

Beautiful Player Study Guide

Beautiful Player by Christina Lauren

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Plot Summary

In *Beautiful Player* by Christina Lauren, Hanna Bergstrom, age twenty-four, is a driven PhD candidate immersed in biological research until her brother Jensen and her father Johan visit her in New York City. They tell her to cultivate her social life by spending more time with friends and going on dates. Jensen suggests that Hanna call his best friend Will who is thirty-one and also lives in the city.

Hanna realizes she has a healthy sexual curiosity that is going unfulfilled, so she decides to take Jensen's advice and call Will, an infamous player whom Hanna long ago had a crush on. Will invites her to join him for an early run in Central Park, and both of them are immediately attracted to each other. Hanna asks Will for advice on how to seduce men and enjoy a casual dating life the same as Will has, and Will reluctantly agrees to be her dating coach.

The more time Hanna and Will spend together, the more attracted they become to each other, both physically and emotionally. They have a frank and easy camaraderie. Hanna invites Will to a friend's housewarming party, where she drags him into an empty bedroom and asks him to guide her through a sexual tryst, as she feels inexperienced. They share a passionate moment, but Hanna assumes Will wants to keep things casual just as he does with his other lovers, Kitty and Kristy, and she accepts a date from a fellow PhD student named Dylan.

Will is very jealous of Hanna's dates with Dylan. His friends Max, Bennett, Sara, and Chloe tease him about his growing feelings for Hanna. Sara and Chloe spend time with Hanna as well, urging her to be careful with the philandering Will, though she may enjoy the sex with him. Hanna's relationship with Dylan doesn't pan out as she finds herself thinking increasingly about Will. The two spend more and more time together, experimenting in every sexual way imaginable, but neither will admit to having feelings for the other. Hanna is adamant that they keep things on a friends-with-benefits level, believing that is all Will is capable of, even after he finally tells her he wants something more stable with her. Will agrees, afraid of scaring Hanna off with talk of something deeper.

Hanna brings Will to her parents' house for Easter, where Will is forced to face Hanna's sister Liv, whom he once had a brief fling with. Liv, married and pregnant, has clearly moved on from Will, and only worries that he might hurt her little sister. Will and Hanna hide their true relationship from the family while getting closer to admitting their feelings. Will, who backed off from relationship talk after his first attempt, is simply waiting for Hanna to tell him she doesn't want to date other men. Hanna is waiting for Will to declare the same about other women.

When they have sex without a condom, they reach a tentative agreement that maybe they will be exclusive, though Hanna still assumes Will has other lovers. She sees a text on Will's phone from his lover Kitty as they drive back to New York from her parents. Kitty is accepting an offer to see Will during the week. Hanna gets upset. When Will lies



about his Tuesday evening plans, Hanna breaks things off with him. Rather than confront Will about Kitty, she tells him that she is young and doesn't want to be serious.

Both Will and Hanna spend a miserable week apart, thinking only about each other. Will commiserates with Max and Bennett, who have their own dramas: Max just learned Sara is pregnant, and Bennett and Chloe's wedding is getting out of control. Finally, Will and Hanna are forced to see each other at the half-marathon they signed up to run together. Things between them are awkward and get more so when Kitty shows up and introduces herself to Hanna. Privately, Kitty tells Hanna that Will broke up with her officially because of Hanna and that she hasn't slept with Will in months.

Hanna realizes she must apologize to Will for the misunderstanding, but she can't find the words as they run together. Celebrating the completion of the thirteen mile run, Will invites Hanna back to his apartment for lunch. He is still attracted to her, but he tells her that he can no longer have a casual sexual relationship with her. Hanna follows him into the shower and reveals she wants to be exclusive with him as well. They say that they love each other as they make love again. The novel ends two months later as they fly to the West Coast for Bennett and Chloe's wedding. Will confesses to Hanna that he plans to propose to her, an idea that thrills Hanna, who is confident that she has reformed Will's player tendencies.



Prologue - Chapter 1

Summary

Beautiful Player by Christina Lauren begins as Hanna Bergstrom, a twenty-four year old graduate student in biochemical engineering, attends a ritzy Manhattan cocktail party with her father and brother. Her father and brother are in New York to visit Hanna, but they've barely seen her because of her workaholic schedule. Her brother Jensen tells her to pursue a more active social life. Her father, a scientist who put work in front of his wife and five children, tacitly agrees with Jensen. Hanna is irritated by Jensen's attempt to manage her life, but she admits her social circle is alarmingly small. Jensen suggests Will, his own best friend from college and fellow New York resident. Hanna is shocked by the idea. As a teenager she had a crush on Will, a bass player/scientist/businessman, but he never noticed her because of their seven year age difference. Will once kissed Liv, Hanna and Jensen's sister. Despite Will's reputation as a ladies' man, Jensen urges Hanna to call him to widen her social opportunities. Hanna, who lives alone in her parents' swanky uptown apartment, far from her fellow students, knows she needs more of a life. She agrees to call Will.

Three days after the party, Hanna anxiously calls Will, waking him before the sun is up. Will is expecting her call and refers to her by her childhood nickname, "Ziggy." Hanna invites him to dinner, but Will suggests she join him for a jog in Central Park instead. They meet half an hour later, despite Hanna's aversion to running and the February cold. Hanna hasn't seen Will in four years, but she finds him as magnetically appealing as ever. Will seems to think Hanna has grown up well, but Hanna is sure she's misreading the attraction between them.

Will leads Hanna around the Central Park reservoir, a short trail that is almost more than she can handle. Will asks about her life, and Hanna explains her social rut. There is a subtle flirtation between them, and Hanna's physical attraction grows as she watches Will's athletic body. She bluntly asks him if he's dating, and he evasively claims he isn't seeing anyone seriously.

Will questions why Hanna is looking to branch out socially at this point in her life; he assumes she already gets asked on dates frequently. Hanna admits she has dated but is socially awkward. Because she is still young, she wants to take advantage of her thriving sex drive and generally enjoy life more. She asks Will to teach her how to date better, how to be less nerdy, and where to find better potential partners. Will reluctantly accepts her challenge, agreeing to take her out and introduce her to the girlfriends of two of his friends who might also be able to help her.



Analysis

Hanna is an exceptionally well-educated, scientific woman with an upper class background who speaks at the level of a lower middle class eighth grader. Hanna herself notes her own awkward lack of a verbal filter, but the way she uses words such as “boobs” and “pussy” to a man who is little more than an acquaintance, as well as having thoughts like, “Good sweet baby Jesus, I wanted to bang the smirk off this man” (Page 25) is slightly disjointed from Hanna’s socio-economic status. On the one hand, readers might find it refreshing that a smart and self-aware young woman can acknowledge and embrace her own physicality and healthy sex drive. On the other hand, readers might find it hard to suspend their disbelief that someone with Hanna’s background would speak in such an informal, almost crass manner. Hanna’s status as a doctoral student in biochemical engineering seems more like an authorial device to quickly thumbnail Hanna as intelligent bordering on nerdy, rather than a true passion Hanna is invested in. Despite her self-proclamations at being “driven,” the way Hanna speaks and acts is very incongruous with what her social and educational role. Readers may want to examine the stereotypes of the upper class and whether it is useful for the authors to break convention, or too unbelievable to ring true.

Structurally, the novel begins with a typical romantic comedy meet-cute: despite having known each other for years, the reintroduction of Will and Hanna is the first time they meet as equals, finally both independent adults. The attraction between them is immediate, setting up the classic romantic question: will they or won’t they? Hanna’s essential mission, fueled by her brother Jensen, embraces one major theme of the book: how to establish a balance between work and play (i.e., a social life). Will’s reputation as a player sets him firmly on the “life” side of the work/life equation; his tattooed covered body is an instantly recognizable trope of the bad boy (as a teenager he also had piercings and played bass in a rock band, more stereotypes of a “player”), ever-ready to corrupt the wholesome and near virginal good girl that Hanna represents. Will may need just as much balance as Hanna, and the tension that arises immediately begs the question of whether Will and Hanna will learn to compromise and meet in the middle.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Hanna is a believable doctoral student? Why or why not? List some stereotypes about the upper class. Does Hanna conform to the stereotype or break it? How?

Discussion Question 2

What are some stereotypes of a “player”? From first impressions, does Will fit the mold?



Discussion Question 3

How do readers know Hanna needs a better work/life balance? Is this revealed through the authors showing readers Hanna's behavior, or telling readers about it? Why is this effective or ineffective? Do you think it is better for writers to "show" or "tell" when building a character? Why?

Vocabulary

protocol, garish, prominent, soiree, opulent, discreet, impassive, soluble, exude, quell, mortification



Chapter 2

Summary

Will has lunch with his longtime friends Max and his girlfriend Sara, and Bennett (whose girlfriend Chloe is out of town but usually joins them). He tells them about Hanna, whom he still refers to by the nickname Ziggy. Will's friends are well aware of his status as a ladies' man, including the fact that he made out with Hanna's sister Liv. They don't believe he can simply be friends with an attractive woman. They are surprised he lets Hanna run with him, an activity more personal and sacred than sex to Will. As Will describes Hanna, he is surprised to realize how much fun he had with her because of her honesty and confidence. Because of Will's long history with the Bergstrom family, seeing Hanna felt like home, and he found her more attractive than he remembered. Will admits to his friends that the mindless sex he has with regular no-strings-attached partners Kitty and Kristy is no longer satisfying. Will's pensiveness after seeing Hanna piques his friends' curiosity, and they assume he likes her. Will protests that he has no interest in Hanna, but he can't stop thinking about her youth and beauty. He asks Sara and Chloe to take Hanna under their wing as girl friends and shopping buddies. Will texts Hanna to meet him to run again in the morning, fully signing on to help her with her social life.

Sara and Chloe take Hanna shopping on Saturday morning, and Will is less enthusiastic about running alone. He meets Max for lunch. Chloe calls looking for Bennett, and Will asks her to help Hanna buy sports bras to make her comfortable while running, much to Chloe and Max's amusement. When Hanna arrives from shopping, Will notices how good she looks in well-fitting clothes. He is continually unnerved yet refreshed by Hanna's open, unfiltered way of talking. They talk frankly about sex, though Will is careful to keep his attraction hidden. They talk about their favorite books, and Will is further surprised that Hanna's is a famous scientific tome rather than a romance. Will is overwhelmed by a sexual fantasy of Hanna and excuses himself to the bathroom, where he reminds himself of the "little sister" status Hanna should have in his mind. Looking at Hanna when he returns to the table, he knows he cannot deny his sexual attraction.

