the point. *Go to hell, Maeve*" (**McManus, 2020, p. 137**)

The quote shows that the friendship between Knox and Maeve is strained.

Maeve texts Knox to apologize for involving him. Maeve feels she is in charge of everything. Maeve does not think her secret involves someone else, not just her.

Maeve claimed that she did not mean to harm Knox and that she needed to hash things out with him so they could find a solution. Maeve wishes to resolve the

problem with Knox as soon as possible. She appeared to be pleading with Knox to give him a chance to explain. However, Knox was unwilling to accept and unhappy with what had occurred to him and Maeve. Although he agreed many issues would be resolved together, Knox said he wanted Maeve to leave. Knox texted Maeve back, telling her not to bring this up again.

Some students at Bayview High School were affected by the truth or dare game, for which it is unknown what the motivation was. Some of them were also disadvantaged because of the game. People who should enjoy their school life comfortably have to deal with numerous problems, such as losing close friends, becoming the focus of humiliation, losing closeness with their siblings, and impacting other people who do not even participate in the game. This shows that the game is hugely harmful.

4.2 The Revelation of The Game Creator

After what occurred to Maeve, an incident pulled the entire Bayview High School back into the spotlight and was reported on Bayview's local television stations.

"We're continuing to bring you the latest from Bayview, where tragedy has occurred at an abandoned construction site. The story is still developing, but what we know so far is that a group of local teens were in a blocked-off area when one boy fell through the roof of a partially constructed building. Another boy was also injured, although it's not yet clear how. And we just got word, from one of the officers here, that the young man who fell through the roof has been confirmed dead." (McManus, 2020, p. 167)

The above quote depicts a reporter from the E! network reporting on an incident in an abandoned construction site near a mall in Bayview. There was a gathering of teenagers, and one fell to his death from the roof. Liz also reported

that another young man was severely injured. A journalist, Liz, said the police were still investigating the crime. Phoebe and Maeve, who were together when they heard the news, were shocked and wanted to know who the victims were. Later, Phoebe recalls that she and Knox had previously spent time in the mall near the incident. It terrified her. Maeve and Phoebe were at Ashton's place. Ashton, their neighbor, is engaged to marry one of the famous lawyers named Eli. Ashton was close with Phoebe and Maeve. She then took the initiative to ask Eli who the incident victims were. Eli later stated, after gaining confirmation, that the victim was Knox.

"He's okay. Knox is okay!" Ashton's voice fills me with such intense relief that I can finally look up. "But he's the one in the hospital. Eli doesn't know what happened yet. I'll take you there right now." (McManus, 2020, p. 169)

Eli reports that Knox is fine. The teenage boy believed to have passed away was not himself. However, Knox was the teen who was alleged to have been injured. Eli states that he does not know what occurred. Knox was taken to Bayview Memorial Hospital for treatment. Phoebe and Maeve are somewhat glad that the dead teenager was not Knox.

Nevertheless, they were also concerned about Knox's current condition.

Maeve and Phoebe inquired once more about who was the tragedy's victim.

Ashton then said that Brandon Weber was the victim. Brandon is a Bayview High School student. He has remained close to Phoebe and often makes fun of his friends when they get into trouble due to the truth-or-dare game. As stated in the quotation below:

"Addy keeps her arm around me as we stand. I feel as unsteady as a newborn fawn; none of my limbs are working properly as I lurch toward the door. "Does Eli know who died?" I manage to get out. Ashton nods, her pretty face somber. "Yeah. It was a boy named Brandon Weber. Did you know him?" (McManus, 2020, p. 169)

Later, Maeve and Phoebe go to see Knox, hoping he will tell them what happened. When Maeve and Phoebe get to the hospital, they find Knox watching Sean's interview. As was already said, Sean goes to Bayview High School and is very close to Brandon. Sean told the reporter the order of the events that happened to him.

"It's all kind of a blur, but I'll try. A bunch of us were at the mall, and then we wanted to go downtown. We were trying to save a little time, and—God, that sounds so stupid now, doesn't it? Like, we should've just walked the regular way. But we'd cut through the site before. Lots of kids do it; we didn't think anything of it. Anyway, Bran was joking around like always, and then he jumped, and then...."(McManus, 2020, p. 172)

The quote depicts an interview done by Sean. Liz, a journalist conducting a live broadcast, is currently interviewing Sean. The goal of the live stream was to report on the recent tragedy in Bayview. After visiting the mall, Sean announced that they would head downtown. Afterward, they crossed an abandoned construction site on foot to save time. Before this, it was common for many people to pass through the area. According to Sean, as they passed the area, they were laughing as usual. After explaining to Liz how Brandon had fallen, Sean remained silent.

A week after Brandon's death, the Bayview students were no longer persuaded into playing the game' truth or dare' that had been terrifying them. There is no indication of how the game will continue. Considering that Maeve was the last victim to be contacted, it is assumed that the game was designed to ruin her. As shown in the quotation below.

"From what I've heard around school, it looks as though the Truth or Dare game ended with the Knox/Maeve bombshell which makes me wonder if the whole point of the game was to mess with her. After all, she's the one who turned the tide against Simon last year. Maybe one of his acolytes decided to get his revenge. If so, job well done, because she and Knox are still barely speaking and it's making her miserable" (McManus, 2020, p. 179)

This quotation indicates the current situation of the "truth or dare game."

Since the revelation of Maeve and Knox's secret, the game has ceased to exist.

Phoebe believes the game may have been intended for Maeve. Phoebe feels that the game makers want revenge on Maeve because she assisted the police in revealing the truth about Simon's case. Phoebe believes that one of Simon's henchmen is exacting retribution on Maeve so that she receives what she deserves. If Phoebe's forecast is correct, she concludes that the 'unknown' action was successful. The bond between Maeve and Knox remains the same. Maeve and Knox have not communicated since the incident. Maeve's pathetic appearance is her inability to reconcile with Knox. Knox continued to disregard Maeve. Then, a week after the Brandon incident, in addition to the abrupt end of the truth or dare game, Knox thought that what happened to Brandon was unlike what he had heard from Sean's interview. Knox informed Phoebe that he had few recollections of what had occurred at the time.

"Of Sean. It's just a flash, but...all of a sudden, in my mind's eye, I saw him standing at the edge of the construction site with his phone held up in front of him. Like he was taking a picture or a video. And then he yelled, 'What the fuck are you doing here, Myers?'" (McManus, 2020, p. 189)

The quotation indicates that Knox remembers the tragic circumstances surrounding Brandon's death. Knox has few recollections of himself or Sean. He

asserted that the memory was limited and continued to appear random. Knox recollected a piece of this memory while playing Bounty Wars with Owen. Knox was contemplating Sean in some way. According to Knox, Sean was standing at the edge of the building site. Sean stood with his cell phone in hand. Sean is using his cell phone to shoot a picture or video. Then, Knox noticed Sean was shouting at him. Sean asked in a stern tone, asking what Knox was doing in the construction area. Knox stated that he had only this much recall. He could not recall what occurred next. The memory lasted until Sean stood and yelled at him.

After having a hazy recollection of what transpired between him and Brandon, Knox tries to find out more through Sean's cell phone. However, he could not find out for himself because he could not borrow Sean's mobile. Luis, the son of a cafe owner that Knox frequents, assists Knox in getting the video files on Sean's phone because Sean is his friend. Luis left the video file with Maeve, as evidenced by the following quotation.

