

Before I Go to Sleep: A Novel Study Guide

Before I Go to Sleep: A Novel by S. J. Watson

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Contents

Before I Go to Sleep: A Novel Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part 1.....	5
Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 9-12.....	7
Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 13-16.....	9
Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 18-20.....	12
Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 21-23.....	14
Part 3.....	16
Characters.....	19
Objects/Places.....	22
Themes.....	24
Style.....	26
Quotes.....	28
Topics for Discussion.....	30

Plot Summary

Before I Go To Sleep is the debut novel of English writer S.J. Watson. In this novel, Christine Lucas wakes every morning thinking she is a carefree, twenty-something woman with a bright future ahead of her. In reality, Christine is a forty-seven year old woman who suffered a terrible attack eighteen years ago that has left her unable to retain memories. However, with the help of a doctor who specializes in memory disorders, Christine begins to keep a journal that helps her piece together her past and how she ended up as she has. Before I Go To Sleep is a thriller that will leave the reader guessing until the final sentence.

Christine Lucas wakes in a strange bed beside a man she does not recognize. In the bathroom, Christine finds pictures taped to the wall of herself as a much older woman and the man in the bed who tells her he is her husband. Christine is shocked and frightened, especially when a glance in the mirror tells her that the pictures are accurate even though she is convinced she is only twenty-five, not forty-seven. The man in the bed tells her he is her husband Ben, that they have been married for many years, and that she had an accident that has left her unable to retain new memories.

After Ben leaves for his job as a teacher at a nearby school, Christine receives a call from a stranger who tells her he is Dr. Nash, a man who has been helping her attempt to recover some of her memories. Dr. Nash picks Christine up and takes her to a local park where he explains their work together and shows her a journal she has been keeping for several weeks. Dr. Nash explains that Christine asked him to read the journal a few days earlier. Dr. Nash asks Christine to read the journal and then to contact him should she want to continue with their work.

Christine begins to read the journal. The first few entries introduce Christine to her husband, Ben, and the work she has been doing with Dr. Nash. In these early entries, Christine learns that she and her husband went for a brief visit to a park and the sight of fireworks caused her to have a flash of memory that included a woman she instinctively knows as her best friend. The memory takes place at a party when both women were in college. In this memory, the woman prepares to introduce Christine to a man with whom she thinks she might be compatible. Christine becomes frustrated when she cannot recall the woman's name.

A few entries later, Christine learns that Dr. Nash took her to a home she previously shared with her husband. In the kitchen of this home, Christine has a memory of an afternoon tryst with her husband. This memory makes Christine feel happy because she had been frustrated before when she could not remember anything about her husband. This one memory expands later to help Christine recover the memory of having written a novel in her past. Christine asks Dr. Nash about this and he gives her a copy of her novel along with a press clipping he has found. As Christine looks at the press photo, she suddenly recalls having had a son named Adam. However, when Christine asks her husband about her child, she learns that he was killed in Afghanistan.



As Christine struggles with the loss of her child each day that she reads about it in her journal, she becomes aware of lies Ben has told her over the past few weeks. Dr. Nash makes excuses to her about this, but Christine struggles to trust Ben. Then Christine remembers the name of her best friend and learns that she has left a number for Christine at the facility where she lived for years after her injury. Christine meets with her friend and is given a letter from Ben explaining why he divorced her several years ago. Christine is touched by the letter and decides to tell her husband everything.

Christine has reached the end of the journal. Comforted by what she has read, Christine prepares to go on a short vacation with her husband. However, when they arrive at their destination, Christine realizes that Ben has taken her to the same hotel that was the scene of the attack that left her with her memory loss. In Ben's luggage, Christine finds several pages from her journal and discovers that they hold the secret to her current circumstances. It turns out that Ben is not Ben, but a man named Mike with whom Christine had a brief affair eighteen years ago. With this knowledge, Christine suddenly remembers the attack, remembers that Mike did this to her. Christine fights valiantly when Mike comes into the room and somehow survives, memory intact. However, no one knows if she will still remember after she falls asleep.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

This is the first novel of English writer S.J. Watson. The novel is set in London and features a woman with a memory disorder, perhaps inspired by Watson's work in the National Health Service.

Part 1. Today, Christine wakes in a strange bedroom with a strange, older man beside her. With thoughts of a one night stand with someone else's husband, Christine slips naked from the bed and makes her way to the bathroom. On the wall beside the mirror, Christine finds pictures of herself as a much older woman and the man in the bed. Handwritten notes inform her this man is Ben, her husband. Christine begins to panic, confused by the older face looking back from the mirror at her. Christine returns to the bedroom and demands to know what is going on from the man on the bed. He rolls over, still half asleep, and begins to tell her that he is her husband, that they have been married many years, and that she suffered an accident that has affected her memory.

The man helps Christine dress and then takes her on a brief tour of the house. The man, Ben, gives Christine a scrapbook of pictures, explaining most of them are recent because of a fire they had in their previous home. Ben then tells her that he is a Chemistry teacher at a nearby school, head of the department in fact. Ben then dresses and leaves, instructing Christine to stay close to the house and to take her cell phone if she goes anywhere. Finally, Ben tells her that she should pack a bag so that they might go on a brief vacation that weekend to celebrate their anniversary.

Alone in the house some hours later Christine sits and tries to reconcile herself to her situation. Christine feels great compassion for the man who claims to be her husband because of all he must have to go through each day in order to care for her. A phone in Christine's handbag rings and she answers with some trepidation. The voice on the other end is vaguely familiar. A man introduces himself as Dr. Nash, a doctor who has been working with her without Ben's knowledge in hopes of helping her recover her memory. Dr. Nash asks Christine if he can come by and pick her up because he has something to discuss with her. Christine agrees, instinctively convinced she can trust him.

Dr. Nash takes Christine up the hill to a small park where they have some coffee. Dr. Nash explains that he has been working with Christine for some weeks without Ben's knowledge because Christine had wanted to show some progress before telling Ben. Dr. Nash tells Christine that she has shown some improvement, but they still have a long ways to go. Finally, Dr. Nash hands Christine a journal and tells her it is hers, that she has been writing in it every day for several weeks. Dr. Nash asks Christine to read the journal and call him later should she want to continue their work. Alone at home a short time later, Christine opens the journal and discovers on the front page she has written: Don't Trust Ben.