Analysis

In Chapter 2, the novel abruptly takes on a new narrative voice. It is written from the first person perspective of Will, following the Prologue and Chapter 1 told in Hanna's first person voice. Readers get a new perspective on Hanna as Will paints a portrait of her for his friends. She got through college early. She works in a prestigious scientist's lab, etc. This dual-narrator gives the authors a clever device for revealing character; Will can say things about Hanna that it would seem arrogant for her to say about herself. Readers learn from Will that Hanna is beautiful, something Hanna could not say about herself. In addition, readers get to see the inner workings of Will's mind and quickly



learn his crisis. He is tired of meaningless sex and has begun to yearn for something more fulfilling and substantial. Just as Hanna wants to loosen up and have more fun, Will is perhaps having too much fun and finding it empty. Both characters are stuck in a rut. There is a theme of change running through the text, as Will's friends claim one night with the right woman could "change" things for him. As his thoughts constantly return to Hanna, Will must remind himself that "Nothing in my life had changed in a day" (Page 36). But, it may be a situation of protesting too much and too loudly.

Will's friends are shocked that Will invited Hanna to run with him. They make that clear by saying, "Letting someone in your private little running head space? That seems like it would be more intimate than sex to you" (Page 33). Running offers one of the novel's few metaphors. It is a solitary activity that symbolizes his overall disinterest in (or inability to) share his life with anyone. As his friends point out, it is telling that Will would bring Hanna along for that. Long-distance running is also a sport where longevity, stamina, and commitment are important. As Will and Hanna continue to run together, the other metaphorical resonances may rise to the surface for both characters.

Will and Hanna have a strange conversation in which she predicts stem cells will eventually be used to regenerate a woman's hymen, allowing her to give her sacred virginity again and again. Hanna casually states, "It's a man's world" (Page 53), so women will gladly do this in order to keep men happy. Hanna is half joking, yet for such a well-educated woman, there is a surprising lack of feminist context. Hanna doesn't seem to think there is anything wrong with it being a "man's world" or the lengths women will go to change their bodies to keep men happy. She doesn't consider that in some cultures, women who don't bleed on their wedding night may be killed for not being virgins. This conversation is a mindless titillation to demonstrate Hanna's lack of verbal filter, which instead demonstrates her lack of feminist and cultural awareness.

Discussion Question 1

What are the advantages and disadvantages of having two first person narrators? Do you think it is useful to have Will's perspective, or does it diminish the dramatic tension to know his thoughts? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why is running more sacred to Will than sex? What does this say about him as a person? What does it mean that he lets Hanna run with him?

Discussion Question 3

How do the authors make Will likable despite his reputation as a "player"? What details do they use to keep readers engaged with him? Is Will likable? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

paradox, pensive, palpable, delve, careen



Chapters 3-5

Summary

Hanna doesn't enjoy running, but it gets a little easier every day. Will suggests she get a trainer because Will himself needs more intense preparation for an upcoming triathlon, but Hanna decides to train with him. They talk freely about Hanna's breasts, which Will frequently stares at. He notices how good they look since Hanna's shopping expedition, and Hanna acknowledges the value of a well-fitted bra. She also tells Will that she has had a breast reduction surgery, much to Will's chagrin. One of Will's lovers, Kitty, runs by, demanding to reschedule a session Will cancelled. Will is clearly embarrassed, but Hanna doesn't bat an eye.

Hanna invites Will to an interdepartmental social mixer at Columbia and he agrees. Not wanting to appear too eager, Will arrives late, after all Hanna's colleagues have left. He buys Hanna a drink – iced tea. Will gets irritated when the bartender hits on Hanna, though Hanna is oblivious. Hanna talks about watching porn to discover what sexual practices excite her; though she has had five sexual partners, none of them made sex interesting. Will has a spasm of jealousy that Hanna has slept with anyone, despite his own massive sexual history. He finds her naiveté appealing, though Hanna protests that she has long been obsessed with the mechanics of sex and pleasure. She admits it bothers her that he still calls her Ziggy, claiming she wants to grow out of her serious-kid persona and into a fun-loving adult. They talk about the intimacy of oral sex. Will thinks if Hanna were attracted to him, she would say so, and he's mildly disappointed. He starts thinking of her as Hanna rather than Ziggy and worries that she is going to unintentionally destroy his well-ordered world.

Chloe and Sara hang out with Hanna at her apartment, and notice the effects of her running on her newly toned body. They also think she looks happier. When they find out she is still running with Will, they assume Hanna has slept with him, but Hanna assures the girls their relationship is platonic. Hanna is attracted to Will, but she refuses to admit her feelings to her new friends. They gossip about teenage Will, who was raised by his mother and sisters. Sara and Chloe think this explains Will's belief that women will do his bidding but Hanna has kinder thoughts about what lies beneath Will's surface. She admits she had a crush on him when she was younger, and Sara and Chloe tease her that she will inevitably sleep with Will. Hanna thinks Will sees her as a little sister. Chloe thinks Hanna should sleep with Will for fun, though Sara gives a reality check by listing Will's current sex partners.

Hanna's conversation with Sara and Chloe leaves her distracted and quiet during her run with Will the next day. When he helps her stretch after a leg cramp, she finds herself filled with lust for him. She goes home to shower before breakfast with Will. Will texts her asking "What are you wearing?" She is touched when she finds that Will has ordered her favorite breakfast for her. She tells him he's a great friend, and he tells her



it's no trouble helping Jensen's baby sister, but they both are aware that something much more intense is building between them.

Analysis

Continuing on the theme of female sexuality, Hanna has only had five sexual partners. Despite his hundreds of sex partners, it bothers Will somewhat that Hanna has slept with anyone at all, proving Hanna's earlier point about the allure of virgins. Hanna is attracted to Will; but she does not demonstrate any sense of jealousy that he has slept with many other women. Will can admit the hypocrisy of his feelings to himself, but readers may wonder if this small admission is enough to mitigate the negative impact of the sentiment on concepts of healthy female sexuality. Will is soothed by the fact that Hanna has never had oral sex – she is still a “virgin” in that sense and he fantasizes about being her first blow job, the first man to perform oral sex on her, an act he finds far more intimate than even blow jobs. Though the novel is only intended as light sexual stimulation for a female readership, readers may still wonder what message the novel is sending about female sexuality and the dominance/ownership by men of women. Readers should note whether Hanna actually sleeps with any other men over the course of the novel. Her original intention was to date like Will does, to see multiple men, and presumably, sleep with them. Will Hanna fulfill this goal, or will she become, as Will desires, his property?

The structural device of alternating chapters narrated by Hanna and Will gives readers insight into both characters' thoughts, leaving little to guesswork. Readers know both Hanna and Will are attracted to the other, but neither thinks the other feels the same way. In a more traditional narrative structure, Will's thoughts might be more elusive and the tension higher regarding whether or not they will get together. It seems inevitable, as Sara and Chloe foreshadow, that Hanna and Will will sleep together. The only question that remains, as mentioned above, is whether Hanna will successfully manage to date anyone else before she settles on Will, or if her progressive goal of embracing being young and having fun will be subsumed in a traditional, one man, and one woman monogamous mold.

Discussion Question 1

What message do you think the novel is sending about female sexuality? Is it positive or negative for a woman to have multiple sexual partners? Would it be “bad” if Hanna slept with anyone besides Will over the course of the novel? Give textual support to your claims.

Discussion Question 2

Does it enhance or diminish the tension to know that Will and Hanna are attracted to each other? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of not having Will's perspective so clearly laid out? Would you prefer more mystery, or is the novel designed



to give away the end from the beginning, and thus it doesn't matter how many narrators there are?

Discussion Question 3

The novel focuses almost exclusively on the inner lives of Will and Hanna? What function do the other characters serve? Do you think they are fully realized? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

wince, feral, monopolize, errant, lascivious, demure, idolize, defuse



Chapters 6-7

Summary

Will ponders the growing tension between Hanna and himself, and the way her reticence seems to indicate an internal struggle that mirrors his own. But, she calls on a Saturday night and invites him to a graduate student housewarming party. Will, who has already cancelled his weekly “date” with Kristy because he irrationally feels like he’s cheating on Hanna, agrees.

The party is unimpressive, in a cramped apartment full of secondhand furniture. Hanna accepts the proffered drink, plum sake, making Will feel more protective of her. When Will tells Hanna how pretty she is, she leads him into an unoccupied bedroom and announces she wants Will to guide her explicitly through sex, telling her what to do, helping her learn what she herself likes. She knows Will can handle casual sex and that he enjoys it, making him the perfect teacher. Will stops calling her Ziggy as he agrees to her plan.

They return to the party, but Will cannot stop thinking about Hanna. He watches her talking to a grad student named Dylan and realizes he wants to take her home to continue the sexual escapades. Before he can text her asking her to leave, she texts him that Dylan has asked her on a date. Despite his intense feelings, Will plays it cool, knowing the point of his interactions with Hanna was to help her have a social life, and it is working. He gives her his blessing.

Less than a week later, Hanna returns home from her date with Dylan, uninterested in him but sexually frustrated. She hasn’t been able to stop thinking about Will and their thrilling party sex. She sees Will every day for their run, and things remain simple between them. After tossing and turning, Hanna gets up at 3 a.m. and walks the seven blocks to Will’s apartment, hoping he is awake. He is annoyed at her for walking alone in the middle of the night, but otherwise pleased to see her, as he has been suffering from insomnia as well.

Will questions Hanna about her date, which she admits did not go particularly well. She was home by 9 p.m. She confesses she was distracted by thoughts of the party, and Will claims the same reason for his wakefulness. Will asks her to tell him to stop, but she can’t. Hanna tells Will she used to fantasize about him while she masturbated as a teenager. Will suggests they pretend that he had just sneaked into teenage Hanna’s room, but promises they don’t have to have intercourse yet if Hanna’s not ready. They grind on each other while still clothed until they climax together.