"A video that Luis gave me," Maeve says "But just to set it up a little more - this is from Sean Murdock's phone. It was taken the day Brandon died." I gasp. Knox, who'd been slouching listlessly beside me, sits bolt upright. "Wait. What?" he asks. He scrambles around me until he's sitting next to Maeve and can stare directly at her phone. "How did Luis get it?" "I think he borrowed Sean's phone last night at Cooper's game," Maeve says." (McManus, 2020, p. 206)

The quotation refers to a video that Luis handed to Maeve. Sean recorded the video on his phone. Knox tried to take a video file from Sean's phone but was unsuccessful. The adjacent Luis noticed Knox wanted to use Sean's phone for something. He then assisted him and obtained the video by using Sean's

cellphone. Luis leaves the video for Maeve. Maeve then tells Phoebe and Knox to watch the video together. The video contains footage of Brandon's death.

"For a guy who's not scared, Branny, you sure are talking a lot," he taunts. "Come on. Let's capture you for posterity. Jump, motherfucker! Jump, jump!" "Fucking hell!" Sean's voice comes out like a scream, high and terrified. "Bran! What the fuck just happened!" (McManus, 2020, p. 208)

The quotation describes the content of the video that Sean recorded. Brandon seems prepared to take on the challenge in the video. Brandon was there with his friends. Sean continued asking him to jump since he considered Brandon to be brave. Sean argued that Brandon should not have talked too much. Sean said he would record Brandon's action on his phone and save it as a memory.

Moreover, Monica and Jules also instructed Brandon to jump. They yelled as though to encourage Brandon to jump. Then, after Brandon's jump, Sean screamed. Sean seems stunned because of Brandon. He believed and felt that the roof was sturdy to support a human body, so he did not believe Brandon would fall. The video then continues to show Sean's voice when Knox is there.

"He fell through the *fucking roof*!" Sean yells. His phone is still aimed at the ground, recording. Monica says something I can't hear. Then there's a couple of minutes of low, urgent conversation that's impossible to catch until Sean's voice comes through again, loud and clear: "What the fuck are you doing here, Myers?" And then the screen goes black. (McManus, 2020, p. 208)

After Brandon falls, the video captures Sean talking to Knox. The footage from Sean's phone does not show any images. He sounded confused as Brandon fell. Then Sean's voice asked Knox what he was doing there. It is unknown what happened after that because only a dark picture was seen, and no sound was heard. Knox also has no memory of what happened to him. Maeve, Knox, and Phoebe

realize after viewing the contents of the video they received from Sean that the game of "truth or dare" does not end with Maeve and Knox. They noticed Brandon also participated in the "truth or dare" game. Later, they also determined that Brandon chose to accept the given dare.

"Maeve swallows hard. "You guys got the gist of that, right?" she asks. "The game didn't end with Knox and me, after all. Brandon was doing a Dare." "Yeah. Got it." I blink back tears and press my hands to my stomach. If I'd eaten lunch before watching that, I'd have thrown it up. "Oh my God. That was horrible." (McManus, 2020, p. 208)

This quote indicates that the "truth or dare" game does not finish with Maeve and Knox. Maeve recognized Brandon's action as a dare issued by the game's creator. This can be heard in the video taken by Sean because he was pleased and provoked Brandon to jump. Brandon also said that what he got was unpleasant because only a few people could see it. However, Brandon continued participating in the challenge since his friends provoked him. Brandon then jumped and fell, as previously proved. His friends were not expecting that the foothold Brandon utilized to land would not support his weight even though the pedestal should be extremely sturdy and capable of resisting huge loads.

The data shown above indicate that the impact of the game truth-or-dare is worsening. After previously causing Maeve and Knox to avoid each other, Phoebe to be bullied by her friends, and different adverse outcomes, the game now causes the death of someone for following the gameplay designed by the game's creator.

4.2.1 Motivated Investigator

After seeing what happened to Brandon, Knox felt that Brandon's death had something wrong. Especially before he watched Sean's video, Knox had overheard his parents talking about Brandon's death.

"Lance has some nerve." Mom's voice is tight. "I hope this is just the grief talking. I feel for him, of course, because—my God. To lose your son. It's a nightmare. But for Lance to bring up the possibility of a lawsuit after the strings he pulled to keep Brandon out of trouble—it's beyond hypocritical." (McManus, 2020, p. 191)

Knox witnessed his parents having a conversation. Knox's parents were discussing Brandon's death. Lance's behavior was quite risky, according to Knox's mother. Lance Weber was Brandon's father. Knox's mother hoped that Brandon's father's actions were exclusively motivated by grief over the death of his son. In addition, her mother also emphasized that she knows what it is like to lose a child and that she is saddened and concerned about Lance Weber's situation. However, Knox's mother revealed that if Lance intended to bring a new lawsuit to dispute his son's death, she believed he would do so in a completely hypocritical manner. Before this, she was overheard claiming that Brandon's father had used his influence covertly to resolve a problem involving Brandon.

In addition to hearing his parents talk about Brandon, one of Knox's father's workers, Nate Macauley, also had an opinion about how Brandon died, which added to Knox's interest. At the time, Knox's father's company assisted in determining the cause of Brandon's tragedy at an abandoned construction site.

Nate gives Knox his perspective on Brandon's tragedy.

"Because of what's not there, I guess. There's not all the debris you'd expect when a well-constructed landing crashes down. Some of the beams don't even have any joists so, like, how were they supposed to stay up in the first place?" Nate narrows his eyes at his

computer. "But the beams have holes like joists *used* to be there, so...if you were totally paranoid, you'd almost think somebody messed with the landing." (McManus, 2020, p. 225)

Previously, Knox went to Nate's home to return his jacket, which he had left at Until Proven's office - where Knox works part-time. As Knox approaches Nate's house, he observes Nate gazing at a photograph of the building where Brandon died. Nate expresses skepticism regarding the police's narrative of Brandon's incident, citing the fact that several elements of the structure are absent, which can be seen from the photograph he captured. Nate believed that there should be more debris than was visible. If a sturdy ladder collapsed, the debris-strewn area surrounding the ruins would have been entirely exposed. Nate says that when certain Blocks break down, they lack ribs. Nate then inquired how a beam without ribs could remain upright. Later, Nate observes that the wreckage beams have holes where the ribs were attached, but the ribs are not found in the building's debris. Nate then suspects that someone intentionally broke the beam.

After meeting Nate that night, Knox's thoughts continue to be filled by Nate's statements. He looked curious about Brandon's accident. Moreover, his involvement with the tragic incident led him to continue considering the truth behind Brandon's death.

"So, I head upstairs with my Sprite, even though Nate's words keep running through my mind, burrowing into the groove of foggy half-memories from the day Brandon died. *If you were totally paranoid, you'd almost think somebody messed with the landing.*" (McManus, 2020, p. 229)

Since he could not stop thinking about Nate's words concerning the possibility of someone damaging Brandon's landing when he jumped, Knox then

called his two friends, who were also victims of the truth-or-dare game, to meet him behind the drama club office.

