

# **Emma's Secret Study Guide**

## **Emma's Secret by Steena Holmes**

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## Plot Summary

"Emma's Secret" is a novel by Steena Holmes which details the aftermath of Emma's kidnapping and her successful return to her parents following two years away. The novel is a sequel to Holmes's "Finding Emma."

In "Emma's Secret," Emma has been home for a little more than month. Her mother Megan, her father Peter, and sisters Hannah and Alexis struggle to adjust to her return. Emma, though kidnapped, was well cared for and loved by her kidnappers, Jack and Dottie. Thus, Emma fondly refers to Jack as "Papa," which annoys and frustrates Emma's mother. Against the advice of their family counselors, she wants to cut off as much of the past two years as possible from Emma, who is now five. Hannah blames herself for Emma's initial disappearance, and Alexis believes that Megan doesn't care about her and Hannah like she cares about Emma. Megan and Peter's marriage is strained. Megan – who has been unfaithful to Peter – believes that Peter is on the verge of walking out. Jack, meanwhile, mourns the death of his wife and misses Emma.

Ultimately, Peter and Megan repair their marriage and soothe Hannah's conscience. They also reassure Alexis that they love her just as much as they love Emma. In an act of great courage and good will, Megan allows Jack back into Emma's life, which delights Emma and helps put to rest the terror of the past two years.



# Chapters 1-5

## Summary

### Chapter 1

An old woman named Dottie picks up a little girl named Emma who is wandering through the neighborhood alone. The girl has a stuffed lion. She reminds the woman of her own daughter Mary. Jack, the old woman's husband, is confused when she brings the little girl home. The woman believes it is a second chance from God. Meanwhile, Emma's mother Megan dreams that her daughter has never been kidnapped. In her dream, her husband Peter and their daughters, Alexis and Hannah, are present. But, reality is much different. Since Emma's disappearance, things have gotten worse. There is a growing distance between Megan and Peter.

The story moves forward to Emma being home again after a two year absence. It is taking time for her to adjust to normal life outside the country farmhouse where she lived with the older couple that had kidnapped her.

Dottie, the old woman, has died. Her husband Jack is going through her things, wondering what he should give away. There are knitted items and many balls of yarn. She continually knitted dresses for Emma. He finds one of the many journals that she kept. She had written in one of the journals during Jack's service in the war. He remembers how another of their children, Basil Jack Henry, died a month after being born.

### Chapter 2

Megan bakes cookies with her daughters. She reflects on how Emma prefers to wear dresses rather than shorts and jeans. As Megan puts an apron on Emma, Emma remarks that "Grandma" did the same thing. She also reflects on how since Dorothy's passing, news delivered by Detective Riley Thompson, Emma has rarely smiled. Though Kathy Graham, the family counselor, urges Megan to refer to Dottie as "grandma," Megan refuses to do so. Megan does allow Emma to put in all the candy she wants into the cookie dough, which makes Emma very happy. Out back, Megan sees Daisy, a Golden Retriever, the only part of Emma's connection with Dottie and Jack that hasn't been cut off. Emma asks if they can mail a drawing to Papa (Jack).

Hannah, Alexis, and Emma play out back. Laurie, Megan's friend and jogging buddy, shows up with iced lattes. Laurie wonders if Megan will ever allow Emma to see Jack. Megan says it will not happen. Laurie says she needs to let it go, just a bit, because it is eating her up inside. Laurie is worried about Megan, who is barely leaving the house. Megan is worried about Emma, because Emma is only five. Megan believes that Hannah, who is only eleven, isn't old enough to babysit yet. And she has to work around Peter's schedule. Megan believes her husband is working earlier and later, not on the



pretext to help his partner, Samantha, but to stay away from her, because she is an emotional wreck. Laurie insists on a girl's night out, and tells Megan to tell Peter to be home earlier the following night. As Laurie leaves, Megan finds a letter in the mail from Jack to Emma, and it angers her. Emma will not see the letter. Megan doesn't care that Jack and Dottie loved and took care of her daughter, because they kept Emma from her. So Megan will keep Jack from Emma.

### Chapter 3

In a journal entry, Dottie writes that it is her birthday and Jack and Emmie are planning her a surprise. She hopes it is coconut cake. She must leave the house and spend the day to herself, so she thinks about going to the lake.

Jack feels very alone in his run-down farmhouse. Jack reflects on reading stories to Emmie every night before bed. Jack also knows that Dottie essentially slipped into a coma, ultimately dying of guilt for what her actions had caused. He goes to Emmie's room and carefully positions a stuffed bunny, which he promised Emmie he would take care of. He and his wife were vilified in the media, and Jack does not blame Megan for not wanting him to be in touch with Emmie. Jack knows he will never forgive himself for tearing a family apart. Jack also misses Dottie terribly.

### Chapter 4

As Megan cleans the house, she loses sight of Emma. In a panic she rushes around to find her in her bedroom with Daisy, talking about missing her life with Dottie and Jack. Megan goes in and Emma curls up in her lap, apparently having been crying. She misses the fairy lights that Jack tacked up in her room, and Megan offers to put up fairy lights for Emma. Megan is distracted throughout the evening, and Peter notices. He asks her what is wrong. She explains that Laurie wants to go out, and he tells her that all she has to do is ask him to be home earlier, and he will be. She recounts to Peter how Emma sometimes only responds to "Emmie" which angers Peter, who doesn't think Megan should be using "Emmie". He asks her what is wrong with her, and what it will take to make her happy.