While Will cleans up, Hanna calls herself a cab, which seems to disappoint Will though he quickly plays it off. In the cab home, Will texts her asking her to tell him when she’s home safe, which she does when she’s curled up in bed.



Analysis

Will cancels his weekly standing date with Kristy, one of the two lovers he regularly sees. He cancels because he feels he “was being unfair to Hanna, by being with other women when she seemed to have given so much of herself to me” (Page 101). Though Will and Hanna are not dating – nor have they had sex – Hanna is slowly changing Will’s outlook. If Will’s crisis is that he is tired of mindless sex and is looking for something more substantial, his evolution has begun. Readers will also remember that he cancelled a sex date with a woman named Kitty as well. This contrasts with Hanna, who plans a date with fellow student Dylan even after her first sexual encounter with Will, although she doesn’t sleep with Dylan. Indeed, her virtual disinterest in Dylan demonstrates that Will possesses her already, even if no verbal agreement has been made between them. The authors try to balance Hanna’s chastity by having Will blow off his lovers as well, but there is still a sexual imbalance between them, and a sense that Hanna is already Will’s property.

The authors try to make Will seem enlightened with some interesting details. He was raised by loving, doting mother and sisters. Thus his status as a ladies’ man stems from a deep-rooted love for women and all they have to offer, rather than from a misogynist desire to use them. Similarly, his tattoo of the word “No” on his ribcage – a middle finger to the idea that God created Eve from Adam’s rib – is designed to suggest that Will is a feminist not a sexual predator. The fact that Will is always straightforward and honest about his intentions with women (always telling them immediately that he is not interested in a relationship) is further evidence that at heart, Will is not a bad guy. If Hanna was, as she plans, like a “ninja” – diving into Will’s brain to learn his dating/sexual secrets and exiting unharmed – and then actually acting on those lessons, these “sweet” details about Will might not be so heavy-handed. But the fact that Will is the only person Hanna is sleeping with, despite her dates with Dylan, sets up a dangerous idea for women: they don’t need to experience multiple partners to learn about their sexuality, they can – and should – be satisfied with only one.

Discussion Question 1

Is Will a misogynist or a feminist? Support your conclusion with textual analysis.

Discussion Question 2

Hanna’s goal was to widen her social circle, but she spends almost all her time with Will. Should Hanna work harder at dating? What message is the novel sending by having all her needs met by Will?



Discussion Question 3

Will has spent years sleeping with thousands of women, yet as soon as he meets Hanna he makes excuses to cancel dates with his regular lovers? Does the change in Will happen too quickly? Is it believable? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

levity, platonic, goad, sterile, tenuous



Chapters 8-9

Summary

Will runs into Dylan at a Dunkin Donuts. He finds himself very irritated when Dylan implies they are both dating Hanna. At work, he is distracted by thoughts of Hanna, annoyed with his hypocrisy in wanting her to want him exclusively even though he never dates that way. He tries to discuss his confused burgeoning feelings with Max, who mocks him for finally feeling romantic towards a woman. Max and Bennett send Sara and Chloe to keep Will company while Hanna is on her second date with Dylan, and the women show up at Will's apartment with food and sympathy. They urge him to break things off with his other two lovers, Kitty and Kristy, but Will can't quite bring himself to do it. Sara and Chloe want to understand Will's fear of relationships, but Will has no answers for them.

Will checks his phone obsessively, waiting to hear from Hanna. As 9pm approaches, Will wonders if Hanna is having sex with Dylan, but he gets a text from Max telling him Hanna and Dylan are in the same restaurant as he and Bennett. Max admonishes Will to stop texting Hanna since she keeps checking her phone. Relieved that Hanna is obsessing about him as much as he is obsessing about her, Will texts her.

Hanna is indeed trying to keep herself from texting Will. Dylan is cute and smart, but Hanna can't stop thinking about Will and wondering why she hasn't heard from him all night. Dylan notices Hanna's distraction, so she regroups and talks about her scientific research until she is surprised by Max, who has come over to say hello. A few minutes after he departs, Hanna gets a text from Will, and her relief is palpable. He calls her "Plum," reminding her of their party tryst. Hanna is irrationally happy to learn he is home alone rather than out with another woman.

The next morning during their run, Will asks Hanna about her date but she can barely muster any enthusiasm. Hanna finds Will edgy, and wonders if he cares that she was on a date with someone else. She isn't sure if she and Will are dating. She asks Will about third date protocol, wondering if Dylan expects sex. Will demands to know if Dylan is pressuring her but Hanna assures him she just wants to know what is normal. Will explains the raised stakes of a third date but reminds her she doesn't have to do anything she doesn't want to do. His protectiveness warms Hanna's heart. She realizes Will is not okay with the idea that she might have sex with Dylan. Hanna isn't sure if she wants to have sex with Dylan because he doesn't make her feel the way Will does.

As soon as Hanna meets Dylan for their third date, she knows the stakes have been raised: the restaurant is nicer, more romantic, and Dylan orders an expensive bottle of wine. Hanna doesn't drink much, and texts Will while Dylan is in the bathroom. She feels she is offending Dylan but wishes he were like Will, who doesn't care that she doesn't drink. Hanna takes Dylan back to her apartment, but doesn't feel any excitement at the prospect of sleeping with him. She knows Will is not an option



because he doesn't do relationships, but she can't stop thinking about him. As Dylan kisses Hanna, she realizes she feels nothing for him. She politely sends him away. She texts Will to ask where he is.

Analysis

Will frets about Hanna's date with Dylan, despite the fact that he is not ready to offer any commitment to her. His evolution out of the life of a player is slow, as he is unwilling to officially end things with his two other lovers. But, readers can see him taking baby steps as he frets over Hanna's date with Dylan and his own jealousy about it. He ponders the nature of relationships, wondering if they mean, "Taking this kind of risk, opening up and gambling on someone else's ability to tread carefully with your feelings?" (Page 157).

Readers have no indication of why Will, a thirty-one year old adult man, fears this risk so much or why it is only dawning on him now about the tradeoff for such a risk. He has no dark past with cruel women to make him shun adult relationships in this way. But, Will is still unable to take the risk and keeps Kitty and Kristy on retainer in case Hanna inadvertently hurts him. In this way he is able to keep a sense of power and control on his life.

The difficulty with the message of the novel is that Will gets his wish without having to make any real sacrifices of his own. He wants Hanna to sleep with only him, and that's likely what will happen, particularly after Hanna sends Dylan away without sleeping with him. There is an implicit message here that despite Hanna's sexual drive and interest in casual dating, as a woman, she is not "built" for that. Once she begins spending time and fooling around with Will, her seeming instinct for monogamy kicks in and she can't even muster the curiosity to see what sex is like with another man, no matter how attractive, smart, and nice. For all intents and purposes Hanna already "belongs" to Will even though she continually tells herself a relationship with Will is impossible. Hanna is failing at dating, mainly because she only wants to be with one man.

The novel seems to cling to specific idea of gender roles, summed up when Sara says to Will, "When you're younger you want the boy who knows how to play the game but when you're older you want the man who knows when it's not a game anymore" (Page 155). Sara seems to be absolving Will – and by extension, all men – of his philandering ways, as long as eventually he settles into a monogamous, married relationship. Women are not granted the same luxury to fool around, and Sara is even implying that they liked to be used by men in this way. Thus Hanna, having never really been in a proper relationship at age twenty-four, is unwilling to demand anything more from Will than casual sex, even though she is ready for a committed, stable relationship.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Hanna and Will's feelings for each other. What do they have in common? What do they want that is different?



Discussion Question 2

If Hanna wants to “enjoy life, be young, and experience things,” does she make a bad decision by sending Dylan away? Is she closing herself off from possibility, or is it good that she is self-aware enough to know what she wants?

Discussion Question 3

Do you agree with Sara’s statement about women that “When you’re younger you want the boy who knows how to play the game but when you’re older you want the man who knows when it’s not a game anymore” (Page 155). Why or why not?

Vocabulary

chide, audacity, angst, contrition, keen, wary, intermittent, comply, rile, ruse, oscillate, disingenuous, jovial, noncommittal



Chapters 10-11

Summary

After getting the text from Hanna saying that Dylan was going to her apartment, Will is so restless that he jogs the seven blocks to Hanna's building, where he watches the shadows of Hanna and Dylan move in the lit window. He grows more and more annoyed until he sees Dylan emerge from the building and walk away. Will is relieved, especially when Hanna texts asking him where he is. Will admits he is outside her apartment. Hanna comes down, demanding to know why he is there. Will confesses it bothered him to know she was with Dylan. Hanna confesses in return that despite thinking Dylan is attractive, smart, and nice, she didn't feel anything when he kissed her. Hanna invites Will to come up to her apartment.

Hanna is surprised by Will's jealousy since she thinks he is sleeping with Kitty and Kristy (a misconception Will does not correct). She admits she only had sexual fantasies of Will while with Dylan, in which Will enjoyed the sex as much as she did. Will assures her he can't think about anyone else. They are barely through the door before Will has her undressed. Once in bed, Hanna gets nervous, asking Will to tell her what to do.

Hanna tells Will she thinks about him all the time, wondering if that worries him, but Will isn't sure what he feels about relationships anymore, and just wants to enjoy the moment with her. Will realizes he is falling in love with Hanna, wanting to make love to her rather than simply have sex. He realizes he is claimed.

Hanna hears Will making her breakfast. She doesn't know how to proceed. She is afraid things will become awkward between them, and she is determined to let him know she can handle a causal sexual relationship. Will is offended, believing Hanna doesn't think much of him. She explains she simply understands the previous night meant different things to each of them. As if to prove her point, Will's cell phone rings with a call from Kitty. Will tries to tell Hanna something, but she interrupts, promising him things won't get weird between them, and he reluctantly agrees.

Analysis

Will has an idea that falling in love equates to losing control of his life. Even as he admits to Hanna that he was jealous of Dylan and that he thinks about her all the time, Will wonders "if I was cutting the last thread of control I had over my emotions" (Page 181). Yet he maintains his power over Hanna by failing to admit to her he hasn't slept with Kitty or Kristy since meeting Hanna. She makes herself vulnerable by admitting how much she thought about Will while on her date with Dylan, and admitting her sexual fantasies about him (which include the potentially degrading scenario of asking Will to masturbate and come on her chest), but Will cannot reciprocate this vulnerability. He recognizes to himself that he is falling in love with Hanna, but still views her as "thrilled



breathless prey” (Page 185) – an apt metaphor for his philandering nature. He wants to be dominant; he doesn’t want to admit he has feelings; and he wants ownership of Hanna, preventing her from sleeping with anyone else.