"Knox is already in the drama club office when Phoebe and I get there at lunch, seated on the floor with an oversized Tupperware container in front of him. Phoebe peers into it, her expression quizzical, as she settles beside him." (McManus, 2020, p. 230)

After meeting Nate, Knox intends to share his thoughts on the tragedy with Maeve and Phoebe. He informed them that it was possible that Brandon's death was not due to the negligence of the construction crew that caused the accident, but someone may have wanted Brandon to fall intentionally. Knox explained to Maeve and Phoebe about Nate, who stated that the construction site where Brandon fell was suspicious due to the missing of certain materials in the wreckage. So, it appears that someone tampered with the landing where Brandon hit.

"Okay, well, here's the thing. I saw Nate Friday night—don't ask," he adds, when my eyebrows shoot up. "It's a long story, work-related, not important. Anyway. Nate was looking at all these pictures from the construction site where Brandon fell. You know how I told you my dad is helping investigate the accident?" We both nod, and Knox continues, "Well, Nate says he thinks someone could've messed with the landing Brandon jumped on." (McManus, 2020, p. 231)

In addition to Nate's statements about the possibility of something going wrong in Brandon's accident, which prompted Knox, Maeve, and Phoebe to consider taking action, another incident prompted them to do so. The incident involves a letter containing a threat that an anonymous person sent. The guy said he would like to meet Phoebe in a park and warned her not to ignore him.

"My heart jumps into my throat as I read the words in front of me: What's with the disappearing act? We need to talk. Meet me at the

gazebo in Callahan Park at 5:30 today. DO NOT ignore this like you've been ignoring everything else." (McManus, 2020, p. 241)

Phoebe discovers a note that instructs her to meet that person. The guy stated that Phoebe had disappeared repeatedly. Phoebe questions Ahmed as to who left the paper on the table. Ahmed reported that a male frequently visited the café and left this note. The note includes an invitation to a park meeting. It stated that Phoebe could meet him at 5:30 in Callahan Park. That person also told Phoebe not to ignore him as she had previously. Phoebe does not recognize the fellow. She also never perceived herself to have made a promise to anyone. Knox, also at the cafe, remembers a man who keeps looking for Phoebe's whereabouts.

"Because that description Ahmed just gave reminds me of someone I've seen here before." Knox turns to Maeve and taps her arm. "You remember that guy who came in a while back? The one who was a dick to Mr. Santos and kept asking about Phoebe? The one Luis and Manny chased off?" (McManus, 2020, p. 243)

Knox and Maeve were at the café when Phoebe received the letter. When Ahmed describes a specific individual, Knox recalls the information. According to Ahmed, the individual, was a tall male with dark hair. Ahmed added that the man might have been older than Phoebe. Knox recalled the person. The male frequently checked on Phoebe. Then, Knox asked Ahmed again. Knox recalled that a man had entered the cafe and been rude to the proprietor, Mr. Santos, when he asked where Phoebe was. The man Knox described as an intense guy left the cafe after being kicked out by Luis and Manny for what he had done to Mr. Santos and kept looking for Phoebe for no apparent reason. In considering this incident, Maeve and Knox intend to assist Phoebe in discovering this person, as evidenced by the following quote:

"I don't mean that. But maybe we can, like, spy on him. See if it's Derek. Then you can report him for harassment or something." He pulls out his wallet and removes a few bills, putting them on top of the twenty that's already on the table. "We could go to my house first and grab my binoculars, so we don't have to get close." (McManus, 2020, p. 245)

The quotation above shows what Phoebe did after she got a mysterious message from an unknown person. Phoebe goes to the park with Maeve, Knox, and Luis. Initially, Phoebe did not want to meet the unknown man because she felt she had nothing to do with anyone. However, Knox advises Phoebe to go and spy on the person who left the message. Knox said that if it was Derek - her sister's ex-boyfriend, Phoebe might have been able to call the police and report the event because it could have been stalking-related. Then, Knox advised Phoebe to visit his home and get a set of binoculars. Knox claimed they could observe the mysterious guy using binoculars without getting too close. They can also quickly identify the author of the letter.

Phoebe admits that she knows nothing about the mysterious guy, despite her attempts to discover his identity through spying. She claims she has never encountered that person, as stated in the quotation below.

"Knox follows and closes the door behind him. He seems preoccupied with his binoculars. I'm pretty sure Phoebe ran interference quickly enough that he didn't see anything with Luis and me. "I have officially never seen that guy before in my life. I have absolutely no idea who he is"." (McManus, 2020, p. 252)

Therefore, Phoebe then asks Maeve to follow the man's car to determine his reasons for meeting Phoebe. The man is then followed by Maeve's car. Phoebe is curious about the man she believes to be a stalker.

"Phoebe leans forward and peers between the front seats. "The blue car?" she asks. When Knox grunts in agreement, she taps my

shoulder. "Follow him. Let's see what this weirdo does when he isn't stalking girls he's never met"." (McManus, 2020, p. 252)

After following the mysterious man for a while, Maeve managed to get some information about the man.

"A couple of hours after we leave the park, we have a license plate number, an address, and a name. Sort of. "The car is registered to David Jackson," Maeve reports, her eyes on her laptop screen. "So maybe David Jackson is Intense Guy?" (McManus, 2020, p. 253)

The quote demonstrates that Maeve successfully identified who owned the car that the mysterious man had used. Maeve knows the car's plate number, address, and owner's name after following and stalking the car for some time. Maeve identifies the car's owner using the obtained license plate. Maeve stated that David Jackson was the registered owner of the car. Then, Knox thought the possibility that David Jackson was the intense man who frequented the café in search of Phoebe. However, it is uncertain because it is only seen from the license plates list. Even if a car is registered in a person's name, that does not automatically imply that they are the one operating it. However, they at least have a clue about the mysterious man. As they continue to investigate the real identity of the mysterious man who continues to look for Phoebe, a PingMe app notification appears.

An alert flashes across Maeve's laptop screen. *The website you are monitoring has been updated*. God, she has PingMe synced to *everything*. Then a string of messages pops up: Fuck you, Phoebe, for not showing up. Yeah, I used your name. WE HAD A DEAL—Darkestmind (McManus, 2020, p. 254)

Maeve receives notifications when the site is updated via the PingMe app, which monitors the site. Maeve had activated PingMe notifications on a Reddit

site where Simon Kelleher was previously active. Maeve is constantly observing what people are doing. During this time, Maeve also spied on a user with the username Darkestmind, frequently mentioning Bayview. When Maeve saw the user's post, she was shocked that the user had mentioned Phoebe. The message in the post indicates that Darkestmind users are enraged with Phoebe. He used simple words and claimed that Phoebe completely ignored him. Phoebe did not arrive at the location specified by the user. The user subsequently explained that he dared to reveal Phoebe's name because he felt she had ignored him. In addition, users claim they have an agreement, but Phoebe is considered to have betrayed the user because she refused to meet him.

Previously, Maeve had observed a site used by Simon while he was still alive. Maeve discovered the website because she was once intrigued about the person behind the truth or dare game. She seeks to find the game designer's relationship with Simon. Then, while searching for this, she found a Reddit site that Simon had previously used to remark on revenge issues. After Simon's demise a year ago, the site now appears to be back online. Vengeance is Mine is the name of a site based on Reddit that hosts conversations between users.