Part 1 Analysis

In this first part of the book, the author introduces Christine Lucas. Christine has an inability to retain memories for longer than a twenty-four hour period. This problem stems from some sort of injury Christine suffered eighteen years prior to the beginning of the novel. For some reason, Christine can make and retain memories while conscious, but when she enters deep sleep all these memories are lost. Therefore Christine has not been able to form new memories and retain them for eighteen years, and sometimes she wakes having lost memories multiple years before her injury.

Christine's situation leaves her extremely vulnerable. However, she has a supportive husband who clearly loves her and is patient enough to explain the situation each morning and help her deal with her unique circumstances. Christine also learns that there is a doctor who has been helping her try to recover some of her lost memories and retain those that she is making. In order to do this, the doctor has encouraged Christine to keep a journal.

Still confused and uncertain about her situation, Christine sits down with a journal she has been told that she has been writing to learn about her immediate past. However, Christine does not recognize the writing in the journal, is not even sure she can trust what she has been told. This alerts the reader to the fact that Christine, through a fault not her own, is an unreliable narrator in this first person narration. This situation increases the tension of the novel, leaving the reader wondering just who can be trusted among its well written characters.



Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 9-12

Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 9-12 Summary

Friday, November 9. Christine describes herself and how she woke that morning beside a strange man, only to learn that man is her husband and she has no memory of the last eighteen years. After her husband leaves for work, Christine receives a call from a man called Dr. Nash who tells her he has been working with her in hopes of recovering some of her memory for several weeks. Dr. Nash comes to pick Christine up at her home and takes her to his office, explaining their previous work and showing her a video of the two of them doing a memory exercise. Dr. Nash then gives her this journal and asks her to begin writing in it, explaining that perhaps writing about her memories might help. Finally, Dr. Nash shows Christine a picture of a house and helps her recover memories from her childhood of growing up in that house. On the way home, Dr. Nash promises to call Christine each day to remind her about her journal.

Saturday, November 10. Again Christine describes waking up confused and having to be told her story by Ben once again. After breakfast, Christine receives a call from Dr. Nash telling her about the journal and directing her to its hiding place in the closet. Finding the journal and reading the first entry helps Christine trust the doctor. Writing in the journal, Christine relates memories of her parents and a strong desire to see them, but an instinctive knowledge that they are dead.

Later that night, Christine tells her journal, she and Ben went for a drive to Parliament Hill. Once there, they sat on a bench and talked. Christine asked about children and learned they had never had any. Christine asked about her injury and learned that she had been hit by a car while walking home from work on an icy evening. Then, as Ben and Christine began to walk back to the car they saw fireworks in the sky. Suddenly Christine began to have a memory. Christine saw herself on the roof of a house with a woman she instinctively recognized as her best friend. She and the woman talked about a man with whom the woman wanted to set Christine up. Christine teased her friend, reminding her of another disastrous matchmaking attempt. However, before the woman could make the introduction, the memory receded. On the way home, Christine asked Ben about her past friends, but he denied she ever had a best friend.

Monday, November 12. Christine begins this entry by describing a meeting with Dr. Nash. Dr. Nash picked her up and took her to his office where she described the memory she read about in her journal of her best friend. Christine expressed frustration with her inability to remember more or to remember her husband. Dr. Nash then showed her a picture of a church and asked if she remembered anything about it, telling her she and Ben were married there. However, Christine could not remember anything. Dr. Nash suggested that perhaps visiting a place in person would help. Dr. Nash asked



Christine if she would consider going with him to a house she once lived in with Ben. Christine agreed.

Christine and Dr. Nash arrived at the house and Christine was shocked to see how similar it was to the house she lived in still with Ben. Inside, Christine moved from room to room, but did not see anything familiar. However, while standing in the kitchen Christine had a strong memory of she and Ben growing distracted from making lunch by passion. This memory excited Christine because it was the first she had had of her husband.

Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 9-12 Analysis

In this beginning section of her journal, Christine learns more about the techniques Dr. Nash is using to help her recover her memory. It seems clear to both Christine and the reader that Dr. Nash is an ambitious doctor who hopes that helping Christine with her unusual type of memory loss will help propel his career. However, this ambition also leaves the reader somewhat skeptical of Dr. Nash's true motivations. It seems there are few people whom Christine can trust, therefore the reader must be wary of everyone.

On an outing with her husband, Christine learns some details of her past, including the car accident that led to her injury. Christine also learns that she and Ben never had children, something that leaves Christine saddened by lost opportunities. That same night, Christine remembers attending a party as a university student with someone she instinctively knows is her best friend. This memory is strong and shows both the reader and Christine that she is capable of recovering memories of the years before her accident. This memory also seems to prove that Christine has others in her life who cared deeply for her, leaving the reader wondering where these people are now.

On a visit to a previous home, Christine has a strong memory of her husband. This memory leaves Christine with the impression that she once loved her husband very much. Christine is excited by this memory because she has been left confused and frightened by the fact that she could not remember her own husband. Now Christine feels more secure in her dependence on her husband due to this memory. This is a trust that might appear well placed, but again the reader must continue to be wary of everyone in Christine's life due to her unique situation.



Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 13-16

Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 13-16 Summary

Tuesday, November 13. On this date, Christine relates her happiness at having recalled a memory of her husband. As she rereads the details of that memory and it triggers more detail. Christine remembers lying in bed with Ben and his expressing an urgency to go so that he might catch a train. Later, Christine entered an office and attempted to write part of a novel but struggled. Christine stood and took another novel off a shelf she had published and looked through it. This memory caused Christine to search her home for that novel, but she cannot find a copy of it anywhere. Christine then begins to wonder why Ben told her that she was a secretary at the time of her accident, never mentioning the novel. Christine calls Dr. Nash and asks him. Dr. Nash confirms that Christine had once written a novel. In bed that night, Christine asks Ben whether she had ever written anything and he tells her she is imagining things.