Hanna symbolizes a lot of female gender stereotypes as well. She is less able to separate sex from emotion, and she is quicker to have feelings, or admit she has them, even if she is working to push them away.

Discussion Question 1

What message is the novel sending about attitudes toward relationships? Is the message good or bad? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why doesn’t Will tell Hanna he hasn’t slept with his other lovers since he met her? How do you think Hanna would react to that information if she had it? Does Hanna really want to date many men casually? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Is Hanna’s desire to be dominated believable, or is she just enacting a male fantasy of the ideal woman?

Vocabulary

prone, accentuate, veneer, condense, taut, pliable, languid, visceral, quell, tentative



Chapters 12-13

Summary

Will skips his morning run with Hanna, afraid she will show up as “Ziggy,” the oblivious kid sister who doesn’t take him seriously. He can’t help but be offended that she thinks what has happened between them is meaningless. But when she calls and wakes him up a few hours later, Will realizes Hanna thinks he has blown her off like any of his other conquests. He reverts to calling her Ziggy in his apology, which only increases the distance between them. Angry, Hanna promises him she doesn’t even want to sleep with him again, so he doesn’t need to avoid her.

Will calls an emergency lunch with his friends, gathering with Max, Sara, Bennett, and Chloe at their usual restaurant. He tells them he feels like “Kitty” in his relationship with Hanna: the attached, emotional one willing to take whatever Hanna gives him. Sara admonishes him for failing to break things off definitively with Kitty and Kristy, despite his obvious feelings for Hanna, and his hypocrisy regarding whom else she sleeps with. His friends urge him to sit Hanna down for a real conversation about the nature of their relationship.

Will waits for Hanna outside her building the next morning for their run, apologizing for blowing her off the previous day. He can’t bring himself to admit his true feelings for her, but he tells her how intense their Saturday night together had been for him, and how he feels more for her than most girls because of his history with her family.

They begin their run, but Hanna is distracted by Will’s body as he removes his sweatshirt. She trips and twists her ankle. Seeing a peek of his body brought all the memories from Saturday night rushing back. Will carries her back to her apartment and cleans her scraped knees, the sexual tension rising between them. Hanna apologizes for treating their encounter too casually. They both admit how intense it was for them, and soon they are falling into bed again.

As they lounge, Will writes a Nietzsche quote on Hanna: “All that is rare for the rare.” Hanna counters with other Nietzsche quotes, testing whether Will’s desire itself is stronger than the object of that desire. He hums a song called “She Talks to Angels,” and Hanna remembers seeing him sing it years before in the band Will was in with her brother Jensen. Will can’t remember her being at the performance. Hanna remembers seeing him with another girl that night, and thinks of all the girls he’s been with over the years, calling him a player. In an attempt to make her see that he is changing, he tells her that his feelings for her are more than just sexual. Hanna immediately freezes up and announces she has to go to work, much to Will’s surprise and disappointment.

In the shower, Hanna contemplates what Will said, irritated that he would complicate their no-strings scenario. She doesn’t believe he means it, or that he understands how to be in a relationship. She is afraid of falling in love with him and getting hurt. She



wipes off the words Will wrote on her, but Will is waiting for her in her bedroom, angry at her for walking away after so intimate a revelation. She accuses him of callously breaking her sister's heart and spurns his compliments when he says he's never met anyone like her. Will leaves.

Confused and upset, Hanna calls her sister Liv for consolation. She is surprised to learn that Liv, married and pregnant, was not nearly as devastated by what happened with Will as Hanna had thought. Liv quickly surmises that Hanna is sleeping with Will. She tries to calm Hanna's fears about him by telling Hanna her own husband Rob also slept around a lot before meeting Liv and that their relationship started as just sex and grew into something more. She reminds Hanna that Will is 31, not the 19 year old who felt her up in a shed.

Hanna walks to Will's apartment, mulling what Liv told her, wondering if Will could be capable of more than just sex. Will admits he has probably hurt more women than he knows, and Hanna maintains she doesn't want to be one of them. Will tells her he's glad she doesn't want to change him, glad they're friends, and that he got carried away. They agree to a friends-with-benefits relationship, and immediately dive back in, with Hanna announcing she wants to give Will a blow job. Will takes her to the couch and talks her through exactly what he wants her to do. After he climaxes, Will invites Hanna to stay to eat dinner with him, and Hanna readily agrees.

Analysis

The theme of growing up is manifested through the Ziggy/Hanna dichotomy. Ziggy, Hanna's childhood nickname, is the baby of the family. Will can create distance between himself and Hanna by using this nickname, putting Hanna in a "kid sister" box rather than calling her Hanna, the beautiful, complicated woman he has taken as his lover. Will himself needs to mature enough to commit to a relationship. Being older than Hanna does not necessarily make him wiser or more mature. Yet, when he tries to take a baby step toward settling into a relationship by admitting his deeper feelings for Hanna, she balks, not trusting him. Trust is another major theme of the novel, tied together with letting go of a false sense of control. Both characters are on a journey: Will is struggling to grow up, despite giving Hanna advice on how to navigate the adult social world. Hanna is struggling to trust that a player like Will could ever truly change despite her own open and honest nature. Both characters need to let go of their tightly controlled worlds and risk something new. Will uses a Nietzsche quote ("All that is rare for the rare") to indicate his changing worldview, but Hanna blocks his efforts with another Nietzsche quote ("In the end one loves one's desire and not what is desired" (Page 236)), hinting that Will's lust is making him say and do things he doesn't mean. This inability to communicate clearly with (and trust) each other creates the dramatic tension that draws the novel out. Readers know the true feelings of each character but the conflict arises in their inability to see those feelings themselves.

Hanna's sister Liv tries to bolster Hanna's courage not only by assuring Hanna that her (Liv's) brief encounter with Will years before is long forgotten, but also by reminding her



that people are capable of change. Liv admits her own husband was a “man-whore” before meeting Liv, and even after they met it was only a sexual relationship for a long time before it blossomed into something more. This is a major trope of romance novels: the idea that a particularly special woman (the heroine) can change a man, generally taming a promiscuous “commitment phobic” player into a loyal and monogamous husband. Liv reinforces this idea with her marital story, and Will himself hints at it by referring to Hanna as a “separate species” (Page 216). She is so different from other women (more beautiful, more honest, more intelligent) that she is tilting Will’s world on its axis. This, in the eyes of romance writers, is every woman’s fantasy. But because Hanna is just as much a man’s archetypal ideal as Will is a female’s, after Will tells Hanna he changed his mind and he just wants to be friends, Hanna is perfectly okay with it and desperate to give Will an immediate blow job. Neither gender is treated with a great deal of respect by the author, as Liv reduces all men to their genitalia by saying “Try and remember that Will has a penis and that makes him an idiot” (Page 251). The gender stereotypes reinforced in the novel boil down to: men are sexual predators until a particularly special (but marriage-centric) woman is able to wrangle them into a committed relationship.

Discussion Question 1

What is Liv’s attitude toward womanizing men? Is it positive or negative? Does she think they can change? Do you agree or disagree with her attitude? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast “Ziggy” and “Hanna.” What character traits do they share? How are they different? In what ways is Will more childlike than Hanna despite his age?

Discussion Question 3

Hanna believes Will is more interested in his desire than the object of that desire (Hanna herself). At this point in the novel, do you think Hanna’s feelings are justified? Do you think Will genuinely cares about her, or is he simply getting caught up in lust?

Vocabulary

cavalier, surmise, wince, inundate, wary, ascent, relent, aphorism, misogynist, conglomeration, receptive, connotation, monogamous, submerge, meticulous, ominous, innocuous



Chapters 14-15

Summary

Will is happy to have Hanna to hang out with, eating dinner, drinking beer, and watching basketball. He is slightly uncomfortable that he lied to her about not having feelings for her. He is willing to take Hanna however he can get her, and thinks this is what she wants. He gets a text from Max, inviting him to join the gang for a drink at a bar called Maddie's. Will knows this is Sara and Chloe's way of checking up on whether he's having his standing Tuesday night date with Kitty. He invites Hanna out to see his friends, promising it won't be weird.

Bennett, Chloe, Max, and Sara all hide their surprise to see Hanna with Will. Will and Hanna can't help but act like a couple, laughing over the fact that Hanna only orders drinks Will likes because he's the one who drinks them. When Hanna goes to the bathroom, Will's friends pounce, but Will begs them to act normal because things with Hanna are so tenuous. Sara is genuinely concerned that Will might hurt Hanna and urges him to be sure he isn't simply infatuated with her. Bennett and Chloe talk about the stress of planning their wedding with their temperamental families, and Will envisions himself marrying Hanna, much to his own surprise.

When Will can no longer stand the constant attention of his friends, he asks Hanna to dance, only realizing too late they are more conspicuous that way. Hanna apologizes again for her behavior, but admits she still feels a weirdness between them, even though things seem perfect. The sexual tension mounts again, and they return to Will's apartment.

The next morning around 5 a.m., Hanna wakes up. Will brings her a cup of tea. Instead of drinking it, Hanna is once again filled with desire, wondering if Will could ever see her as more than just a friend. She draws her initials on him, and they both like the way it looks. When Will tells her it is the hottest thing anyone has ever done to him, Hanna can't help but think of all the other women that have come before her and will come after her, and she reminds herself to stay like a ninja, getting in and out without getting hurt.

As Hanna and Will enjoy their usual Central Park run, Hanna admits to Will she has never been so distracted from work. It scares her because their friendship has become so important to her she is afraid it might get ruined. Will is willing to talk about their relationship, but Hanna isn't ready. Will tells her he feels the same sense of distraction and sexual fulfillment in her that she feels in him. Hanna invites Will to visit her family's house for Easter weekend, and at the prospect of sleeping with Hanna in her childhood bedroom, Will agrees. He picks her up the following Saturday in an old beat-up Subaru Outback. Hanna worries about how her family will react to her and Will, realizing she won't be able to treat him with the same sense of ownership she has in the city. They set off in the frequently stalling car, anxious about what might happen.