"I open another browser tab and type AnarchiSK—Simon's old username—into the search bar. I used to Google that names all the time, back when I was trying to figure out who might have it in for Simon. There are thousands of results, mostly from old news articles, so I narrow the search to the past twenty-four hours. One link remains to a Reddit subforum with the words *Vengeance Is Mine* in the URL" (McManus, 2020, p. 77)

By this time, Maeve was surprised to see one of the usernames on the site say something about Phoebe. It led her and Knox to believe that the mysterious guy following Phoebe and user Darkestmind was the same person.

"It means Darkestmind and Intense Guy are the same person." "I've thought all along that Darkestmind is the person behind Truth or Dare. Remember? He kept talking about Bayview, and a game, and he even said *tick-tock*, just like unknown always did. So, if I'm right about that—Intense Guy is *also* Unknown. The three strands we've been following all lead to a single person" (McManus, 2020, p. 255)

Standing next to Maeve at the time, Knox concluded that The Darkestmind and the intense guy who invited Phoebe to meet and kept looking for her were the same people. Maeve concludes that The Darkestmind is not only the same person as an intense guy, but he is also the creator of the "truth or dare" game that has been in charge of Bayview High by engaging in harmful activities to several people. Maeve recalls her first experience with Reddit sub-forum monitoring. She frequently observed that Darkestmind often mentioned Bayview High during his initial monitoring.

Also, the user spoke extensively about a game that Maeve was previously unaware of. Even Maeve can recall the smallest detail—saying "tick-tock"—which is typically referred to as the game creator's habit. User Darkestmind also often says 'tick tock' when he is active in the old forum that Simon used. Maeve assumes that if her conclusion is correct about that person, then the problems that have been going on about the game' truth or dare,' the mysterious man looking for Phoebe, and the username Darkestmind who keeps talking about Bayview point to the same person.

Several events transpired after Brandon's death, as evidenced by the preceding description of some data. Starting with Knox's suspicions regarding the irregularities in Brandon's death, a mysterious person continues looking for Phoebe, and suspicions that the person they are pursuing is the same person who has been making disturbances at Bayview High School. These things prompted Knox and Maeve to determine who was responsible for the chaos. This shows that Knox and Maeve are motivated to become investigators to ascertain the cause of a recent occurrence. Moreover, they were also victims in each of these incidents.

4.2.2 Evaluating The Clues

Clues play a crucial role in connecting investigators with perpetrators in mysteries. In order to solve the case, Knox and Maeve search for clues to identify the actual perpetrator, the victim's relationship with the perpetrator, and the motivation behind the crime.

4.2.2.1 Investigating The Identity of The Suspects

Following the explanation of the startling facts, Knox and Maeve look for information and clues to solve the problem. After a moment of consideration, Knox tells Maeve that the question they pose may be viewed from the wrong perspective. Supposedly, they must find the answer to what Brandon did to make someone want him to disappear, as stated in the quote below.

"Maybe we've been asking the question from the wrong angle." "Hmm?" She still looks a little fizzy. "What question?" "You asked why Intense Guy, in particular, would hate Brandon," I remind her. "But maybe we should be asking this instead: what could Brandon have done that would make *anybody* hate him enough to want him gone?" (McManus, 2020, p. 257)

Later, Knox tells Maeve about a conversation his parents had in which Brandon's father was implied to have tried to cover up something Brandon had done.

"I was just thinking about a conversation I overheard between my mom and dad. You and I weren't talking then, so I didn't mention it, but I've been wondering about it ever since. My parents were saying how ironic it would be if Mr. Weber sues the construction site, because of some lawsuit involving Brandon that Mom's company settled three years ago."." (McManus, 2020, p. 257)

Knox recalled hearing his parents discuss an issue involving Brandon's family that his mother's insurance company had handled. However, when Knox questioned his mother about it, she declined to respond and stated that it was an adult problem. Then, an idea occurred to Knox after he thought about the situation and decided to investigate Brandon and his relationship with the perpetrator. Knox, who was present with Maeve, expressed the urge for her to do something with her abilities.

"I want to know what Brandon that did three years ago was bad enough to get him involved in some kind of hush-hush settlement." I lean over and grab my mother's laptop case by its handle, hauling it onto the table between Maeve and me. "This is my mom's work computer." Maeve blinks, startled. "Are you suggesting we...hack it?" "No," I say. "That's ridiculous. I'm suggesting you hack it. I don't know how" (McManus, 2020, p. 258)

Knox is curious about what Brandon did that led him to lose his life in a fatal accident. Knox is interested in the perpetrator's relationship with Brandon and why he is also looking for Phoebe. Moreover, his father's business is currently assisting in the investigation of Brandon's death. Knox had given it considerable thought because he believed it was too coincidental. Then, he devised a plan to take his mother's work laptop and order Maeve to find it for information. Maeve was known to be proficient with technology, so Knox asked her to do something.

Maeve initially believed that she and Knox would do a hacking together, but Knox refused because he lacked computer expertise. Then, Knox stated that he intended for Maeve to hack Knox's mother's laptop by herself.

After hacking his mother's laptop, Knox and Maeve attempt to gain the true identity of the person responsible for the truth or dare game and Brandon's death.

They go to observe the residence of the intense guy they believe to be the cause of all the problems.

"It's almost eight thirty on Friday night, and we're settled into a window table at a coffee shop in Rolando Village. The coffee in this place is awful, but the view is ideal. We're almost directly across from the house we followed Intense Guy to from Callahan Park" (McManus, 2020, p. 271)

According to the quotation, Maeve and Knox are surveilling the person they believe to be the root of all their problems. They were inside a coffee shop at the time. The location is directly opposite the target's home, which belongs to an intense guy. Previously, after going to Callahan Park to find out who it was, they were able to find his address. In addition, they were presently observing Intense Guy's activities at his residence.

While monitoring the man's residence, Knox and Maeve look for additional information regarding the man's actual identity. In addition, Maeve attempts to access documents she obtained by hacking into Knox's mother's laptop. They continue to find clues that may help them establish a connection between the numerous occurrences. Then, Knox asks Maeve about the letter left for Phoebe by the man while searching for information on his identity. He wanted to know if there were any hints there. When Maeve attempts to show Knox a photograph of

the letter, Knox recalls something about the letter's font. Knox was again startled by what appeared to be a coincidence.

"He thrusts my phone at me, cutting off my next bewildered question. "I'm talking about the font. *How* the note was written. You know, this type that looks like handwriting but isn't? I've seen it before. The latest batch of death threats at Until Proven used it." (McManus, 2020, p. 273)

Maeve shows a photograph of the mysterious letter that Phoebe received. Knox noticed that the letter's font was identical to Eli's death threat letter. Knox continued by describing the font he was referencing. According to Knox, the font resembles handwriting but was designed by a computer. Knox subsequently claims to Maeve that the mysterious letter Phoebe received and Eli's death threat letter was written in the same font. Knox informs Maeve that Eli has been the target of numerous murder threats. Eli is a well-known lawyer at Bayview and Knox's boss at his part-time job. Because he frequently won major cases and gained notoriety, Eli often received murder threats. In the previous novel, he managed to clear Nate of murder allegations against Simon. Due to the new hint Knox obtained, he returned to figure out the relationship between all the events.