Wednesday, November 14. Christine writes in her journal that Dr. Nash came and took her to have an MRI done of her brain in an attempt to map the way in which her brain stores memories. Christine writes how claustrophobic the machine was and how frightened she became as pictures were flashed on a screen above her head and she did not recognize the faces on them. As the pictures flashed, Christine had a memory of the first time she had sex. After a time, Christine became overwhelmed by the situation and the claustrophobia and panicked. Afterward, Dr. Nash took Christine to a cafeteria and they spoke for a while about the pictures. Dr. Nash told her some of the pictures were of her family and friends, but others were strangers that were added as a control. Then Dr. Nash gave Christine a package that contained a paperback version of her published novel. At home, alone, Christine looks at the book trying to remember writing it, but nothing comes to her. Then Christine finds a news clipping about the novel's release that Dr. Nash had added. The picture causes Christine to have a flash of memory, the realization that she had been pregnant with her son Adam in the picture.

Christine searches the house for evidence that she had once had a son, but cannot find anything. However, the memories continue to come and she is convinced there had been a boy. That night Christine confronts Ben with the memories and he finally admits there had been a son. Ben shows her pictures and a birth certificate. Then Ben tells Christine that their son, Adam, had been killed after joining the Army and going to Afghanistan. Christine is overcome with grief for her dead child. This grief causes her to have a memory, to remember the name of her dear friend. Claire. Christine asks Ben about Claire and he tells her that Claire had given up on her years ago and moved to New Zealand after marrying.



Christine goes upstairs to have a bath. During her bath, Christine has a memory of being in a different bathroom. Ben had knocked on the door and asked her if he could come in. Christine had gotten out of the bath and fallen , hitting her head on the floor.

Thursday, November 15. When Christine finds her journal on this morning, it is a crushing blow to learn of the death of her only child again. Christine feels overwhelmed, so she goes for a walk. At the park she meets a little boy whom she imagines must be like her Adam had been. Christine lingers in the park, reluctant to go home. Finally, however, she goes home and finds Ben anxious, but quickly calmed. Ben tells her it is his birthday and sends her upstairs to get ready for a dinner out. Christine goes into the bathroom to discover the pictures she had torn down earlier in the day have been quietly replaced.

Friday, November 16. Christine wakes this morning with the images of what she cannot tell is a dream or a memory. Christine recalls Ben making love to her and her resistance to him, her reluctance to make love to someone she has only known for a few hours. However, Christine had submitted to him out of a sense of duty. However, while making love to Ben Christine had seen the face of another man, someone she did not know but who felt familiar to her. Later that morning Dr. Nash picks Christine up and takes her to his office. In the parking garage they have a brief argument about Adam and Dr. Nash's failure to warn her about him. The argument ends with a moment of intimacy that makes Christine, who still feels twenty-something, feel as though there might be something sexual between them.

Back home, Christine prepares for a night out with Ben, dressing in a nice clothing and doing her hair. When Ben comes home he is surprised to find her so dressed up. At the restaurant that night Christine quizzes Ben about their relationship. Christine bemoans her accident and makes a wish that she could get better. Christine then sounds Ben out about seeing another doctor, but he shuts her down, insisting it would not be helpful. That night, back at home, as Ben begins to make love to her, Christine has another strong memory. In this memory, a man was attacking Christine, causing her to not be able to breathe. The memory is vivid, but Christine cannot see nor hear the man attacking her.

Saturday, 2:07 a.m. Christine is having trouble sleeping and begins to think that Ben is lying to her. Christine gets out of bed and begins searching the house for the box where Ben keeps Adam's pictures. Christine finds the box, but discovers it is locked. Ben wakes and Christine pretends to have just awoken confused.

Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 13-16 Analysis

In these entries in her journal, Christine tells herself and the reader how she has begun to retrieve more and more memories. Among these memories are details of an afternoon of pleasure with Ben and the fact that she once wrote a novel. Ben has already told Christine that she has a PhD in English, although he told her that she was



working as a secretary the day she was injured. This confuses Christine when she learns that she once wrote and published a novel, but then she begins to think that perhaps Ben has kept this information from her because he does not want to cause her grief. The reader will note, however, that this does not appear to be the only thing Ben has lied about and will not likely be the last.

Christine later learns that she is a mother, but that her son has died. This news deeply grieves Christine each time she reads it. However, the reader will notice that as the journal entries continue, Christine seems to deal with the news more and more easily, suggesting she is beginning to remember the truth and it does not hurt as much.

Christine appears to make another breakthrough when she wakes with the memory of a sexual encounter with Ben the night before. Christine has never remembered anything from one day to the next before, suggesting that she is improving. However, Christine herself is not sure if this is really a memory or simply a dream. Important about this incident, besides the suggestion of improvement in her condition, is the face of the man she sees in the memory. This face will prove to be important later in the novel.

The memory Christine has in which she is being attacked is very significant. This attack is by an unseen man, someone who is clearly passionately connected to Christine in some way that has led to this vicious attack. The reader wonders if this could possibly be how Christine received her brain injuries that left her so terribly dependent on those around her. Later, Christine becomes convinced that Ben is lying to her, that she was never in a car accident. This causes her to search for answers, but only leaves her with more questions.



Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 18-20

Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 18-20 Summary

Sunday, November 18. Christine writes about waking up on Sunday and thinking of a man named Ed, but she does not know what it means. Perhaps Ed is the name of the man who attacked her. At dinner that night, Christine tells Ben that she feels that he is hiding some of the truth from her, but that it is okay for him to tell her. Christine tells him that she has a vague memory of her accident. Ben tells her it is her imagination and she should ignore it. Upset, Christine calls Dr. Nash, but he is busy and unable to help her.

Monday, November 19. Christine meets Dr. Nash in a café. Christine asks him about her injury and he tells her that she had been attacked in a hotel room in Brighton, not in a car accident. Dr. Nash describes some of her injuries and her recovery, how she had been in the hospital for months and then transferred to a psychiatric hospital when her memory problems caused her to act violently. Dr. Nash tells Christine she had been in the psychiatric hospital for seven years. Dr. Nash then suggests that Christine go with him to the hospital to see if being in the ward might trigger a memory. At the hospital, Christine has a few vague memories of seeing her son, of a man and woman she did not know who came to see her. Christine and Dr. Nash speak with Dr. Wilson, a doctor who cared for her at the time. Dr. Wilson shows Christine a diary she had kept. There are dozens of entries, each announcing she had just woken up and the previous entry had been written by an imposter. Dr. Nash explains that her memory lasted only seconds when she first came to the psychiatric hospital. As she stands to leave, Christine accidentally knocks over a photo of herself when she was first injured, a sight that causes her to become very agitated for a time.