Analysis

As soon as Will's narrative chapter begins readers discover that his backpedaling away from relationship talk was a ruse; he doesn't want to be just friends but thinks that is what Hanna wants and he doesn't want to scare her off by being too serious. Of course readers know Hanna is interested in a relationship, not simply casual dating, but she doesn't think she can have that with Will. Once again, by having two narrative voices the reader becomes omniscient in a way that neither character could be. Without the miscommunication and misunderstanding (that a simple, honest conversation would alleviate) there would be no plot to the novel. This misunderstanding is a classic trope in literature and drama, particularly in the genre of farce.

As Hanna and Will deal with their new and unfamiliar feelings, both of them are struck by the physicality of their attraction, which is integral to falling in love. Will notes, "I'd somehow always expected love to be primarily a mental state, so I still felt unaccustomed to the physical manifestation of my feelings for her: the way my stomach would grow tight, my skin would start to feel hungry for her touch, the way my chest would press in, my heart pounding blood hard and fast through my arteries" (Page 263-4). Will thought love was emotional, and he never wanted to get his feelings that entangled with someone else. But while Will is willing to accept the way the physical intertwines with the emotional, Hanna works hard to pretend she can keep them separate. Hanna wants to deny her feelings, thinking that is what Will wants. Both Hanna and Will focus on the primacy of the heart, an organ linked symbolically and metaphorically to love, though of course in reality has little to do with emotion.

The authors present another, more traditionally gendered view of sex: Will, the player who has a constant string of partners, loves new sex, the act of discovering the particulars of a woman's body. This plays into the stereotype of men as philanderers, unable to settle down and commit because they constantly need new stimulus. By contrast, Hanna posits that "Isn't sex with someone you've known forever the best kind?" (Page 277). Hanna follows a certain stereotypical mold, adhering to an idea that women prefer monogamy, a single partner who is comfortable and stable. Because Hanna is so "special," Will begins to see the value in this kind of comfortable, forever sex, too.

The seasons are changing as Will and Hanna continue their runs in Central Park. Winter is becoming spring, and the metaphor resonates: new love is blooming between Hanna and Will, just as the ground thaws and the flowers begin to bloom.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast how Hanna and Will react to the strength of their physical attraction. How does this relate to love for each of them?



Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Will's ideas about sex with new partners to Hanna's ideas about sex with a single, long-term partner. Which character do you agree with? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the symbolic resonance of spring as the seasons start to change within the context of the novel.

Vocabulary

patronize, taboo, ruse, skeptical, aversion, deft, guffaw, oblivious, unison, interject, discombobulated, melancholy, inadvertent, nonchalant, lave, sanctum, tentative, reverberate, intimate, predatory, pragmatic, cadence, insatiable, suppress, sterile



Chapters 16-17

Summary

Will and Hanna arrive at the Bergstrom house in Boston, and Will suddenly realizes how difficult the weekend might be, given his friendship with Jensen and his past with Liv. But when Hanna panics, Will calms her down and reminds her they are just friends. Hanna reminds Will to call her Ziggy in front of her family, lest they look suspicious.

Will finds things with Liv less complicated than he expected as she warmly hugs him. However, things are more complicated than he expected with Hanna. She shows him to his bedroom and they immediately want to have sex. Neither has brought condoms, but since neither has ever had sex without one, and Hanna takes birth control pills, they decide to do it anyway. Will tries to resist but Hanna is persistent, intoxicated by the thought of being Will's first time without a condom. Will is so turned on he comes quickly, just as Jensen bangs on the door to greet Will.

Despite how close they were to getting caught, Hanna still wants her orgasm, and Will obliges. She asks Will if he's ever been in love; he hasn't, before Hanna – though he can't tell her his true feelings. After they clean up, they meet in the living room, where Hanna apologizes for her reckless behavior. Will jokes around with a statue of Jesus he finds on a table, placing it in Hanna's cleavage before Jensen walks in on them, causing Will to accidentally break the statue.

Everyone sits down to dinner, including Hanna's brother Niels. Everyone comments on how good Hanna looks, remarking on her weight and her hair, and Will points out that Hanna might just be happy. By calling her "Hanna" instead of "Ziggy," he calls attention to himself in an awkward moment, but quickly deflects attention to Hanna's research. After dinner, Hanna and Will wash the dishes, once again almost getting caught in a compromising position by Niels.

Hanna appears in Will's room after everyone has gone to bed, and Will senses a pensiveness in her. She asks Will if he is still sleeping with other women, and he hedges by saying he thought that's what she wanted. Because they are having unprotected sex, Will suggests they eliminate other partners, but Hanna evades this proposition. Will is frustrated by Hanna's inability to be straightforward about what she wants, but gets lost in a quiet, intense sexual encounter with her. He wants her heart, but she only offers her body, and he is too weak to resist.

From Hanna's perspective, the sex with Will is more intense than usual as well, but she can't bring herself to tell him what she really wants, which is to belong exclusively to each other. Will didn't tell her that there weren't other women, and so she is still unsure where she stands. She is afraid to demand what she wants, fearing Will, the eternal player, can't give it to her. She grows distant and admits she can't get out of her own head; she wants more of him than she has had so far. Will is willing to give her more,



telling her he only wants her. When Hanna asks if there will be other women, he counters that only she can tell him that. Hanna wishes he would just definitively tell her he is through with his lovers, but Will tells her he wants to be different for her, and is willing to try. Hanna accepts this tentative arrangement as they climax together.

The next day as they prepare to leave, Hanna knows she must confront Will more directly about their relationship. Liv believes Will clearly has feelings for Hanna, but warns her sister to be careful. Hanna overhears Will talking to Jensen, telling her brother that he and “Ziggy” are just friends. Will tells Jensen he wants more with one particular woman, and wants to end it with the others, but the woman is being unclear about what she wants. Hanna is devastated by the idea that Will has been with other women while he’s been with her, and can’t blow it off as she and Will drive back to the city. Hanna is pumping herself up to talk to Will about her true feelings when she sees a text come in on his phone from Kitty, agreeing to meet him on Tuesday.

When they arrive at Hanna’s apartment, she continues to be distant with Will. She invites him to hang out Tuesday night to talk about their relationship, waiting for him to tell her the truth about Kitty. Instead Will tells her he has a work meeting. Hanna wakes up the next morning feeling weighed down by Will’s lie. She realizes wanting to be with Will was enough to make her faithful to him, and he was not capable of reciprocating. She skips her run with Will, and keeps her phone off for two days, burying herself in her work. Will appears at her door on Tuesday evening, wanting to know why she’s avoiding him. Hanna can’t bring herself to tell the truth, so she tells Will she is young and not looking for anything serious. She implies she has no feelings for him. Despite the pain it causes her, she watches him leave without stopping him.

Analysis

Chapters 16 and 17 are positioned for a dramatic reveal to Hanna’s family about the nature of their relationship, yet the tension quickly dissipates. No one in the Bergstrom family notices anything particularly out of the ordinary between them. Instead, Boston is simply a new background for new illicit sexual fantasies – sex in the childhood bedroom, surrounded by the family. These chapters revolve mainly around issues of communication, or the peculiar lack thereof between Hanna and Will. The miscommunication is almost willful – each wants the other to say specific words, a secret code to unlock the relationship and take it to the next level, yet neither is willing to be vulnerable enough to admit their own true feelings. Hanna asks Will if there are other women, but Will evades and says only Hanna can tell him if there will be, instead of just pointedly admitting he hasn’t slept with anyone since meeting Hanna. When Will does posit that they agree to stop sleeping with other people now that they’ve had unprotected sex, Hanna hedges and suggests they break that rule. Hanna feels like Will wants more from her because of his actions – the fact that he calls her Hanna rather than Ziggy (indicating he doesn’t see her as a kid sister figure anymore) in front of her family, the sheer amount of time he spends with her – but she doesn’t let these actions speak louder than words. She wants to hear a specific sentence from him – “I am not and will not sleep with other women” – in order to be sure that’s what he wants (even



though the first time he tried to say that she balked). Rather than confronting Will directly about the text from Kitty she tests him by inviting him over. Will might be the player, but Hanna is also playing games rather than being honest; and Will lies to her about his plans, which demonstrates more lack of trust between them. Communication and honesty are obvious themes in the novel, but Will and Hanna are still learning the value of both.

Hanna is “special” to Will; she is the first of the hundreds of women he has slept with whom he is willing to be reckless enough to have sex without a condom. This is the only way that Will is even remotely a “virgin,” and Hanna is happy to be his first time at something. It levels the playing field a bit and is the only way Hanna can truly stand out from all Will’s other sexual partners. Both characters claim to be “ruined” for sex with anyone else because of each other – though again, they don’t actually verbalize that thought to each other.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn’t Will simply admit to Hanna he isn’t sleeping with anyone else? Why doesn’t Hanna tell Will she wants to be exclusive? Are their motivations for withholding information the same, or different? Do you agree with their motives? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why doesn’t Hanna confront Will about the conversation she overhears him have with Jensen, as well as the text she sees from Kitty? Is it a good choice to test Will by inviting him over the night she knows he is supposed to see Kitty? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What actions do Will and Hanna take that demonstrate how they feel about each other? Do you think actions speak louder than words, or are words just as important as actions? Why?

Vocabulary

stellar, enmesh, impending, immeasurable, lothario, chaste, devious, blasé, prominent, sufficient, earnest, clarity, molten, passive, tactile, proximity



Chapters 18-Epilogue

Summary

Will is devastated by Hanna's brush off, though he still meets with Kitty to officially end things with her. He believes Hanna is lying, but he doesn't understand why. He returns to work Tuesday evening, and is surprised to find Max still there. Max is equally surprised by Will's dismissal of Kitty. Max also looks upset and they meet Bennett at Maddie's to talk. Will explains his feelings for Hanna, as well as her inexplicable behavior. Bennett then shares how difficult wedding planning is for him and Chloe. Will realizes he would love the hassle of a wedding if it meant marrying Hanna. Finally, Max announces that Sara is pregnant. He is excited but terrified. Will is overcome by the changes occurring in his social circle, but he sees the necessity of progressing into the next phase of life. He texts Hanna that he is thinking about her.