After what occurred with Brandon, Knox believes that nothing occurs by chance. Afterward, he intends to investigate the relationship between coincidences one to another. Knox later considers accessing his G-Drive file, which he used to store documents related to his work at Eli's law office, to learn more about the incident involving Eli's death threats.

"Sandeep thought the threats were related to the D'Agostino case, so I'm gonna...I have a bunch of stuff in my G drive." He angles the computer so I can see his screen. "This is a spreadsheet of everybody involved in the D'Agostino case. I'll check for David Jackson." (McManus, 2020, p. 273)

Knox recounts Maeve Eli's murder threats. Later, Knox remembered Sandeep's assertion that Eli's letter containing death threats had to be related to the D'Agostino case. Due to his part-time employment at Until Proven, Knox can access the information he stores on the G drive. Then, Knox opened his files and learned about the D'Agostino case. He showed it to Maeve. The document is a spreadsheet that lists the individuals implicated in the D'Agostino case. Then, Knox began tracking down the name David Jackson and searching for possible connections.

Subsequently making multiple attempts with different keywords, Knox found one result that matched the keyword he had inputted. The information pertains to a person named Ray Jackson.

"Officer Ray Jackson, defendant. Accused of assisting Sergeant Carl D'Agostino in blackmailing and framing seventeen innocent people for drug possession. Age: 24. Status: In jail, awaiting trial" (McManus, 2020, p. 274)

After accessing his G-Drive, which contained multiple documents, Knox discovered something. He found that Ray Jackson is involved in the D'Agostino case. The prosecution against D'Agostino, charged with extortion, included Officer Ray Jackson. Ray Jackson was accused of extortion and accusing seventeen people of drug possession. After it was determined that Ray Jackson assisted Sergeant D'Agostino in the case, he is currently incarcerated and awaiting trial.

After discovering this information, Knox investigated Ray Jackson's background. Due to his position in prison, he and Maeve believed Ray Jackson could not carry out a series of activities, including sending death threats and

inviting Phoebe to meet. Therefore, Knox searched for articles that could help him discover the link between the case and the person he sought.

"What does it say about Jackson?" Both our eyes race over the page, but mine are faster. I almost gasp when I see it. "Ironically, one of the at-risk youths receiving peer mentoring was Ray Jackson's younger brother Jared, 19, on probation last year for petty theft," I read. "Program officials said Jared Jackson excelled in the program and now works part-time for a local construction company." (McManus, 2020, p. 274)

The article referenced in the citation contains information about Ray Jackson. After perusing the article, it was discovered that Ray Jackson had a younger brother who was mentored by Carl D'Agostino, who is now a suspect along with Ray. According to the article, Ray Jackson's younger brother Jared Jackson has excellent peer mentoring skills, allowing him to join a local construction company as a part-time worker. After discovering that Ray had a younger sibling, Maeve and Knox viewed a photograph of Ray Jackson in the news article. Because Jared and Ray had a striking facial resemblance, they became persuaded that Jared Jackson was the intense guy they had been pursuing.

"Intense Guy is Jared Jackson," I breathe. "Ray Jackson's brother. He must be. The age is right, and the face is right. They're definitely related." "Yeah," Knox says. "And the note he left for Phoebe is identical to the ones we've been getting at Until Proven, so...Jared Jackson must *also* be the person who's been sending threats to Eli." His brow furrows. "Which makes a twisted kind of sense, I guess, since Eli put his brother in jail. But what's his problem with Phoebe?" (McManus, 2020, p. 275)

The quotation reveals the identity of the Intense Guy for whom they have been seeking. The intense guy was Jared Jackson. Knox continued by asserting that Jared was the most probable candidate. Both the letter Phoebe received and the threat made against Eli were written in the same font. Then, Maeve attempts to infer that Jared threatened Eli because he imprisoned her brother for extortion and

false allegations. However, Maeve is still unsure how the case relates to Phoebe and Brandon. She was also curious about Jared's role in Brandon's deaths and why he designed a game that claimed so many victims.

4.2.2.2 Looking for The Background Information of The Suspects

For a criminal act to be solved and a solution to be found, it is necessary for investigators to discover existing clues. The same thing applies to Knox and Maeve. After successfully identifying the criminals behind several incidents they faced, Maeve and Knox looked for clues and information related to the criminals to arrive at solutions and resolutions. After discovering Jared Jackson's real identity, Knox searched for personal information about him. Knox discovers an article about Jared's past that describes a case he has encountered.

"I just plugged Jared Jackson into Google, and there's a lot here." His eyes flick up and down the screen. "So, yeah, he was arrested for stealing from a convenience store right after he graduated high school. Got probation, did that mentoring program, started working for a construction company." (McManus, 2020, p. 275)

Knox was looking for Jared's Background on Google. Then, Knox discovered a lot of news and information concerning Jared Jackson's background. Jared Jackson was once detained for shoplifting in a supermarket. He received a suspended sentence after being detained. After getting a mentoring program, Jared Jackson worked for a construction company during the suspended sentence.

Knox observed Jared carrying a bag pack and preparing to go while searching for more information on him. This was accompanied by a PingMe alert informing Maeve that the Reddit site she monitored was being updated. Maeve was shocked to see this when she read Jared's message because it appeared suspicious. This is evident from the following quotation.

"He has a backpack and he's getting into the car." "Knox, I can see him perfectly fine—" A PingMe alert flashes across my screen. *The website you are monitoring has been updated*. I minimized the document from Mrs. Myers's computer and navigated to the Vengeance Is Mine forum. *Tick-tock, time's up. Guess I'll just fucking do it myself.*—Darkestmind" (McManus, 2020, p. 277)

The quotation above reveals that Maeve visits the sub-forum "Vengeance is Mine," where Jared frequently posts about getting his revenge. While reading Jared's latest post, Maeve is shocked that Jared looks like he's about to do something terrible. The post says that Jared will do everything himself. Maeve believes he is going to do something terrible. Maeve takes the initiative to follow Jared after sensing he is about to commit something terrible. While following Jared, Knox searches for hints about Jared and his connection to the recent incidents.

Then, while digging through his mother's documents that Maeve had hacked before, Knox uncovers shocking information about Phoebe.

"Mr. Lance Weber acknowledges that on October seventh, which was Take Your Child to Work Day at Eagle Granite Manufacturing Corporation, his thirteen-year-old son was present on the manufacturing floor. Despite repeated admonitions to stay away from equipment, Mr. Weber's minor son mounted a forklift and operated its controls for what one worker reported as a five-minute period. That same forklift jammed shortly thereafter while transporting the slab of concrete that ultimately crushed Andrew Lawton. "That was Brandon. It has to be," I say. "Messing around with a forklift that killed Phoebe's father. Shit. Brandon fucking Weber" (McManus, 2020, p. 280)

The quotation illustrates the truth of Phoebe's father's death. When Maeve hacks Knox's mother's laptop, she uncovers a wealth of information about various cases involving the Brandon family. The death of Phoebe's father is one of the cases Knox reads in certain documents. The case began when Brandon's father celebrated a special occasion on October seventh. The day Brandon's father

designated for children to take them to work. On that special day, everyone was permitted to bring kids to work. Brandon was also invited to visit his father at work at the time. He was thirteen years old. Brandon's father was careless then and oblivious that his son was operating a forklift. Brandon operated the forklift for five minutes while operating the machine's control panels. The forklift that Brandon used and operated failed shortly after that. Andrew Lawton was struck by a stone slab shortly after the forklift transporting the slab dropped it. Andrew Lawton is Phoebe's father.