On the way home, Christine and Dr. Nash speak about the progress she is making. Dr. Nash insists she is doing well. Christine tells him that she thinks if she could remember what had happened during her attack that she might regain her memory. Then Christine has a flash of memory, of a man dragging her into a bathroom in a hotel room and shoving her head into the water. Christine cannot recall the man's face, but tells Dr. Nash she thinks his name might be Ed. Dr. Nash explains that his name is Ed and that she is doing something called confabulation in which her mind is filling in the blanks of memory with her imagination. Dr. Nash then suggests that the following week they go to Waring House, a home for people with brain injuries where she had lived for the past ten years.

Tuesday, November 20. Christine writes in her journal that she has begun to feel guilty for keeping Dr. Nash and the journal from Ben. Christine has come to understand what a huge burden her care must be for Ben. Christine resolves to tell Ben about the doctor, but is still uncertain whether or not to tell him about the journal. That night Christine tries



to speak to Ben several times, but he has had a bad day and is not in a receptive mood. In fact, Ben becomes nearly violent after she accidentally breaks a plate.

Dr. Nash calls later that night. Dr. Nash tells her he has spoken to a woman who worked at Waring House years ago and recently returned who had told him Ben divorced her several years ago. Not only this, but that her friend Claire had been trying to reach her but had gotten no response from Ben. Dr. Nash gives Christine Claire's number and suggests she talk to her before telling Ben about the journal.

Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 18-20 Analysis

In these sections of the journal, it is clear that Christine is remembering more and more of the attack that led to her brain injury. Dr. Nash fills in some of the blanks, telling her where she was found and about her recovery. It is clear that what happened to Christine was devastating, leaving her unable to care for herself for most of the past eighteen years. Christine has some small memories of this time period, but they are dark and confusing, memories that center around her son and two strangers who visited her in the hospital. A visit to the psychiatric hospital makes it clear that Christine's memory was drastically worse than it is now. The fact that Christine has made so much progress is a good sign, but does not necessarily mean that she will ever recover all her memories. In fact, Christine has begun to experience moments of complete memory loss even during the time period in which she has been able to retain memories. This leaves the reader in doubt as to whether Christine will ever fully regain her memories.

The unreliable narrator becomes more and more clear in these journal entries. Christine has begun to doubt herself, to doubt whether her memories are really memories or manifestations of her imagination. Christine remembers the name Ed and believes he might be her attacker, but learns that Ed is really Dr. Nash's first name. Later, Christine imagines a romantic link between she and Dr. Nash but is rebuffed when she kisses him. It is clear that Christine is still struggling with reality and her mind's attempts to fill the blanks of her memory.

The fact that Ben divorced Christine at some point in her past is a strange revelation. The reader cannot imagine why a man who divorced his wife would return to take on the burden of caring for her in his home. Why Ben divorced Christine and why he came back are mysteries that remain unanswered at this point in the book, leaving the reader wondering if Ben has some other nefarious plan of which Christine and the reader are still unaware. Perhaps finding Claire now will help Christine find answers to some of these problems.



Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 21-23

Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 21-23 Summary

Wednesday, November 21. Christine has Claire's number, but she hesitates before calling it worried that she cannot trust her own thoughts and memories that are written in the journal. When she finally does, all she gets is an answering machine. Later in the morning Dr. Nash appears at the door and Christine cannot recall a phone conversation he insists they had had that morning. Christine becomes upset, but Dr. Nash reassures her. Christine then tells Dr. Nash that she suspects Claire and Ben are having an affair, something that would explain Ben's lies about Claire and Claire's absence from her life. As they talk, Christine leans over and kisses Dr. Nash, telling him later that she thinks they are in love. Dr. Nash gently tells her that he believes she is confabulating again and that they have to keep a professional distance from one another. In humiliation, Christine throws him out of the house.

Christine, who is beginning to question everything and everyone around her, finds the key to the locked box of pictures Ben had hidden in his office. Christine opens the box and looks through the pictures, finding pictures of herself and Ben on what must have been their honeymoon, pictures of Adam, pictures of Claire at her wedding, and a newspaper clipping describing Adam's death. Christine decides that all this should convince her to trust Ben.

Christine calls Claire again and this time Claire answers. Claire is clearly happy to hear from Christine. Christine tells Claire about her memories of her and asked if she had ever moved to New Zealand. Claire insists the only place she has ever lived abroad is Barcelona for a short period many years before. Christine and Claire decide to meet later in the week.

That night, Christine confronts Ben about Claire and asks him why he lied about her. Ben becomes angry until Christine asks why he had divorced her. Ben apologizes and insists that he would never leave her again, that he had only done what he thought was best for her.

Thursday, November 22. Christine wakes that morning with a man watching her from a chair, completely unaware of where she is or who he is.

Friday, November 23. Christine follows Claire's directions precisely and meets her at a park. Claire has brought along her young son, Toby. At first it is awkward and they speak about general things, of Claire's life in the past eighteen years. Christine asks about Adam, asks if she was a good mother, and Claire assures her she was. Christine asks about her attack. Christine has already guessed she was having an affair and Claire



confirms it. Claire tells Christine that she had had trouble adjusting to motherhood, so Claire had suggested she take an afternoon a few times a week to write in a café. In time, Christine had begun going every day and apparently met someone there. Claire had confronted her on it and Christine told her that she had ended it. However, Christine had been attacked a few weeks later. Claire tells Christine that Ben had suspected the affair, but did not know for sure until she told him after the attack.

Christine confronts Claire with the idea that she and Ben had been having an affair. Claire admitted that sometime after her attack she and Ben did have a brief affair, but it did not last long. Claire says she stopped going to see her because Adam became upset about the affair and did not want her around. Sometime later, Claire had written to Ben to ask permission to see Christine and Christine herself had written back telling her to stay away. Then Claire gives Christine a letter Ben wrote to her explaining why he decided to divorce her. The letter tells Christine that he felt that his presence only aggravated her and brought her pain, so he thought his absence would help her recover faster. The letter is so gentle, so touching, that Christine decides it is time to tell Ben the truth about Dr. Nash and the journal.

