



READING GUIDE

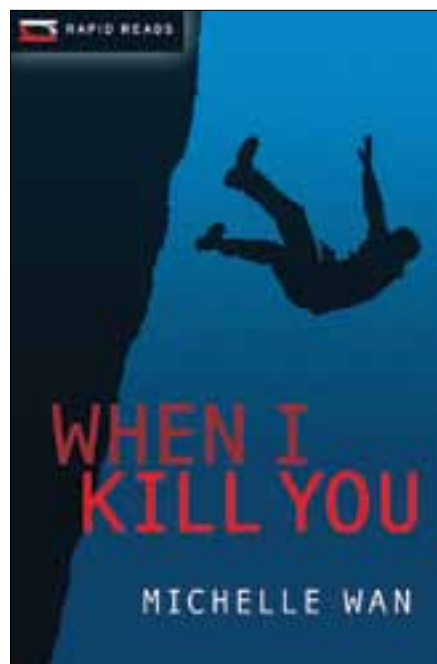
WHEN I KILL YOU MICHELLE WAN

Reading level: 3.8

Interest level: Adult

Themes: mystery, humor, blackmail

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Summary

Twenty-six-year-old Gina Lopez works at the post office by day and wows the crowds in the ring on weekends. As Lady Lava, Gina mud wrestles at Al's Roadhouse & Pit in her hometown of Franks, Ontario. Gina is fit, determined and strong—and eager to climb to the Vegas show circuit. But Gina doesn't just wrestle for kicks. It helps her leave behind her marriage to Chico, a gambling womanizer who caused more heartache than he was worth. Chico died a month ago when his attempt to throw Gina off a cliff backfired. Instead of Gina going over the edge, his wife's quick reflexes led to him being the one on the losing end. *He should have known better*, she reflects. *You don't shove a mud wrestler.*

Gina wants to settle Chico's gambling debts and move on with her life. The \$250,000 life insurance payment that's coming as a result of his death will help her do this.

When a stranger by the name of Marcia Beekland turns up after a wrestling match with incriminating footage of what looks like Gina deliberately throwing her husband off a cliff, Gina starts to worry. Especially when she learns the woman knows about Chico's life insurance policy. Suddenly Gina looks bad without having done anything wrong. And Marcia knows it. She puts the squeeze on Gina, telling her she'll go to the police with the video unless Gina agrees to kill a man that Marcia wants out of her own life—Stanley Beekland.

And so begins Gina's weeklong string of attempts on Stanley's life. She casually consults her bartender pal, Jimmy, for tips on how to off someone, finally settling for the air-filled hypodermic. But that doesn't work. Nor does sneaking into Stanley's place of work and bashing his head in with a hammer, or running him over with her car. Gina's just not cut out to be a killer. But Marcia certainly is. The woman's calculated guidance gives Gina the creeps, adding to her already staggering load of guilt and the loss of her self-respect in even considering doing what Marcia's asking her to do.

But unless she wants life in prison, she's got no choice.

As Gina makes her way through the final setup for killing Stanley—a wire strung across the basement stair—she makes a discovery of her own: Marcia and Stanley Beekland aren't spouses. They're siblings. When Marcia shows up dead at the bottom of the cellar stairs instead of Stanley, Gina is confused.



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As Stanley explains his own devious plans for killing off his sister, the story behind Marcia's desperate ploy to kill her brother unfolds itself to Gina. The Beeklands' mother, whom Marcia was caring for, is ailing. She's also very rich and about to undergo a high-risk surgery. If she dies, she leaves behind a couple million for Stanley and Marcia to share...unless there's only one of them.

With Marcia dead and Stanley waiting for his mother's millions, Gina leaves Franks for good. Her friend Jimmy catches up with her after a couple of years, and becomes her trainer and coach. Gina wrestles her way into the big leagues just in time to have Stanley hunt her down with another offer: against all odds, the old lady pulled through the surgery. Would Gina be interested in another job?

Questions for Discussion

1. Gina Lopez excels at mud wrestling, partly because she wrestled in high school. Were or are you similarly excellent at any sports? Comment on the positive spinoffs of being involved in sport at an early age. Are there negatives, too?
2. Female mud wrestling: Demeaning? Empowering? Or merely entertaining?
3. Wild Woman Wanda delivers a head butt that stops Lady Lava cold in the first chapter. Have you heard stories in the media lately about head injuries? What do you know about them? As you see it, should greater precautions be taken to protect the head in sports like wrestling and martial arts? Explain.
4. Being a mud wrestler on weekends is a significant departure from working for the post office. Do you know any people with unique weekend hobbies? What about yourself? Do you engage in pastimes that would surprise your coworkers?
5. Gina knew Chico was a womanizer and a gambler when she married him. Why do people tend to think their loved ones will change their ways for them?
6. What does the fact that Gina tolerated Chico's repeated infidelity tell us about her character?
7. During her discussion with Marcia Beekland, Gina realizes that the problem centers on money. "It always boiled down to money" (ch. 3). Why does money trap us so?
8. In chapter 3, Marcia explains to Gina that she—Gina—is going to kill Stanley. Write a list of ten things that would go through an average person's mind as they contemplate the fact that they're being blackmailed into taking another person's life.
9. Gina describes Jimmy, her good friend, in some detail in chapter 4. Write a few sentences describing someone significant in your life.
10. At the end of chapter 5, Gina contemplates how thoroughly she's in Marcia's grip: "She really had me up against the ropes." What does this figure of speech mean? Can you think of any others that mean the same thing?
11. Gina is blown away by the fact that she's being forced into killing someone, but at no point in the story does she try to explain to Marcia what really happened that day on the cliff. Do you see this as a reasonable reaction, or would you have tried to explain?
12. In chapter 9, Gina gets Stanley drunk at the bar and realizes his true nature. "Everything about him was so buttoned-down but wanting to come out, he was bursting like





a sausage.” A comparison like this that uses the words like or as is called a simile. Can you think of another simile that would describe Stanley Beekland? Have you found examples of other similes in *When I Kill You*?

13. Discuss the author’s way of setting Gina up for failure after failure when she’s trying to kill Stanley. What purpose does this kind of structure serve in creating a mystery?
14. In chapter 13, Gina—at age twenty-six—moves away from Franks, the town where she grew up. As you see it, is it important for us to leave home in order to grow up?
15. Gina runs. It’s how she copes with her problems. “Sometimes I went jogging, not for fitness but because it was a way of running out on life” (ch. 13). How do you cope?
16. Through all this drama, Gina realizes she can’t trust herself: she tried on four separate occasions to kill a man she didn’t even know. What happens when we lose faith in ourselves?