After learning this information, Knox understood why Brandon had to be the victim in the truth or dare game. When Jared came to find Phoebe, the circumstances made logic. Knox begins to be skeptical of Phoebe. However, Maeve stated that Phoebe could not have been involved because she did not recognize that person. Maeve also wonders, if Phoebe is involved, why she would be the target of a truth or dare game that truly harms her, given that she is the victim of school bullying. In addition, Phoebe appears to be ignorant of the details surrounding her father's death because she is so close to Brandon. Maeve senses that something is still awry.

"Maeve. Do you think there's any way she could've..." "No," Maeve says instantly. "You didn't let me finish." "Phoebe had no clue about this," she says urgently. "She can't have. She was hooking up with Brandon! She'd never do that if she knew he'd had anything to do with her father's accident. Plus, she wouldn't spread horrible gossip about herself" (McManus, 2020, p. 281)

After following him for some time, Maeve and Knox are startled to see

Jared's car enter the restaurant where Eli and Ashton are having their rehearsal
dinner before their wedding. According to the previous data, Eli frequently
receives murder threats from Jared. Maeve had thought it was all a coincidence,

but Knox reminded her that there were no coincidences because everything that had occurred was related. Notably, so now that everything is accessible through technology.

"Okay, no," Maeve says, her voice tight. "This has to be a coincidence. He's not going to Ashton and Eli's rehearsal dinner. How would he even know where it is?" "You're always saying there are no coincidences," I remind her. Pressure starts to build behind my eyes. "And people can find anything online. Haven't we just proven that?" (McManus, 2020, p. 283)

Maeve and Knox were extremely worried when they saw Jared get out of his car and head to the restaurant because everyone they knew personally was at Eli's rehearsal dinner party. Those who panicked at the time attempted to call someone, including Eli, but no one answered. In response to their suspicion and worry, they decided to record Jared while following him. In addition, Knox contacted the police to report what Jared intended to do.

"We need to go, too." Maeve says. She grabs my arm when I lower my phone. "No, keep recording. But follow him, okay? I'm going to call the police and tell them...I don't even know. Something. I'll be right behind you after that." (McManus, 2020, p. 284)

Maeve and Knox had anticipated that Jared would do something toward Eli there. Maeve and Knox observed that Jared had put something in a bag and placed it in the arboretum as they ursued. An arboretum is a location where diverse plant species are planted in a specific area and utilized for research. After Jared went, Maeve and Knox checked what was inside the bag. Maeve found something round and metal. When Maeve and Knox checked the bag's contents, he realized the plate was a bomb.

"God, I wish I'd paid more attention to my father when he used to explain how stuff works. "I can't be sure, but this looks a lot like somebody's idea of a homemade bomb." My voice cracks on the last word. Maeve's eyes get wide and scared. "What do we do?" ...

"There's a bomb in the arboretum! Everybody get inside!" When an explosion rips through the air, the noise is deafening" (McManus, 2020, p. 286)

Then, Knox and Maeve attempt their best in light of this realization. They yelled at all of the restaurant's customers. As predicted, the contents of the bag were a homemade bomb. Maeve believes the explosion was an act Jared did to retaliate against Eli.

As described in the preceding data, Maeve and Knox determined the perpetrator's identity. Subsequently, they received information that could be used to understand the incident. Even though Maeve and Knox do not know the motivation behind the perpetrator's action, they identified those responsible for the incident involving them and some of their classmates.

4.2.2.3 The Suspects' Confession to The Police

As mentioned in the data above, Maeve and Knox reported Jared's crimes to the police, who arrested him. Jared was brought into custody by the police to answer questions about his bombing actions. This prompted him to disclose what he had been doing the entire time. Jared's confession to the police contains some shocking details. This relates to the truth-or-dare game he has been playing and its relation to his desire for vengeance against Eli.

"We've spent the past hour interviewing Mr. Jackson about his motivations for tonight's events at Talia's Restaurant. We also seized his phone, which he claims has months' worth of correspondence with you. He says he met you in an online forum called Vengeance Is Mine in late December, that the two of you bonded over family tragedies, and eventually agreed to, as he put it, *take out* one another's enemies. Mr. Jackson says he fulfilled his end of the bargain when he executed a texting-based Truth or Dare game at Bayview High that led to Brandon Weber's death earlier this month." (McManus, 2020, p. 299)

The quotation depicts a detective visiting Phoebe after the bombing at the arboretum. According to the police, the primary culprit Jared Jackson was indeed arrested. Phoebe had to wait for her sister, who was getting treatment in the hospital. Thus, she was not present when Maeve and Knox were there. The police inform Phoebe that Jared Jackson's statement claims that Phoebe was involved in a case of revenge. Jared and Phoebe are accused of conspiring to exact revenge.

According to Jared's statement during his interview with the police, Jared and Phoebe had an agreement in which they aided each other in taking out their respective enemies. They meet at a revenge forum called Vengeance is Mine on the Reddit platform. Jared told the police that they had agreed to carry out an agreement in which Jared would assist Phoebe in getting rid of Brandon, and Phoebe would help him in getting rid of Eli. He also asserts they are close because they believe they share the same family fate. Later, Jared also revealed to the police that he had played Truth or Dare to assist Phoebe in getting rid of Brandon.

The authorities added to their statement about Jared's interview and told Phoebe about that. This is evident from the following quotation:

"The actions that led to Brandon Weber's death were the result of a Dare issued to him. Mr. Jackson made use of his background in construction work to remove supports from beneath that landing, causing Brandon to fall to his death. In return, you were supposed to help Mr. Jackson get revenge on Eli Kleinfelter for putting Mr. Jackson's brother in jail. However, Mr. Jackson says you fell out of touch after Brandon Weber's death and became unresponsive to his attempts to contact you. Thus, tonight's attack. He decided to take matters into his own hands and conclude the deal without you." (McManus, 2020, p. 299)

According to the police, Brandon Weber's death was caused by his participation in a Bayview High School "truth or dare" game. The police added that Jared used his construction knowledge to remove supports beneath Brandon,

causing him to collapse. Jared has experience in the construction industry and a basic understanding of building structures. In exchange for his assistance in exacting vengeance against Brandon, Phoebe was asked to assist Jared in exacting revenge against Eli, who had imprisoned Jared's brother due to false accusations and extortion. After Brandon Weber's death, Jared claimed that Phoebe stopped responding to his attempts and could not contact her. Jared ultimately decided to carry out the agreement without Phoebe and exact his vengeance on Eli using explosives.

Phoebe denies the accusations made by the police after hearing them. Phoebe repeatedly confirmed to the police that she did not know Jared and had only recently known his name.