Part 2: The Journal of Christine Lucas, November 21-23 Analysis

Christine has found and learned a few new things about Claire. Claire's phone call is a shock to Ben and he becomes quite angry, suggesting some sort of tension there. Christine jumps to the conclusion that Ben and Claire have had or are having an affair. This seems plausible and is later confirmed by Claire. However, the scenario Claire describes does not completely support the reaction Ben has when he learns that Christine has talked to Claire. There is clearly something odd happening here.

Christine's meeting with Claire reveals that Christine had been having an affair in the weeks before her attack. This leads Christine to feel a great deal of guilt and a great deal of compassion for Ben. This information also creates a list of suspects for the reader as to the identity of Christine's attacker. The attacker could be a spurned lover or it could be a husband momentarily blinded by jealousy and later overwhelmed with guilt. The reader is suddenly quite cautious when it comes to Ben, wondering if Christine's decision to tell him the truth about Dr. Nash and the journal is a good idea. Not only this, but the reader cannot help but notice that this entry is the final in the journal, but the reader knows nearly a week has passed since that last date. The reader must wonder what happened over that week and where the bruise on Christine's head came from.



Part 3

Part 3 Summary

Christine glances at the clock and realizes Ben will be home soon. Christine wonders why there is a week missing from the journal, but believes part of the reason is because it was with Dr. Nash for most of that time. Christine looks in Ben's office and finds the lock box where he kept Adam's pictures, but now it is open and holds only a new copy of her novel. On the desk, Christine picks up an envelope absently and carries it downstairs with her. As Christine makes another cup of tea, Ben calls and asks her to pack their bags for the trip out of town. As Christine packs, she thinks of how lucky she is to have Ben and feels the continuing guilt of having cheated on him all those years ago. When Ben comes home he appears agitated and annoyed by the pressures of caring for Christine. Christine asks about pictures of Adam, assuming Ben now knows about her journal and that she knows about their child. Ben shows her an album he had wanted to put together for her as a gift for their anniversary but did not have time to finish. Among the pictures is one of Adam with a woman whom Ben describes as his fiancée.

They drive for a while and Christine falls asleep, waking as they sit parked on the edge of a cliff. They speak for a few minutes and spend a few longer, drawn out moments in silence before continuing on to the hotel. When they reach the hotel Christine feels a sense of fear, but is unsure why. They check in and the clerk takes Christine up to the room while Ben goes to get the luggage. Even before Christine turns on the light in the room she feels something sinister. However, when the lights come on she does not recognize anything about the room and thinks that her imagination is running overtime again. A glance out the window causes the sinister feeling to return when Christine realizes they are in Brighton. Christine thinks that Ben might have brought her here with the misguided idea that it might help her recover her memory, but Christine is frightened and wants to leave. Then Christine sees the tile in the bathroom and knows this is the same room in which she was attacked eighteen years ago.

Ben comes in with the luggage, then leaves again to get some champagne, locking Christine into the room. To keep herself busy, Christine begins to unpack. In Ben's luggage she finds the envelope she had absently taken from his desk earlier in the day. Christine opens it and is shocked to find papers cut from her journal inside. The first is dated Friday, November 23, the same as the final entry in her journal she read earlier that day. This entry describes Ben's arrival home that night and Christine's confession that she had seen Claire, that she was seeing Dr. Nash, and that she was keeping a journal. A fight had begun between she and Ben. Ben had become violent, beating Christine about the face before storming from the house, leaving her frightened he might come back and frightened that he would not.

After reading this entry from her journal, Christine touches the still tender bruise on her forehead and knows the words are true. Ben returns from downstairs and tells her he is



going to take a shower. Christine continues reading these missing entries from her journal.

The next entry is dated Monday, November 26. In this entry, Christine learns that she called Claire and described Ben's violent outburst on Friday night. Claire swears that Ben, a vegan, would not hurt a fly. Christine denies that Ben is a vegan, causing Claire to ask Christine to describe him. However, it is quickly clear that the man Christine describes is not the Ben who Claire knows. Claire calls the school Ben told Christine he worked at and learns that Ben is not head of the Chemistry department, but a lab assistant. Not only this, but Claire reveals to Christine that Ben is an architect, not a teacher. Claire tells Christine that the man she is living with is not her husband. Not only this, but Claire tells Christine that Adam did not die in Afghanistan but is alive and well in Birmingham. Finally, Claire tells Christine that there was no fire in their house, that the man posing as Ben has lied to her about everything.

Ben has come out of the bathroom. Christine confronts him, telling him she knows everything. The man tells her that he loves her, that Ben and Adam abandoned her but he never would. He tells her how they met in that café, how they had a passionate affair and how he had thought they would be together for life. However, Christine begins to recover memory after memory, remembering how she ended the affair with him after he threatened to confront Ben, how she had decided that she wanted to make a new start with her husband and son. Christine remembers receiving an invitation she thought was from her husband to come to this hotel for the weekend to begin their lives anew. However, it is this man, not her husband, who had come to the door that night. It is this man who attacked her and left her for dead.

The man, who Christine now remembers is called Mike, tells her that she has ruined everything and she must die. They begin to fight and he overpowers her. Mike then takes her journal and begins to burn it in the trashcan. Christine manages to knock it over, causing the fire to spread to the bedspread. Christine blacks out and wakes some time later in an ambulance with Claire beside her. Claire had put it all together and called the police, who arrived just in time to save Christine, but Mike was dead. At the hospital Christine sees Adam and learns that Ben has been in Italy, but he soon arrives as well. Late that night, Christine tells Dr. Nash that she can remember everything and that she can remember things that happened a week ago without having read it in her journal. Christine is hopeful that her memory will remain when she wakes. Dr. Nash admits there is no organic reason why her memories should not remain, but she should not expect a miracle.

Part 3 Analysis

In this final section of the novel, the narrator returns to the present day. Christine has finished reading her journal and finds herself wondering what happened on that Friday. Christine does not know if she told her husband, but later discovers she did when she drops hints about the journal and the doctor. Christine feels content with her life, feeling

as though she is making progress and that she has the full support of a man she loves deeply.

Throughout the novel it has been clear that Christine is not a reliable narrator because she is reading her story along with the reader. This is made even clearer when Christine finds pages that were torn from her journal that reveal not only that her husband lied to her, but he is not her husband at all but the man who beat her so severely she has been left brain damaged and unable to retain memories for eighteen years. Christine, however, proves to be a very strong, very courageous woman when she fights off her attacker and saves her own life.