Hanna, meanwhile, is losing sleep, anxiously awaiting the moment she will see Will at Saturday's race. She frets that his text was meant for another woman, or came while he was with Kitty. She meets Chloe, Sara, and Sara's assistant George for drinks on Friday night. As soon as they see Hanna they know something is wrong – her stress shows on her face. Hanna asks about Kitty, but they can't confirm that Will ever officially broke it off with her. Hanna is aware of her own hypocrisy in wanting to keep things open but being upset if Will was seeing other women. Chloe, Sara, and George urge Hanna to talk honestly with Will and let him explain himself.

Hanna goes to Central Park for the race the following morning; seeing Will is just as jarring as she expected. He tries to help her check in for the race, but she deflects him. Suddenly, Kitty appears and introduces herself to Hanna, though Will seems just as surprised as Hanna to see Kitty. Will introduces Hanna as "my Hanna." Kitty follows Hanna into the women's prep tent and claims she was surprised Will is actually ready to settle down. She tells Hanna Will officially ended things with her earlier in the week, even though they hadn't slept together in months. Kitty can see that Will is in love with Hanna and she urges Hanna not to mess it up.

Hanna barely has time to process this information, recognizing that Will broke up with Kitty even after Hanna dumped him, as she moves to the starting line and finds Will once again at her side. He gives her last minute advice for running the race, and promises to stay with her the entire time, despite her protests. The race is hard work, but Will encourages Hanna every step, even slipping and calling her "Plum" once. Hanna realizes she is doing something she never thought she would have the stamina to do, and she takes Will's hand as they cross the finish line together.

Will and Hanna celebrate completing the race, and Will invites Hanna to his apartment for lunch. Hanna is reluctant, but Will senses a returning intimacy in her, and she agrees. Things are tense between them, and Hanna deflects it by teasing Will for checking her out. But Will gets genuinely upset that Hanna jokes about sex after telling



him she just wants to be friends. Hanna apologizes and finally explains the sudden shift in her behavior after their intense night of love-making at her parents' house: the overheard conversation and the seen text. She tells him Kitty told her that Will broke things off, and that she (Hanna) misinterpreted the situation. Will explains again that he was only following the rules Hanna set, but when they seem at an impasse, he goes to take a shower.

Will is surprised when Hanna joins him in the shower, but quickly tells her he cannot have a friends-with-benefits relationship with her anymore. Hanna admits she feels the same, and that when he said "my Hanna" at the race it encapsulated all her desires that they belong only to each other. She tells Will she loves him, and they have sex; Will explains that the reason sex between them is so good it almost hurts is because of their emotional connection. He allows himself to lose control and come quickly. They talk and make love for hours, and Will redraws her tattoo, "All that is rare for the rare," hoping he "could be the rare thing...Hanna deserved" (Page 396).

Two months later, Will and Hanna are flying to the West Coast for Bennett and Chloe's wedding. Things are going well with the couple, and Hanna admits to Will that she thinks he is hers forever. Will sets up the airplane's WiFi on Hanna's phone and texts her despite sitting next to her. He tells her he thinks Hanna is his forever, too, and that he is going to propose soon, though the prospect terrifies him. Hanna assures him verbally that they can handle anything together.

Analysis

The theme of growing up prevails in Chapters 18 and 19. After less than 48 hours away from Hanna, Will misses her desperately. He wishes he were going home to her, just as Max and Bennett will go home to their girlfriends. Will is almost envious of the stress of Bennett's wedding planning because he is practically ready to marry Hanna himself. The news of Max and Sara's baby makes further sense to him; it is a natural next step in an adult life. In the space of two months, Hanna has apparently completely tamed Will. He is fully prepared to hang up his bachelor stripes and join the adult world of commitment and child rearing. This once again plays into a female fantasy about "changing" a man, of being so alluring and spectacular that a man would give up an entire way of life for her. Hanna sees this change in Will as he attentively helps her prepare just for the race, and she has the thought, "Maybe the player really was gone" (Page 347). Hanna, who reverts to a childhood habit of wakefulness preceding a big event, is slightly more reluctant than Will to grow up, but that stems more from a lack of trust than a lack of desire for a committed, monogamous relationship (something the novel suggests every woman wants).

The half-marathon Will and Hanna run is a perfect analogy for the skills needed to commit to a long-term relationship. Anything worth doing or having is going to require hard work. Quitting because something is difficult is immature. Recognizing that work will make the reward that much sweeter is – and also that hard work is simply



necessary to achieve one's goals – is more adult, and resonates with the theme of growing up that pervades the novel.

All the themes converge in the final pages of the novel: Will and Hanna are finally open and honest with each other, and admit that they want to be exclusive with each other. They both understand the risk involved in trusting another person with one's heart, but they have both grown up enough to understand that letting go of control can yield an enormous reward. This symbolic "letting go" is manifested in Will's quick and intense orgasm after Hanna tells him she loves him. He literally loses control of himself rather than curating his orgasm, and it is the first time he has ever allowed himself to do so.

As the novel ends, Will tells Hanna he intends to propose to her, and here readers get the happily-ever-after a romance novel requires. With a marriage proposal, there is no question that Will is thoroughly reformed, ready for a lifelong commitment to that special, unique individual who "changed" him, Hanna. The female fantasy is complete, but the male ideal for a woman is manifested too, as Will can't imagine ever getting tired of having sex with the lustily insatiable Hanna. Traditional gender roles and needs have been upheld, and despite all the graphic sex scenes, the novel implicitly embraces a conservative and old-fashioned view of relationships between men and women.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss how Will has changed from the beginning of the novel to his impromptu talk with Bennett and Max in Chapter 18. Do you think he has grown up more than Hanna? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Describe how the half marathon is a metaphor for a committed relationship. What does Hanna learn about herself by completing the race, and how does it apply to her relationship with Will?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss gender roles throughout the novel? Are they traditional/stereotypical? Are there any ways that Hanna and Will go against traditional gender roles? Do you think the novel portrays a healthy dynamic between men and women? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

euphoria, elation, ambiguous, bemoan, peripheral, appraise, sordid, meld, contrite, oscillate, smoldering, synchronize, residue, covert, resolve, conscript, premonition



Characters

Hanna Bergstrom

Hanna Bergstrom is a twenty-four year old PhD student in biochemical engineering. She has gray eyes and light brown hair. While always slender, the running she does over the course of the novel makes her even more fit. Hanna is obviously incredibly book smart but thinks she has no social skills, never filtering the thoughts she has as they come out of her mouth, as well as being relatively sexually inexperienced. Hanna is a workaholic, but her motive at the beginning of the novel is to find a better work/life balance, - a challenge she treats as seriously as work when her brother implies she is “failing” at life; failure is not something goal-oriented and driven Hanna allows herself to do. Hanna looks to Will to teach her how to date casually, flirt more, and seduce men. She thinks of herself as a ninja – she wants to pick Will’s brain and get out without getting hurt, knowing his reputation as a lady’s man. Hanna’s motivation changes over the novel, as she spends more time with Will and falls in love with him and wants a committed relationship with him but wonders if he is even capable of such a thing. Hanna is stubborn and full of pride, so she can’t stomach the idea of sharing Will with other lovers. Hanna’s journey involves growing up, not just in terms of sexual experience, but also learning to communicate her true feelings better and learning to trust (i.e., take a risk) on someone (Will) who doesn’t have the best track record with women. Always confident and outspoken, Hanna truly settles into herself by the end of the novel, a mature, content adult.

Will Sumner

Will Sumner is a thirty-one year old philanderer who, despite having a sterling academic record in scientific research and a successful career in business is emotionally immature. Will is tall, fit, and good looking with a charming crooked smile. He is a typical bad boy, covered in tattoos. He was formerly a bass player in a band. He was raised by his mother and sisters, giving him a healthy appreciation of women; though he genuinely cares about their sexual needs and loves their physicality, his youth spent surrounded by women doesn’t seem to have made him sensitive to female emotional needs, as he selfishly uses women for sex without being willing to commit to a relationship with them. There is no reason for Will to have such a fear of commitment, but he at least prides himself on always being honest with women about what he wants. He is also a fiercely loyal friend, demonstrating he is capable of bonding emotionally with people. At the beginning of the novel, Will is starting to tire of the meaninglessness of his sexual life. He has two regular lovers but is restless and unsatisfied. He is primed to meet Hanna, who slowly changes his outlook on relationships. It starts out as a recognition of the hypocrisy of not wanting her to sleep with anyone else even though he does and grows until he admits he wants to date her exclusively. Will, though older than Hanna, grows up just as much as she does over the course of the novel, maturing



and getting less selfish. He changes more than Hanna, going from an acknowledged womanizer to a monogamous boyfriend.

Jensen Bergstrom

Jensen Bergstrom is Hanna's older brother and Will's best friend. Jensen is also thirty-one, divorced, and the oldest of the five Bergstrom siblings. Hanna claims he personifies vigilance, because he is fiercely protective of his family and he has a habit of trying to micromanage their happiness. Jensen sets the plot in motion by worrying about his baby sister's work/life balance, urging her to socialize more and suggesting she call his old friend Will to seek tips on dating and having more fun. Jensen's relationship with Will symbolically acts as a signpost for readers to know that despite his tendency to womanize, Will isn't all bad.

Liv Bergstrom

Liv Bergstrom is Liv's older (and only) sister, aged twenty-nine, who once kissed a nineteen year old Will in a gardening shed while Will was visiting the Bergstroms one summer. Hanna has long believed Liv was devastated by the way Will blew her off afterward. However, as a married, pregnant woman, Live has moved beyond her brief past with Will and has a healthy perspective on relationships with men. She believes love can grow out of casual sex and essentially that the right woman can "change" a man, as she did with her own husband. She is optimistic enough to think Hanna might do the same with Will, but also realistic enough to warn Hanna to protect her heart and tread carefully as her relationship with Will progresses.

Max Stella

Max Stella is one of Will's two best friends in New York, as well as being Will's business associate. Max is British. He uses humor to show his affection for his friends, constantly mocking Will for his womanizing ways as well as his burgeoning feelings for Hanna. He will make crass jokes about sex and his girlfriend Sara, but deep down he is loyal and true, deeply in love with her and willing to do anything for Sara. He is equally loyal to Will and beneath his jokey exterior he is concerned about Will's happiness and wishes he would settle down.