"I'm going to be sick. "No. That's not...I wouldn't in a million years do anything like that," I say. An image flashes through my brain of Brandon in my apartment, assaulting me and hurling insults. "Why would I? Brandon and I aren't....we didn't get along all the time, but he wasn't my *enemy*"." (McManus, 2020, p. 300)

As evidenced by the preceding citation, Phoebe claimed she did not comprehend all the accusations against her. She denied everything the authorities claimed. She has just learned the cause of Brandon's demise. She was ever close to Brandon before the truth-or-dare game began. She had never imagined doing such a thing, even though Brandon frequently disturbed her after revealing a secret about her. Phoebe repeatedly refuted what the authorities claimed because she did not wish to do so. Even though Brandon had attacked and hurt Phoebe then, Phoebe stated that it had never occurred to her to harm Brandon.

Detective Mendoza, questioning Phoebe and repeatedly receiving responses from her, eventually told her that Brandon's actions had caused her father's death.

Phoebe was so stunned by everything at the time. However, she still claimed that she was unaware of the situation. This keeps making Detective Mendoza curious.

"Everything's coming unglued now: tears fall, my heart accelerates, and my voice shakes. "I didn't do any of this." "Then how would Jared know that Brandon was involved in your father's accident, Phoebe?" Detective Mendoza asks. Not like he's mad. More like he's genuinely curious." (McManus, 2020, p. 301)

After the argument between Detective Mendoza and Phoebe ended, Emma, who was being treated then, disclosed a surprising detail regarding her relationship with Jared.

"I blink, utterly confused. Did I just say that? Detective Mendoza's head swivels from me to Emma's bed. My eyes follow. She's sitting up, pale but alert. Her hand is folded in my mother's. "I told him," She repeats in a low voice. "And I told him I was Phoebe." (McManus, 2020, p. 302)

This quote depicts Emma's confession to the authorities. Emma said quietly that she was the one who informed Jared that she intended to take action against someone who had harmed her family. Emma also stated that she used her sister's identity and misrepresented herself to Jared as Phoebe. Emma said that she acted this way due to her conflicts with Phoebe.

4.2.2.3.1 The Relationship Between the Two Suspects

Emma explains her relationship with Jared and why she was involved in the incident after she confessed to Detective Mendoza.

"Not like you said. I met him online, and I pretended to be my sister because I was mad at her for...other stuff." She flicks a glance at me, and I flush. "And I told him what happened to my dad, and he—he said we could help one another." Emma's voice trembles as she pulls her hand from Mom's and starts fumbling with the edge of her hospital blanket. "But he never mentioned Eli." (McManus, 2020, p. 302)

Emma states the authorities. Emma claimed that the truth differed from what the officers had told her sister earlier. Emma admits that she and Jared met online.

Emma was displeased with her younger sibling, so she assumed her identity.

Emma stated that her accord with Jared had no bearing on the anger. Emma was angry with her sister because Phoebe had cheated on her with her ex. When they were connected online, Emma informed Jared about her father's death case. Jared continues by offering to help Emma resolve her problem. Emma continued by stating that Jared never brought up Eli.

Then, Emma reveals to her lawyer, following her confession to Detective Mendoza, what occurred between her and Jared. Emma claims everything began when she attempted to review her mother's files.

"It's true, what Jared said about how we met online. I was going through a bad time. I'd just found out that Phoebe and my exboyfriend hooked up, and I was really upset." "But then I was looking through Mom's files, trying to figure out how much money we have set aside for college, and I found the settlement paperwork from Dad's accident. I was...so angry." (McManus, 2020, p. 323)

The data above tells that Emma's involvement started when she became quite upset with Phoebe. Emma learned at that moment that Phoebe had slept with her ex-boyfriend. Emma also confirmed that the online meeting she had with Jared was true. Emma said she intended to check her mother's files at the time. She was curious about how much money her mother had collected for the college tuition of her daughter and son. Emma unexpectedly discovers her father's settlement documents while looking for all her mother's documents. Emma found a document that detailed her father's death and the restitution the victim's family received. Because of her issue with Phoebe, Emma was upset and lost control. She was upset at everything that had happened to her at that time.

Then, because Emma could not think clearly that day, she decided to do something that had only briefly entered her mind.

"When I read about what Brandon did, I hated him so much that I couldn't think straight. I wanted—I don't even know. I wanted to *do* something. I remembered Simon Kelleher's old revenge forum, and I went looking for it. It had moved, but I found it eventually. I made up a name and signed on. I met Jared there, and we started talking. We sort of—bonded, I guess. He suggested we talk offline with ChatApp. We used real names then. Well, I used Phoebe's name." (McManus, 2020, p. 324)

Emma continued confessing to her lawyer. Emma asserted that she had come to hate Brandon even more after reading the chronology in the paperwork. Emma admitted that she was struggling to think clearly at that very moment. Then, driven by her feelings of rage and loathing, Emma wanted to take action. Emma thought it was unfair that Brandon could keep on with his activities despite doing terrible things to others. Emma attempted to find Simon Kelleher's prior forum for retaliation because she could not think clearly. After Emma looked for it, the forum moved from 4chan to Reddit. Even after the forum had moved, Emma could still find it. Then, Emma signed up, gave herself the username Bayview2020, and started participating in the forum discussions.

Later, Emma told her lawyer where she had first met Jared. At that moment, Jared replies to Emma's forum posts as Darkestmind. Jared proposed moving to Chatapp after the two got along well after exchanging comments. After moving, Emma and Jared could formally acquaint themselves and initiate a dialogue by exchanging their respective names. Emma used her sister's name to get Jared to call her Phoebe since she was also annoyed with her sister at that moment. Jared persisted in his search for Phoebe due to this reason.

Emma then returned to discuss how she and Jared had made a deal. Emma proceeds to describe how she met Jared and how they became friends. Emma,

angry at that time, poured out everything she had experienced about her father's death caused by Brandon. Emma says that Jared is a good listener. Jared listened to what Emma was telling him. Emma claims that Jared spoke things about Brandon and that he noted Brandon never cared about consequences. After hearing Emma's story, Jared promised to help her find a solution for Brandon. Jared tried to assist Emma, but he placed a requirement on him: Emma must assist Jared in performing a similar action.

"I unloaded about everything to him," Emma says. "He was a good listener." She makes a face, as though it pains her to admit that. "Jared said Brandon sounded like the kind of person who'd never had to face a consequence in his life. And that he could help me figure out a way to get even, if I'd help him do the same." (McManus, 2020, p. 324)

Subsequently, Jared told his story about someone who hurt him and his family, just like Emma did. This is as stated in the following quotation.

"All Jared told me was that someone had ruined his brother's life, and his mom killed herself because of it. I felt horrible for him." Emma flushes and looks down at the table. "Jared said we could start with me. He thought we should do something to...hurt Brandon. So he wouldn't be able to play football anymore, and then he'd know what it's like to lose something important." "Did you agree to that?" Martin asks evenly. Emma licks her lips. "Yes," she says quietly, briefly closing her eyes at the shocked noise my mother can't hold back." (McManus, 2020, p. 324)

In her story, Emma continues to characterize her relationship with Jared. Jared informs Emma that he has been harmed. Jared stated that someone had ruined his elder brother's life, prompting his mother to take her own life. As Emma heard the story, she was devastated by Jared's misfortune. Emma continued by stating that Jared had suggested that she begin everything. Jared then proposed injuring Brandon to prevent him from playing football. Jared advises Emma to do something for Brandon so that he may experience what it is like to lose something

extraordinarily important in his life. Emma agrees to Jared's proposal, indirectly involving her in an agreement. So, what Emma has said is the same as Jared's previous statement to the police.