The author leaves the reader with a final question that Christine cannot and therefore does not answer at the end of the novel. Will Christine retain all she has remembered on this night? The reader hopes that she will, but past events suggest she more than likely will not. No matter what happens with her memory, however, Christine has her family back and that could be enough.



Characters

Christine Lucas

Christine Lucas is a forty-seven year old woman who suffered a terrible assault that left her with brain damage. For the past eighteen years, Christine has been unable to retain new memories. At first, Christine's memories would last only seconds, but over the years she has recovered enough to retain memories for a full day with the memories disappearing with deep sleep overnight. At the beginning of the novel, Christine wakes next to a strange man, thinking she is a twenty-something young woman who has had a one night stand with someone's husband. However, Christine soon learns that this man is her husband.

Christine has been working in secret with a doctor who is attempting to help her recover some of her memories. As a part of this, Christine has begun writing in a journal and it is this journal that takes up the bulk of the novel. Over time Christine begins to remember more and more of her past, most of her memories centering on the people she loves and the attack that left her so damaged. In time, these memories reunite Christine with her best friend, but also alert her to lies that her husband has been telling her every day for the past few weeks.

Mike/Ben

Mike is referred to as Ben during the bulk of the novel because he has told Christine that he is her husband Ben. Mike is a man with whom Christine was having an affair in the months before her attack in a hotel in Brighton. A few weeks before her attack, Christine ended her affair with Mike, but he refused to believe she no longer wanted him. Mike lured Christine to a hotel in Brighton and attacked her, leaving her for dead. Christine survived the attack, but suffered such devastating head injuries that she can no longer retain memories for a significant amount of time.

Over the years, Mike has watched over Christine, keeping note of her progress. When the real Ben divorced Christine and moved on with his life, Mike felt that this was a cruelty and he decided to take responsibility for her. Mike checked Christine out of the facility where she had been living four months before the opening of the novel and began taking care of her at home. When Mike learns that Christine has been seeing a doctor secretly and has contacted her friend Claire, he decides that he must kill her before everyone figures out what he has done. Mike takes Christine to the same hotel where he previously attacked her and acts out their final scene.

Ben Wheeler

Ben Wheeler is the name of Christine's husband. Christine and Ben met in university through Christine's friend Claire. Ben and Christine had an idyllic relationship, but it



changed when Claire gave birth to their son and struggled to adjust to motherhood. Christine had an affair, but Ben never stopped loving her and stood by her throughout her recovery and for several years after her injury left her hospitalized. However, when Ben came to the realization that his presence only agitated and upset his wife, Ben divorced her and tried to go on with his life. In the end, Ben is in Italy when Mike takes Christine out of Waring House and is unaware of her ordeal until contacted by their son.

Adam Wheeler

Adam Wheeler is Christine's son with her husband Ben. Christine does not initially remember Adam, but comes to remember him when Dr. Nash gives her a newspaper clipping written after her novel was published. Christine has a flash of memory while looking at the picture included with the article and recalls she was pregnant at the time. With this memory comes a flood of others. When Christine confronts her husband about these memories, he tells her that their son died in Afghanistan a year before. Christine is devastated upon learning this news and each time she reads about it in her journal. However, Christine later learns that the man posing as her husband has lied to her and that her son is alive and well.

Claire

Claire is Christine's best friend from university. Claire is an artist who is somewhat eccentric, but who is also very loving and supportive of Christine. One of the first memories Christine records in her journal is one of Claire. When Dr. Nash contacts Waring House to arrange for Christine to visit, he learns that Claire has been trying to reach her and has left a number there. Christine calls the number and arranges a meeting with Claire. During this meeting, Christine learns she had an affair during her marriage in the months before her attack and that Claire had an affair with her husband during her recovery. This information, along with a letter Ben gave to Claire to give Christine, leads Christine to the conclusion that her husband is trustworthy and deserving of her trust. Later, however, it is Claire who realizes that the man claiming to be Ben is not really Ben Wheeler. It is also Claire who puts all the clues together and arranges Christine's rescue at the end of the novel.

Dr. Ed Nash

Dr. Nash is a young neuropsychologist who has been secretly working with Christine in an attempt to help her recover her memory. Dr. Nash is clearly an ambitious man who has chosen Christine in an attempt to make a name for himself in his field of study. Dr. Nash has requested that Christine allow him to write a paper about her case and to talk about her case at scientific conferences.

Dr. Nash helps Christine with her memory by taking her places where she once lived her life, hoping it will inspire new memories. The biggest thing Dr. Nash does to help Christine, however, is that he asks her to begin writing in a journal. It is this journal that



helps Christine to look back on her days and see what she has remembered. This journal is what helps Christine keep track of the things her husband has been telling her and eventually realize he has been lying to her.

Dr. Paxton

Dr. Paxton is a colleague of Dr. Nash's. Dr. Paxton is an older man who uses MRI to map and trace the way in which a patient with amnesia retains memories. Dr. Nash takes Christine to Dr. Paxton to have a study done on her brain. Dr. Paxton comes to the conclusion that there is no organic cause to Christine's memory loss, suggesting that she might one day be able to retain memory normally.

Dr. Wilson

Dr. Wilson works at the psychiatric hospital where Christine lived for seven years in the aftermath of her attack. Dr. Wilson meets with Christine when she visits the psychiatric hospital with Dr. Nash in a hope that it will trigger some memories. Once there, Dr. Wilson shows Christine some journal entries that show her how bad her memory was at the beginning and how much it has improved. Also while with Dr. Wilson, Christine sees a picture of herself in the aftermath of her attack that causes her to have a panic attack of sorts.

Amanda

Amanda is the new owner of the house Christine lived in with her husband when Adam was born and when she wrote her first and began her second novels. Christine visits the house in hopes that it might trigger some memories. The kitchen of the house does trigger a memory of the man Christine believes to be her husband, causing her some joy at being able to remember someone she has struggled to remember and trust. However, what is most significant about meeting Amanda is that she tells them they purchased the house from an architect. Due to the fact that her husband is a school chemistry teacher, Christine believes this architect bought the house long after she moved out. However, it turns out the real Ben Wheeler is an architect.

Christine's Parents

While Christine often cannot remember the years before her accident, she normally has no problem remembering her childhood. Christine has specific memories of her parents, such as her father's terminal illness diagnosis and her mother's advice in love and sexual relations. Christine thinks of her parents often in the early pages of her journal, but her memories are tempered by the fact that she knows her parents must be dead but she cannot remember their final years.



