



READING GUIDE

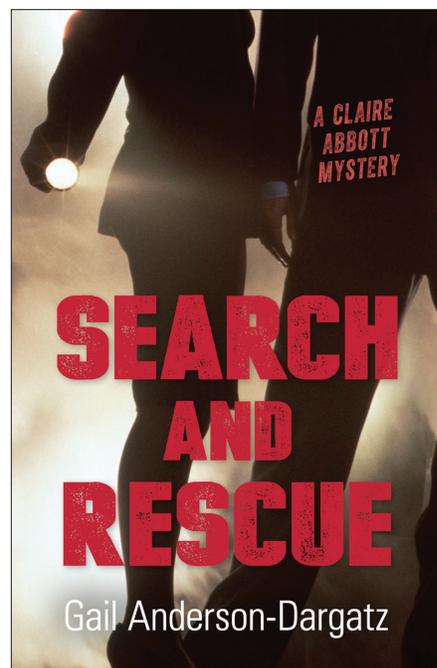
SEARCH AND RESCUE GAIL ANDERSON-DARGATZ

Reading level: 3.0

Interest level: Adult

Themes: mystery, murder, journalism, kidnapping,
newspaper reporter, female sleuth, psychic

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Summary

Reporter Claire Abbott is almost always the first on the scene of an accident. She attributes it to an odd sixth sense that guides her to the place where she'll get the story. One night, on her way to a date with Trevor, a handsome firefighter, she feels the familiar twinge. Compelled to follow it, Claire ditches her date and instead turns her car in the direction her gut dictates.

She takes a few photos of a car on fire, and then, in talking with the fire chief afterward, learns about that evening's *real* story: a young girl is missing after having gone for a jog on a nearby mountain earlier that day. When fire chief Jim Wallis tells Claire the girl won't make it through the night's freezing temperatures, Claire decides she must assist the search-and-rescue team.

At the search-and-rescue base at the mountain bottom, Claire and her questions are made to feel unwelcome by search organizer Matt Holden, a strong, silent man of similar age with whom Claire feels a degree of sexual tension. While interviewing Matt, Claire unexpectedly has a vision of Amber. It happens when she picks up the girl's basketball jacket. With the jacket in her hands, Claire's vision is clear: she knows without a doubt that the girl is up on the mountain somewhere, unconscious and in danger. Reluctantly, and only because police dogs and searchers haven't yet had any luck, Matt agrees to take Claire up the mountain in search of the girl. When they find only drag marks in the dirt in the place where Claire swears she saw the girl, Matt scorns Claire's "seeing," tells her not to waste any more of his time, and asks her to leave the search-and-rescue camp.

Claire retreats to her mother's house to discuss the case, and also to inquire more deeply into her mother's own visions. The older woman has contributed valuable information about missing people over the years, yet has always been labeled a crackpot for her claims that she can view events remotely. She tells Claire how to tap into more and clearer visions, and encourages her daughter to visit Amber's mother to see if she can gain any new insight from being inside the girl's home. The two women also discuss why Claire keeps standing Trevor up on their dates.

Upon visiting Amber Miller's house and explaining her intentions, the girl's mother, Helen, allows Claire to hold her daughter's necklace. Claire has a second clear vision: Amber is inside an



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old van, being driven on a logging road. Helen confirms that the van Claire sees belongs to Amber's ex-boyfriend, Doug Conner. Certain that Matt Holden won't dismiss her this time, Claire heads back to SAR basecamp with Helen, where she is surprised to be joined by her own mother in solidarity. Despite their pleas, Matt ejects Claire and her mother from the camp, and so they decide to go it alone, without any help from the searchers.

Together in Claire's car, mother and daughter set off the logging roads, slipping and sliding dangerously in the fresh-fallen snow and eventually cornering the kidnapper, who indeed turns out to be Doug Conner. The kid is stoned and holding a shotgun, but Amber is still alive and breathing in the back despite having been heavily drugged. Chasing ensues, with Claire ultimately running the van off the road, and Doug transferring Amber to Claire's car to continue his flight. Claire keeps on with the chase, this time in the van. She cuts Doug Conner off, causing an accident. While the boy is unconscious, Claire and her mother transfer Amber to the van and drive back down the mountain to the search base.