Sara Dillon

Sara Dillon is Max Stella's girlfriend and one of Will's few female friends. Sara is sensitive and sweet, more worried about emotions than most in Will's group of friends, who constantly seek a laugh. Sara worries about Hanna's potential feelings for Will by getting physically involved with him, and warns her against it. She admonishes Will for the way he uses women. Will knows that if Sara criticizes him about something he likely genuinely deserves it – she is slow to censure or confront, and only does it when



merited. Sara is pregnant by the end of the novel, and this externalizes the symbolic nature of her character as gentle mother figure, trying to care for everyone's emotional well-being.

Chloe Mills

Chloe Mills is Bennett Ryan's fiancée, and one of Will's few female friends. Chloe befriends Hanna and acts as her fun-seeking guru; she advises Hanna to sleep with Will for the fun of it but not to get emotionally attached. She is nice but slightly colder than Sara, as well as blunter. She is on the verge of cracking under the strain of planning her wedding.

Bennett Ryan

Bennett Ryan is one of Will's two best friends in New York. He is a successful businessman, engaged to Chloe, and always available to mock Will's antics and give him heartfelt advice by turns. Bennett and Max are rather interchangeable, but exist to shore up Will's reputation as a good guy by giving him loyal friends who don't judge him too harshly and always give him emotional support when he needs it.

Dylan Nakamura

Dylan Nakamura is a good-looking, smart, Asian graduate student who asks Hanna on a date. Despite going out with him three times, Hanna can never see Dylan as more than a friend as her mind is consumed by thoughts and fantasies of Will. Will is jealous than Hanna would even think of sleeping with Dylan. Dylan is a plot device through which Hanna and Will implicitly become exclusive, even before either of them is willing to admit that is what they are doing.

Johan Bergstrom

Johan Bergstrom is Hanna's father and Will's former mentor in scientific research. Hanna takes after her father in terms of brains and ambition, but also in the way she tips the scale of her life in favor of work. Johan spent years researching rather than spending time with his wife and children, and late in his life he has some regrets. He is determined to push Hanna to have more balance in her life, and allows his son Jensen to urge Hanna to socialize more.

Kitty

Kitty is one of Will's regular lovers before Hanna arrives in Will's life. Kitty is a woman with little instinct for self-preservation, willing to take whatever little time and effort Will gives her even though he is clearly just using her for sex, despite Kitty's deeper



emotional connection. Kitty thinks sex will make Will have feelings for her, but instead she is unceremoniously tossed aside when Will realizes he wants to commit to Hanna. Kitty is a metaphor for how Will feels in his relationship with Hanna: like a person without power, who will gladly accept whatever attention the object of his affection will give him, just to have a little time with her.



Symbols and Symbolism

Cell Phones

Cell phones are the primary means of communication between Hanna and Will. Nerdy, workaholic Hanna barely uses her old flip phone before Will comes along. With a new iPhone Will teaches Hanna about flirting electronically.

Plum Sake

Plum Sake is the drink Hanna consumes at the housewarming party the night she and Will first have a sexual encounter. It inspires Will to nickname her plum, a private joke between them with a great deal of sexual connotations surrounding ripeness, juiciness, and firmness.

Running

Running is the primary activity Will and Hanna participate in together, a symbol of endurance, stamina, and commitment to the long haul. Will is helping Hanna “train” for a half marathon, pushing her farther physically each day, but Hanna is metaphorically easing Will into the idea of a long-term, committed relationship.

Will's Tattoos

Will's Tattoos are each a private symbol (a phonograph represents his grandfather who loved music, a “No” on his ribs marks him as atheist and also feminist). Collectively, they easily earmark Will as a traditional, old-fashioned “bad boy,” someone dangerous who women should be wary of, though the placement of the tattoos on Will's fit and attractive body only makes Will more attractive to women.

A Ninja

A Ninja is Hanna's metaphorical concept of herself in her interactions with Will. She wants to penetrate Will's brain, extracting the information she needs about casual dating and sex, without getting emotionally entangled with him. She uses the symbol of the ninja because ninjas move imperceptibly and safely to achieve their goals, without getting hurt.



Spring

Spring is the season when Hanna and Will fall in love, meeting in February and allowing their feelings to bloom in April. Spring is a symbolic time of year for romance, young love (and lust via the requirements of fertility). Hanna and Will's feelings grow gradually, like flowers.



Settings

New York City

New York City is the main setting of the novel, where Hanna is a graduate student at Columbia University and Will is a successful businessman. Both Hanna and Will live on the Upper West Side, a signpost for wealth.

Boston

Boston is Hanna's hometown and the place Will frequented in his college days as Jensen's best friend and Johan's research assistant. Hanna takes Will to her parents' house for Easter, a weekend that brings them closer as they are forced to have sex more quietly and gently.

Maddie's

Maddie's is Will's and his friends' favorite British style pub in Harlem, where Max, a Brit, can get Guinness and food that remind him of home.

Denny's Apartment

Denny's Apartment is the site of a housewarming party that also hosts Hanna and Will's first sexual encounter in an empty bedroom as the party continues around them.

Central Park

Central Park is the location of Will and Hanna's daily runs and the half-marathon they complete together.



Themes and Motifs

Growing Up

When Jensen visits Hanna in New York and tells her to work less and develop more friendships / romantic interests, he is essentially pointing out Hanna's lack of socialization. Hanna is book smart but doesn't have the best skills interacting with other people. She is twenty-four years old. Despite having had several sexual partners, she has never been in a proper romantic relationship. Despite her intelligence, she is young and inexperienced, and she turns to Will to advise her on enhancing these social skills, particularly in terms of dating and sexuality. Essentially, Hanna is looking for advice on how to navigate adult relationships. Yet, turning to Will means she only learns how to participate in casual sexual encounters in a "mature" way: without becoming clingy, needy, or attached. Despite Will's thirty-one years of life experience and his own exceptional intelligence, he needs to grow up just as much as Hanna. Just because Will is older does not mean he is more mature than Hanna, though he may be more sexually experienced. His emotional development is just as stunted as Hanna's social development has been. Just as Hanna has buried herself in her lab and her research rather than facing a well-rounded adult life, Will has lost himself in meaningless sex, floating between sexual partners in an offhand way, never allowing any woman to penetrate his emotional life. By falling in love with each other, Hanna and Will both face their insecurities and their deficiencies. When they finally agree to an exclusive relationship at the end of the novel, they are both embarking on a traditional idea of adulthood in modern American culture: compromising one's own needs and putting the needs of others before one's own, risking emotional pain for the potential benefits of love, stability, and security.

Trust / Losing Control

Both Hanna and Will are intelligent, capable human beings, and each has total control of her or his life exactly as they want it at the beginning of the novel: Hanna buries herself in her PhD research, spending long hours in the lab literally controlling the conditions of various experiments in a metaphorical God-like position. She may not have a social life, but by constantly working, she is avoiding what she assumes would be awkward and unpleasant social interactions which she could not control. Will's revolving door of sexual partners also allows him a certain amount of control over his life; he is avoiding the messiness of emotional entanglement. If he involved himself with women beyond physical coupling, he would make himself vulnerable to pain, anxiety, and myriad emotions he would rather keep himself closed off from in order to maintain his equilibrium. When Hanna and Will begin sleeping together, the connection between them is more than just physical, though neither is at first willing to admit the emotional component to their relationship. Falling in love requires both of them to lose control. Hanna, knowing Will's sexual history, must learn to trust that Will will be faithful to her and that he will be satisfied with a single sexual partner. Will also must let go of his



tightly controlled universe and trust that Hanna will not break his heart through her youth and inexperience. The novel indicates that “control” is an illusion, given that Hanna and Will fall in love almost despite themselves and their intentions. Because humans can never truly control anything, trust is necessary for all social interaction, and as Will and Hanna let go of the idea of control, they learn to trust each other.

Commitment

Commitment is an obvious component of a loving, adult relationship within the context of a traditional moral society such as America. At the beginning of the novel, Will is incapable of commitment to a woman, but the novel underscores other types of commitment that pave the way for the budding relationship between Will and Hanna. Will has been best friends with Hanna’s brother Jensen for a dozen years, and he is equally loyal to his friends Max and Bennett. Will runs every day, keeping his body in peak physical condition, and this symbolizes a type of commitment as well. He teaches Hanna about this dedication. Hanna has always prided herself on her “drive,” a quality inherited from her parents that fuels her obsessive biological research in her quest for her PhD. Yet, Hanna never thought herself capable of the drive, or commitment, necessary to run a race. By running daily with Will, incrementally increasing the distances until she is capable of completing a half-marathon, Hanna learns about this type of commitment. Will commits to running the race with Hanna, whom he loves, rather than running at his own pace and by himself. His evolution from ladies’ man and player to one-woman faithful partner is complete and symbolized in this selfless act. The half-marathon itself is the novel’s main metaphor for commitment, a long-haul, long distance race requiring stamina, pacing, and determination. As they complete it together, Will and Hanna’s dedication to each other is solidified, even if they are not immediately aware of it.

Styles

Point of View

The novel has two first person, limited perspective narrators, Hanna and Will. They trade chapters, each recounting their side of events in a linear structure, with only minimal overlapping. Sometimes, a particular scene or event will be begun from one character's perspective and then finished from the other person's. Frequently, a scene not narrated by either Will or Hanna will at least be commented on by the non-narrating character in retrospect, giving the reader a clear idea of what each character is thinking at all times.

This narrative device gives the reader insight into the two characters that Will and Hanna don't have about each other. Readers are aware of each character's real, deepening feelings for the other, though Hanna and Will are not aware of these feelings themselves. Because both characters get to tell their side of the story, readers have an omniscient perspective similar to an objective, third person narrator. Readers can see all the miscommunications and misunderstandings that build the tension in the story, though of course they do not know if the truth will be revealed and the conflict resolved before the end of the novel.

It should also be noted that because Will and Hanna come from an upper class, educated background, a certain liberal attitude pervades the story. There is obviously little prudishness in the world of the characters, and their sexual gymnastics go unquestioned from a moral standpoint. In traditional gender terms, Hanna is more virginal than Will, having only had sex a handful of times before him, and never even considering sex with another man once she meets him. Despite Will's busy sexual past, he, too, never wavers from loyalty to Hanna once he meets her, and in this way the novel espouses a traditional, monogamous, heterosexual relationship despite its racier sexual content.