Objects/Places

Journal

Christine keeps a journal that Dr. Nash has given to her. In the journal, Christine writes down things that have happened to her and things she has remembered in an attempt to help her recall her past.

Ben's Letter

Claire gives Christine a letter written by her husband Ben that explains why he made the choice to divorce her during her care at Waring House.

Missing Journal Pages

Christine finds missing pages from her journal in an envelope on Mike/Ben's desk before leaving for a weekend trip to celebrate their anniversary. These pages reveal the truth about Mike/Ben's lies and his true identity.

Locked Box

Mike/Ben keeps pictures of Christine's past, including pictures of Adam, in a locked box that he brings out whenever she recalls her son.

Flip Phone

Dr. Nash gives Christine a flip cell phone that was once his girlfriend's so that he might be able to reach her without Mike/Ben's knowledge.

Simple Cell Phone

Ben has given Christine a simple cell phone on which only he calls her so that he can call her all times of the day.

Shoe Box

Christine hides the journal Dr. Nash gave to her in a shoe box in the corner of the bedroom closet. Christine has to be reminded by Dr. Nash about the journal at first, but soon begins finding it on her own.



Newspaper Clippings

Christine is given a newspaper clipping by Dr. Nash about her novel that causes her to remember being pregnant and giving birth to a son named Adam.

For the Morning Birds

For the Morning Birds is the name of the novel Christine wrote and published before her brain injury.

Waring House

Waring House is the name of a facility for people with brain injuries for which Ben fought and finally won a bed for Christine. Christine lived there for ten years before Mike/Ben removed her and began caring for her at home.

Birmingham

Christine learns that her grown son, Adam, has been living in Birmingham and was not killed in Afghanistan.

Brighton

Christine was attacked while staying at a hotel in Brighton, a seaside resort town.



Themes

Loss of Identity

As Christine struggles with a loss of memory, she struggles with her own identity. Throughout the novel, Christine expresses shock at her own body. Christine wakes most mornings thinking she is a twenty-something woman, or even younger, but when she wakes it is to discover that her body is forty-seven. Even as Christine begins to remember more and more about her past, about her friends, her family, and the attack that left her so terribly brain damaged, she fails to grow used to the idea that she is no longer twenty-something.

Christine's situation leaves her in a situation where she cannot trust anything, including the people around her and her own body. Christine, who was once a very independent person, must now rely on a man who calls himself her husband to tell her the truth about her past, a doctor who is highly ambitious to tell her the truth about her progress, and a friend who has betrayed her in the past to tell her what kind of a person she was in the past and who she might be now. It is a difficult situation for Christine, causing her to question who she can trust, wondering if she can even trust her own words, her own memories.

This novel is not only about a medical disorder, but it struggles with the question of what happens to a person who has lost themselves. Christine has lost what defines herself, what defines who she is, what she is, and where she will go in the future. However, Christine finds ways to deal with this loss of self, bringing herself back from the darkness and looking into the future with hope.

Duplicity

Christine cannot retain a memory for longer than a single day. Once Christine enters deep sleep, all the memories she has made in a day of living are wiped clean and she begins again the following day, making the same memories and struggling to hold on to them. For this reason, Christine is deeply dependent on the people around her. This makes it easy for Christine to fall for lies.

Christine lives with a man who calls himself her husband for four months. For all those months, this man tells Christine that she was injured in a car accident, that they have been married for many years, she was an overly qualified secretary, not a novelist, that they never had children and then that she had a son who was killed. These lies escape Christine who has no way of remembering them and comparing them to the truth until she begins writing them down in a journal. Soon Christine begins to see the lies, but she allows herself to believe that they were told for her benefit, to protect her from the grief of the truth.



Mike/Ben is a dark man who believes his love for Christine overshadows the need for truth. Mike wants Christine to love him the way she implied she might do, not love another man, someone else's child. Mike uses duplicity to win her back, but his love is violent, dangerous, and leads Christine down a path that nearly leads to her death.

Love

Christine struggles to remember her past, struggles to retain a memory for more than a few hours. When Christine begins to have flashes of memory that she records in her journal, most of these memories surround people she loves. Christine remembers her best friend, Claire, first. The memory is centered on a party they both attended, the party where Claire introduced Christine to Ben, the man she would one day marry and bear a son with. Later, Christine will remember the child to whom she gave birth, the little moments in a parent's life that make the struggle of parenthood so worth it. It is love that brings on these memories, love of the people in Christine's life who mattered before her injury.

Love is an important theme in this book because it is love that causes Christine to remember her past and that inspires her to keep fighting to hold on to those memories. It is also love that has placed Christine in her precarious position with Mike/Ben, a different kind of love, but love nonetheless. Without love Mike/Ben would never have taken Christine from Waring House and she might never have remembered her attack, might never have recovered the memories of her life, even if they only last a day.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first person point of view. The first and third parts of the novel take place in the present tense with the main character telling the reader what is happening to and around her as it happens. The second part of the novel is a written journal in which the narrator is writing down her memories, the things that have happened to her, with the intention of reading them herself to keep track of her days and her memories.

The point of view of this novel begins as a typical first person narration, taking the reader along for the same ride the narrator is taking as she wakes in the morning, learns she is an amnesiac, and she struggles to accept her situation and find purpose in her day. The second half of the novel, however, is a curious change of perspective. While the second half of the novel is also first person and also takes the reader along for a ride, it is written with the intention of keeping the narrator herself up to date with her own life and memories, making her an observer looking over the reader's shoulder. It is a unique point of view that takes the reader on an exciting ride, feeling like a voyeur in a courageous woman's life.

Setting

The novel is set in London. The bulk of the novel takes place in the home of Christine Lucas and Mike/Ben Wheeler. The home is a small, but comfortable place not far from a park. The novel also takes the reader to the offices of Dr. Nash, a small, crowded room that speaks of deep ambition. Later, a hotel room in Brighton becomes an important setting, a setting that marks the end of Christine's previous life and the beginning of her struggle with amnesia.