Maeve and Knox were able to determine the identity of the creator of the game truth-or-dare, who is also a suspect in Brandon's murder, after accumulating various clues and identifying some of the information from these clues. Maeve and Knox found out who was behind all the bad things that happened to them and stopped the murder case against Eli. This is because all the issues that have happened so far are connected. In addition, having successfully uncovered all clues and identified the perpetrators, they turned the case over to the police so that the motives behind all these incidents could be revealed.

4.2.3 The Motive of The Game Creator

As explained in the previous discussion, Jared and Emma agree on something. The agreement they reached resulted in considerable commotion. Not only does it harm one individual, but the confusion forces others to get involved who are not affected by the same issues. Also, the impact of Jared and Emma's agreement ruined several people's lives. After interviews conducted with Emma and Jared, it was proven they had motives for creating the game. A primary motive drives the game's creator, and an additional underlying motive influences the perpetrator's decision to pick a particular player for participation.

4.2.3.1 Taking A Revenge

As previously expounded, the primary motivation of Jared and Emma is to seek vengeance. After receiving confirmation from Emma, her lawyer inquired once more about the possibility of a truth-or-dare game involving several students

at Bayview High. Emma subsequently revealed that Jared gave the idea of creating that game.

"And who came up with the Truth or Dare game?" "Jared," Emma says. "He liked the idea of using Simon's...legacy, he called it, to create a gossip-based game that Bayview High students wouldn't be able to resist. The idea was to build the game slowly, until it got to the point that Brandon would take a Dare without question." (McManus, 2020, p. 325)

Based on what Emma said, the suggestion to do the game was from Jared.

Jared seems to like Simon's legacy because Bayview High used to be obsessed with it. Jared liked the idea of creating a gossip-based game that would get all the attention of the Bayview High students. To prevent anyone from suspecting their action to take revenge against Brandon, Jared proposed expanding the game gradually until Brandon could accept the challenge without hesitation.

4.2.3.2 Proving Ability

In addition to the primary motivation, which is centered on utilizing a game for the purpose of revenge, there exists an additional motive that captivates

Jared's attention in terms of selecting players to participate. Previously, before they started playing, Jared told Emma to think of some names that could be used in the game. Jared thought the names were those of people who liked being in the spotlight. Emma then names two Bayview High School students who might like this attention-getting thing.

"And did you provide other names to Jared? People you thought would play along and take Dares?" Emma nods. "Yes. I tutor Sean, and I used to drive Jules to school, so I was pretty sure they'd love the attention." (McManus, 2020, p. 326)

In the above quote, it is clear that Emma's lawyer asked her to explain how the game's initial system worked. Emma says that Jared asked her to send him some names the game might use. Emma came up with the name Phoebe first. At the time, she was upset with her sister, so she told Jared a secret about Phoebe. Then Emma Returned and said that she had suggested other possible players. Emma thought of Sean and Jules because she knew how much they liked being the center of attention. Emma is sure that they will pick a dare.

Then, Emma told her lawyer again that Maeve's participation in the game they planned to create was Jared's idea. Jared had an ulterior motive for including Maeve on the player roster. In the quotation, Emma tells her lawyer that Jared wanted to include Maeve in a game he was making because of her role in the Simon case. Jared considers Maeve intelligent because she can uncover Simon's motives for disclosing gossip on the 'about that' application. Besides, Maeve, with her expertise, revealed the motive behind Simon's death at that time. So this reason made Jared want to fool and deceive people, which Simon could not do. He does this to demonstrate to Maeve that he is cleverer than Simon. Jared wants to show his ability to do things that he thinks are even better than what Simon did before. Jared wanted Maeve to realize that he could fool her through this game.

In this section, the two perpetrators' motivation for creating a game is to exact revenge on Brandon and trick other people so that their actions are not considered murder. Additionally, through this game, one of the criminals wants to show his ability to conduct crimes without revealing himself so that one of the players cannot quickly identify the criminals as she had in the past. However, this

did not detract from the fact that the prominent motive of the game was designed to exact retribution by causing someone to lose the most valuable thing in his life.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

By presenting the research's conclusions in this chapter, the researcher intends to provide readers with information and opportunities to learn quickly about the findings. After thoroughly analyzing the mystery surrounding the truthor-dare game in Karen M. McManus' novel *One of Us Is Next*, it is possible to conclude that all issues began with establishing the game at Bayview High School. Besides, the characters follow a specific pattern to identify the culprits and the motives behind the game. This includes a crime that has occurred, the analysis of clues, the suspect's interview, and the disclosure of motive.

The action of crime occurs when the game of Truth or Dare puts several people as targets within the game. Then, the crime escalated as some of the targets experienced the impacts of the game, including bullying, friendship and sisterhood rifts, and even death. Since many things have occurred because of the game, some victims are motivated to identify the actual perpetrator and the motivation behind it. Maeve and Knox are encouraged to investigate the truth behind the 'truth or dare' game.

As described previously, Motivated investigators seek these facts by analyzing case-related clues. The analysis of these clues includes investigating the suspect's identity and looking for information about the suspect's background. Maeve and Knox had previously discovered that the creator of the truth or dare game and the suspicious person who kept looking for Phoebe were the same. However, they do not know the person's real identity. Therefore, Maeve and Knox

used several methods to investigate the suspect's identity. These methods include analyzing clues about Brandon's death and his past, identifying several people who might be related, hacking Knox's mother's computer to obtain information, and following a suspicious person whom they assume is the game creator. Maeve and Knox continued their investigation after determining the suspect identity by searching for background information, such as investigating the criminal's past and his connection to one or more cases.

After gathering some information about the suspect and stopping the attempts of the suspect they were pursuing to murder someone, Maeve and Knox contacted and reported their findings to the police. The police interviewed suspects because they had more authority than Maeve and Knox. The police then received information from Jared about his motivations for committing his crimes, revealing all the facts, including Jared's motivation for creating the game and his agreement with Phoebe's sister, Emma. Then, it was disclosed that Jared and Emma had agreed to take revenge together. After discussing their problems online, they decide to assist one another in taking vengeance. They agreed to take vengeance because they believed their lives had been destroyed by Brandon and Eli, the intended targets of their retribution. Emma then disclosed that she and Jared chose the 'truth or dare' game that prompted all the incidents because they wanted to build their revenge slowly so that no one would discover the cause of Brandon's death.

After learning all the facts surrounding their reasons for taking action, the true motivation for the revenge becomes clear. All the incidents are motivated by a desire for vengeance against someone who destroyed their life. Brandon ruined

Emma's life because he killed her father, and now he can live life as usual, whereas Eli ruined Jared's life because he imprisoned his elder brother, who then made his mother commit suicide. In addition to pursuing vengeance, Jared also desires to prove his abilities in doing his action to Maeve, so he selects her as one of his game targets. Maeve solved the mystery surrounding Simon's death as in the previous novel. Jared wants Maeve to recognize his superiority over Simon because he can effectively fool her instead of revealing what he did. However, as previously explained, Maeve and Knox identified him as the suspect from the mysterious "truth or dare" game that triggered all the incidents at Bayview High.



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UIN SUNAN AMPEL S U R A B A Y A