Language and Meaning

Despite Will and Hanna's high level of education, as well as their obvious upper class status living in one of the wealthiest areas of New York City, Will and Hanna both speak in a strikingly slangy, informal manner. Based on their dialogue alone, an uninformed reader would never guess that Hanna is a PhD candidate, nor that Will has a background in rigorous scientific research as well. This is slightly jarring, as it seems unrealistic that such highly educated people would speak in such frequently crass ways, and even more so given that Hanna and Will barely know each other at the outset of the novel and immediately fall into overly familiar language. On the other hand, it is perhaps a limiting stereotype to assume that members of the upper class don't use the same language as everyone else when it comes to discussing sexuality. The language of the novel is built to appeal to a wide audience, most likely targeted at a lower and middle



class readership, and thus it is simple and straightforward. The authors don't waste time on developing literary metaphors and symbolism, instead focusing on physical descriptions of Will and Hanna and detailed descriptions of their sexual interplay, using as much nuance as possible to create stimulating visual images for readers. What similes there are generally help build a tactile sense, as when Hanna refers to Will's "stomach like granite" (Page 202), as does Will's nickname for Hanna, "Plum," stemming from the flavor of an alcoholic beverage Hanna drinks, but also evoking a metaphor for Hanna's sexuality and physicality: ripe, firm on the outside but soft on the inside, and juicy.

Structure

The novel is divided into twenty chapters, as well as a prologue and an epilogue, ranging from five or six pages to almost thirty, though most chapters are approximately fifteen pages long. The novel moves in a linear, chronological order, encompassing roughly two months from February through April in an unspecified, contemporary year.

As mentioned earlier, the novel has two narrators, Hanna and Will, who trade chapters back and forth throughout its length. The gimmick of two narrators is not common; in particular romantic novels such as *Beautiful Player* are usually told from the female's perspective and targeted to a female audience. By writing half the novel from the male point of view, the authors offer insight for their female readership into the inner workings of the male psyche – or at least a highly romanticized, idealized version of the male psyche. Readers can live vicariously through Hanna, embracing the intense feelings of love and desire that Will articulates towards her in the chapters he narrates, as well as projecting themselves into the "I" of Hanna in the feminine chapters to further immerse themselves in the fantasy of the novel.

Two perspectives also raise the question of who is the true protagonist in the novel. Again, in most romance novels, the female is automatically the heroine because the novel is told from her perspective. While both characters undergo some amount of changing, giving Will a clear voice and story arc makes him more of the protagonist in this particular novel: Will shifts from player to one-woman man, from commitment-phobe to monogamous boyfriend. Hanna's transition is much more minimal; she moves from asexual person (who is still interested in sex but hasn't had a dynamic partner) to fully realized sexual being. But, because her interest in sex and social relationships are present in her from the start (Jensen doesn't have to push her too hard to force her to call Will and go out more), her story arc is less pronounced than Will's, and he represents the true protagonist.



Quotes

My brother had given me a task— go live your life more fully— knowing that if there was one way to ensure I'd tackle something, it was to make me think I was failing. And while I was pretty sure it hadn't been Jensen's intent that I spend time with Will to learn how to date and to, let's face it, get laid, I needed to get inside Will's head, learn from the master and be more like him in those ways. I just had to pretend I was a secret agent on an undercover assignment: get in and out and escape unharmed.

-- Hanna Bergstrom (Chapter 1 paragraph Page 14)

Importance: In this quote Hanna explains the inciting incident of the novel. Hanna describes herself as the personification of "drive," and with a push from her brother she suddenly becomes driven to adjust the scales of her work/life balance. The fear of failure motivates Hanna even when it comes to social situations, and her drive kicks in to not only try her hand at dating but to be "the best" at seduction, which is why she wants to learn from Will, a tried and true "player."

Do you ever feel like the people who mean the most aren't the people you see the most?" When he didn't respond, I added, "Lately I just feel like I'm not putting my heart where it matters.

-- Hanna Bergstrom (Chapter 1 paragraph Page 20)

Importance: Hanna says this to Will upon their first reintroduction, and the quote resonates with Will as well. Both Hanna and Will are at a crisis point: Hanna is spending too much time at work, Will is having too much meaningless sex. Both are seeking more meaningful, significant relationships.

When you're younger you want the boy who knows how to play the game but when you're older you want the man who knows when it's not a game anymore.

-- Sara Dillon (Chapter 8 paragraph Page 155)

Importance: Will's friend Sara makes a presumptuous statement about the nature of male/female relationships, assuming that women like players for a certain period of their youth, as long as they grow up and settle down at a certain point. This statement assumes both that women enjoy being manipulated and used by men, and also that they eventually all require committed monogamy. The novel asserts this gender stereotype time and again.

I knew it wasn't a game. It wasn't even fun right now. My time away from Hanna oscillated wildly between exhilaration and obsessive anxiety. Is this what it was about? Taking this kind of risk, opening up and gambling on someone else's ability to tread carefully with your feelings?

-- Will Sumner (Chapter 8 paragraph Page 157)

Importance: At age thirty-one, Will is just starting to understand what it means to have feelings for someone. Relationships require the loss of control of one's life, as one must



trust one's partner to be as selfless with one's feelings as the partner is selfish with his or her own.

When we first got together it was definitely just banging. Look, Ziggy, a lot of stuff happens to a person between the ages of nineteen and thirty-one. A lot changes.

-- Liv Bergstrom (Chapter 13 paragraph Page 250)

Importance: Hanna's sister Liv here states every woman's dream. Relationships that start as sex can grow into something more and the "right" woman can change a man from a player to a mature monogamous partner. She makes the case, which is appropriate for both Hanna and Will, that people can and do grow up, and their priorities can change.

Never before had my heart felt like such a thick organ, beating with heavy, squeezing pulses. I loved these reminders he gave me that my heart was a muscle and my body was made, in part, for being raw and animalistic, fucking. But not emotions. Definitely not those.

-- Hanna Bergstrom (Chapter 15 paragraph Page 295)

Importance: Hanna embraces her newly tapped sexuality, but is trying hard to keep her emotions separate from her physicality. But, she gives herself away by focusing on her heart, which may be a physical organ but symbolizes love and romantic emotions. She is failing at having sex without feelings, and in this way she supports an implicit idea of the novel, that women cannot have causal sex and are only seeking committed relationships.

Of course I'd been attracted to women before. But there was something more with Hanna, some chemistry in our blood, something between us that snapped and crackled, that made me always want just a little more than I should take. She offered her friendship, I wanted her body. She offered her body, I wanted to hijack her thoughts. She offered her thoughts, I wanted her heart.

-- Will Sumner (Chapter 16 paragraph Page 310)

Importance: Like the above quote from Hanna (Page 295), Will is also finding it hard to separate sex with Hanna from feelings, much to his surprise. His emotions are completely tied into the physical act of sex with Hanna, and the insatiability of his lust for her makes him want more and more of her, body, heart, and soul.

I felt the unformed words on his lips, how he seemed to be trying to say something . . . maybe the same something I'd been skirting around since I snuck into his dark room. Even before that. He didn't seem to understand what I was asking.

-- Hanna Bergstrom (Chapter 17 paragraph Page 330)

Importance: In this quote, readers see the crux of the conflict between Hanna and Will: neither is willing to verbalize their true feelings, needs, and wants to the other. Even though they both want the same thing from each other (an exclusive sexual and



emotional relationship), they won't admit it, which creates misunderstanding and tension between them.

Mom said she liked using only her horn, she liked that moment of faith, where she knew my schedule and she knew the curve so well she didn't need to see what was ahead in order to know it was clear. The thing was, I was never sure whether I loved or hated that feeling myself. I hated having to hope the coast was clear, hated not knowing what was coming, but I loved the moment of exhilaration when the car would coast downhill, clear and free. Hanna made me feel this way. She was my blind curve, my mysterious hill, and I'd never been able to shake the lingering suspicion that she'd send something the other way that would crash blindly into me.

-- Will Sumner (Chapter 18 paragraph Page 349-350)

Importance: In this quote, Will is describing a curve in the road outside his childhood home. He compares the blind curve to Hanna, the emotional roller coaster of fear and excitement that she instills in him because he doesn't know what to expect with her. He cannot see a clear, simple, straightforward path with her, and that scares him, though once again he understands the reward the risk can yield, the "moment of exhilaration" rounding the curve (or moving forward with Hanna) can elicit.

The enormity of this started to sink in and I all but collapsed back into my chair. This, here, was life. This was life beginning for us: weddings and families and deciding to step up and be a man for someone. It wasn't about the fucking jobs we had or the random thrills we sought or any of that. Life was built from the bricks of these connections and milestones and moments where you tell your two best friends that you're about to have a child.

-- Will Sumner (Chapter 18 paragraph Page 360)

Importance: As Will's friends make major leaps forward in their lives – marriage, children – Will finally recognizes the value of a meaningful life. Though he's always had uncomplicated sexual relationships, he suddenly can see himself getting married to Hanna, and growing up into a typical, mature adult male.

The pain had been worth the fear that I'd fail or be hurt. I'd wanted something, taken the chance, and jumped with both feet.

-- Hanna Bergstrom (Chapter 19 paragraph Page 377)

Importance: Hanna here is talking about running the half marathon, but this lesson she learned applies equally to her relationship with Will. She is going to have to take a risk and trust him in order to experience the rewards of being with a man she loves and feels loved by. The race, a lesson in endurance and commitment, is a metaphor for long-term monogamous relationships.

It wasn't that my fear was gone; if anything, hearing her say she loved me was infinitely more terrifying because it brought hope along with it: hope that I could do this, that she could, that both of us could somehow navigate blindly through this elusive first.

-- Will Sumner (Chapter 20 paragraph Page 390)

Importance: At the end of the novel, Will and Hanna finally admit their feelings for each other. Will, the perpetual player, has changed into someone who wants love and monogamy. He has let go of control of his life in order to be with Hanna, risking getting his heart broken. He recognizes the paradox of love: the words don't truly give security, just fear that love could just as easily go away, but at least they also engender hope that success is possible by taking this baby step of being honest about one's feelings.