Matt agrees that maybe Claire's visions are useful after all. When he invites her out for dinner, Claire realizes that Matt, and not Trevor, is the right energetic match for her.

Questions for Discussion

1. Talk about the importance of a book's first line. What do you think of the first line of *Search And Rescue*? With a partner, gather several books (or find them online), and record the first line of each. As a group, compare all the first lines you found. Discuss which ones make you want to read further. Rework "weak" lines to make them stronger or more engaging.
2. How does Claire Abbott's job, as described in chapter 1, fit with what you already know about the way the media works? Is there anything that surprises you, or that doesn't mesh with your existing schema of reporters?
3. In chapter 2, when Claire interviews Matt Holden for the first time, she is aware of the man's seeming impatience with reporters. Over time, however, she has developed a thick skin. She also loves her job. What would be the biggest challenge for you, personally, if you were to spend time in a reporter's shoes?
4. A good story shows the main character's fear and/or weakness early on. At the end of chapter 2, we see how deeply Claire believes she is needed to solve this case. What's at stake for her? Why is it such a big deal?
5. What other book or movie characters do you know who have some sort of psychic or extra-sensory abilities? Describe them. What makes ESP and psychic abilities such a compelling storyline for readers?
6. At the end of chapter 4, Matt insists that Claire leave the search-and-rescue camp. For what reasons might he feel so strongly about her not being there?
7. In chapter 5, when Claire turns up at her mother's house to debrief after her first experience with a vision, she and her mother talk about how Claire has now stood Trevor up for the third time. Claire can't figure it out: the guy is good-looking, kind *and* he's a firefighter. What's not to love? Make a list of the 20 most important qualities in a life partner. Now





narrow that list down to ten. Now to five. What drops away? Discuss or write about your findings.

8. When Claire's mother shares her tips for how to engage with a vision—by holding something that was frequently used by a victim—Claire feels self-conscious. "You're asking me to meditate on the object?" she asks, pointing out that if she does so, Amber Miller's mother is for sure going to think she's crazy (ch. 5). What Western bias worries Claire? With a small group, discuss (or research) meditation's benefits. As you see it, is it bunk? If not, where does this bias come from?
9. Conflict is what keeps a story moving along and makes things interesting. Typically, story plot follows one of four basic patterns of conflict:
 1. *Person against nature*, where tension comes from the character's battle against strong forces of nature.
 2. *Person against person*, where the tension comes through the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist.
 3. *Person against society*. Here, tension comes from the main character's struggle against some societal factor that must be overcome.
 4. *Person against self*, where tension is created as the protagonist faces internal conflict; the hero has two or more courses of action and must decide which course to take.

What conflict pattern does *Search And Rescue* follow? Are there more than one, depending on which part of the story you look at? Which one predominates?

10. In her quest to ensure Amber Miller's safety, Claire makes some risky choices in pursuing the girl's kidnapper farther up the mountain during an early-season snowstorm. How far would you go to protect someone? Would you willingly endanger four lives in order to save one? How do you weigh things differently for a virtual stranger versus someone you love very much? How do you, as a responsible and compassionate human being, make those kinds of decisions?
11. Which character in *Search And Rescue* would you like to know more about? Imagine you have the opportunity to take one of them out for coffee or tea. Who would you choose, and why? What sorts of things are you wondering about their life?
12. When Claire finally does catch up with Doug Conner in chapter 9, she informs him that kidnapping his ex-girlfriend is certainly not going to make her love him again. What observations would you add, if you had the opportunity to share some life wisdom with someone's jealous ex?
13. Describe Claire's character arc throughout the story. What lessons does she learn? What events help drive her to this learning?
14. Like plot, setting and characters, theme is an important literary element in any novel. Theme is an idea or message about life revealed in a work of literature. What do you understand to be the theme of this book? Is there more than one?