The setting of the novel is London, a place the writer knows well. The writer takes the reader and his character to several different locations all over London, but the most important locale visited is the home of Christine Lucas. This home is most notable, not because of what it contains, but because of what is missing. The home does not have many pictures of Christine and her husband, Ben, in it and does not have any pictures of their son Adam on display at all. This is notable because as Christine begins to remember her past, she notices their absence and begins to question the things her husband has been telling her.

The end of the novel takes place in a hotel room Christine remembers upon walking through the doors despite the fact that it has changed and her journal did contain a detailed description of it. This hotel room is the same room in which Christine was beaten and left for dead, causing the injuries that have left her with amnesia. While this setting is only featured in one section of the novel, it plays a huge part in the entire



novel since Christine makes it her goal to remember what happened in that room and it is this room that is the scene of her final showdown with Mike/Ben.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is a simple, modern English. The writer uses very little slang, choosing instead to stick to the simple, but educated language that his character more than likely would use based on her level of education. While the novel is set in England, there are few terms that any modern reader would not understand or find unfamiliar. There are no foreign phrases and no difficult medical terms in the novel, nothing that might cause the reader to have difficulty understanding the plot of the well written novel.

The language of this novel reflects the education level and the personality of the main character. This is an important aspect of the language because the novel is told in the first person point of view and the bulk of the novel is a journal that was written by the main character. For this reason, it is important for the language to reflect the main character and the author has done a good job remaining true to his character.

Structure

The novel is divided into three parts. The first part of the novel is in the present, beginning as Christine Lucas wakes in a strange house with a strange man, only to learn that she suffers memory loss and that this is her home, her husband. Later, a doctor gives Christine a journal in which she has been writing down her memories and events that have taken place in the course of her day over a two week period. The second part of the novel is this journal. The last part of the journal is the evening of the day that begin in part one.

The novel contains one main plot and takes place over the course of a single day. In this plot, Christine Lucas wakes to learn she has a memory problem and she is given a journal that tells her what has happened to her over the course of two weeks and some of the memories she has recovered in that time period. These journal entries introduce a mystery in Christine's life that comes to a climax on the day that began in the first part of the book. The main plot comes to a satisfactory conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"The face looking back at me is not my own. The hair has no volume and is cut much shorter than I wear it; the skin on the cheeks and under the chin sags; the lips are thin; the mouth turned down. I cry out, a wordless gasp that would turn into a shriek of shock were I to let it, and then notice the eyes. The skin around them is lined, yes, but despite everything else, I can see that they are mine. The person in the mirror is me, but I am twenty years too old. Twenty-five. More." Part 1, pgs. 4-5

"Something has been added. Something unexpected, terrifying. More terrifying than anything else I have seen today. There, beneath my name, in blue ink and capital letters, are three words. Don't trust Ben." Part 1, pg. 32

"And then I will find out, again, that I am wrong. My choices have already been made. Half my life is behind me." Part 2, pg. 36

"This is my husband, I told myself, I am married to him, yet still I felt somehow as if going to bed with him was wrong. I could not remember ever having done so before, and did not know what to expect."
Part 2, pg. 61

"I looked at the world outside—the strange, mysterious, unfamiliar world—and in it, I did not see threat, but possibility." Part 2, pg. 79

"With a shudder, I realized that he has done all this before. His grief is not new. It has had the time to bed down within him, to become part of his foundations, rather than something that rocks them."
Part 2, pg. 119

"For me time stretches, is almost meaningless. Years have slipped through me, leaving no trace. Minutes do not exist." Part 2, pg. 147

"My husband is telling me one version of how I came to have no memory, my feelings another." Part 2, pg. 163

"I had woken that morning happy. Happy to be in bed with someone called Ed. But it was not a memory. It was a fantasy." Part 2, pg. 199

"They exist, but as shadows in the dark. As strangers, they crisscross my life, connecting, disconnecting. Elusive, ethereal. Like ghosts." Part 2, pg. 219

"The memory of our son must be allowed to exist in this house, and in my heart, too, no matter how much pain that causes." Part 2, pg. 274

"I know he was only trying to prepare me for the worst—for the possibility that I will wake up tomorrow with no idea where I am, or who this man sitting next to me is, or



who the person is who is claiming to be my son—but I have to believe that he is wrong. That my memory is back. I have to believe that." Part 3, pg. 358



Topics for Discussion

Who is Christine Lucas? What has happened to her? Why can she not remember the past eighteen years? What is unusual about the way her mind processes memories? Why does her case draw the interest of Dr. Nash? What does Dr. Nash hope to do for Christine? What might Christine do for Dr. Nash's career?

Why does Christine keep a journal? What does she write in it? Why does this journal become so important to Christine? How does Christine remember to write in it each day? Why does Christine not think of the journal on the morning in which the novel begins? Why does Christine not notice there are pages missing from her journal? Who took the pages? Why?

Who is Ben Wheeler? What does he do for a living? What lies does he tell Christine about their past? Why do Christine and Dr. Nash think he tells these lies? What is the truth? What might happen if Ben were to tell Christine the truth each morning? How might this impact Christine? How does reading the truth in her journal each morning impact Christine?

Who is Claire? Why does Christine remember Claire first? Why does she not remember her son first? Why does Christine have trouble remembering her husband? Why does it make her so happy to finally have a memory of Ben? What does Claire tell Christine about her past when they first meet? How does this information change Christine's decision to tell Ben about her journal and Dr. Nash? Is this a good choice for Christine?

Why does Christine keep Dr. Nash and her journal a secret from Ben? Why does Dr. Nash encourage this? What does Dr. Nash think that Ben will do when he learns the truth? Why would Ben not want Christine to get better? Is Dr. Nash making Christine better? What evidence is there to this? Could Christine recover memories before she began seeing Dr. Nash? What are the chances that Christine will suddenly be able to retain all her memories? Explain.

Who is Adam? Why does Mike/Ben lie about Adam's death in Afghanistan? What purpose does this lie serve? Why does Mike/Ben tell Christine prior to her memories of Adam that they had no children together but they wanted them? Is this a complete lie? What does Christine think is the reason for these lies? Is there any truth to Christine's opinion? Explain.

What is amnesia? How does it affect the victim? How does it affect the victim's family? Are there really people with amnesia like Christine's? How would you deal with amnesia like Christine's? What happens to a person who cannot retain memories? How does the amnesia impact Christine's life? Could the events in this novel have happened to Christine if not for her amnesia? Explain.