### Chapter 5

Dottie recounts in a journal entry how Jack believes she is more tired than usual lately, and so an appointment has been made with Dr. Stewart. In this journal entry, she believes Emma is the daughter of her own daughter, Mary, who struggled with an addiction, for which she blamed Dottie.

Peter watches his family in the living room, and almost begins crying, seeing his three daughters together. Alexis tells Peter to come and sit with them, which he does. The girls are unhappy that Megan has gone out, saying she always goes out. Peter is not sure what to think of this. But Peter tells his girls it is okay to have time to oneself. The girls and Hannah tickle Alexis's feet, which makes Daisy bark, and Emma laugh, and Peter revels in the knowledge that he is hearing all of the girls happy.



Megan, meanwhile, drives to the pier, bothered by Emma not always responding to her name. She wants more than for her family to heal. Megan goes to see Kathy Graham. She tells Kathy that she is worried that Emma might not be her daughter. But Kathy reassures Megan that Emma needs only time. Kathy also explains that memories from the farmhouse are Emma's ways of trying to involve Megan in her life. Megan asks Kathy about how sometimes, Emma will only respond to "Emmie". Megan fears it is because Emma wants to be called Emmie again.

## Analysis

When Steena Holme's novel "Emma's Secret" begins, Emma, having been kidnapped and kept away from her parents for two years, is now five years old and safely back at home with her family. Emma and her family are adjusting to her return. Perhaps, the family member most on edge is Megan, who is consistently –and understandably – concerned about Emma and her safety. Megan blames herself for Emma's wandering out of the house in the first place. Now, she rarely leaves the house herself in order to keep an eye on Emma and to tend to Emma's every need. Megan knows that she has missed the last two years of Emma's life, and she doesn't want to miss another moment. She is trying to get those two years back, in part by spending time with Emma, but also in part by trying to erase the child's time away.

Emma has some difficulty fitting back in as well, but it is not because of her family. Emma falls right back into place. She is laughing, playing, and hanging out with her sisters, Hannah and Alexis. But, it is the memory of the past two years that Emma can't seem to integrate with her present. A huge part of this is because Megan is doing her best to suppress anything from the previous two years –except for the dog that Jack and Dottie had purchased for Emma and the occasional letters Emma wishes to send to Jack. She lovingly refers to him as Papa.

Peter, meanwhile, seems to have a better time adjusting to Emma's return. He is thrilled to see her fitting back in so quickly to family life, especially with her sisters. Peter and Megan have their own problems to contend with. Their marriage is strained. Megan considers it a blessing that their marriage has not ended. It has defied the odds and survived the kidnapping, which rarely happens in similar situations. At the same time that the story is telling of Emma's return to her family, the reader also begins to learn about Dottie and the reason she kidnapped Emma. Dottie's own story will slowly unfold in the manner of journal entries scattered throughout the novel.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Megan believe she is having such a hard time adjusting to Emma's return? Can she be faulted for this? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 2

How do Peter and Megan differ in their handling of the return of Emma so far? Why is it that they react differently?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Megan refuse to heed Kathy's advice concerning Emma and the past two years? What does Megan want to do, instead? Why?

## Vocabulary

splayed, complemented, winced, oblivious, exertion, vilified, frantic, impulsive



# Chapters 6-10

## Summary

### Chapter 6

Peter is waiting for Megan to return. He is worried that something is wrong. He is worried something is wrong. He puts his kids to bed. Alexis wants to go golfing with him, and he says he will rearrange some meetings. Hannah tells Peter it is nice to have him home, and he is touched by her sincerity, the gravity of what she says. She asks him if he is happy. He says that he is happy, and Hannah leaps onto him to hug him. He ignores his phone vibrating in his pocket so he can hold his daughter. In the hall, a text message from Samantha who is Peter's business partner. She says that they need to talk about what's been happening. He then goes into Emma's room, where Emma is drawing a picture for Megan. Emma says she is sorry because she hurt Megan by saying she missed Grandma. Peter asks about that, and Emma says she used to make cookies with Dottie. He tucks Emma in and sees her clothes piled up in her closet. Emma says she only wants to wear dresses. He asks her if she will wear some new clothes for Mommy every once in a while, such as on Sundays, and Emma accepts this. She asks him if he will mail a letter to Jack, and Peter agrees to taking Emma out for breakfast and stopping by Jack's mailbox. He only wants to see Emma happy, even if it means that Megan is angry. His phone then vibrates again.

### Chapter 7

Megan goes to Brewster's Bakery, owned and operated by Jan Brewster, who brought food and motivation to Megan. She had helped raise funds and awareness in the search for Emma. Jan is happy to see Megan. She tells Megan she needs to forgive and let things go and that she needs to learn to love herself. Most of all, she needs to forgive herself.

Jack, or Papa as Emma calls him, is at the doughnut shop with his friends Doug and Kenny. Jack reflects on his neighbor Sherrie being part of what led the authorities to recover Emmie. Since the day Dottie was found collapsed on the floor, Sherrie has been a source of strength and kindness for Jack. But Jack feels as if his home is no longer a home without Dottie or Emmie. He then goes to the bathroom.

### Chapter 8

In a journal entry, Dottie says her memory is getting bad. She recounts that her own father had Alzheimer's.

Peter brings Emma to the doughnut shop. She has never been inside, having only gone through the drive-through with Jack. She is very excited to be able to go inside. She tells Peter this and that she used to see Megan there sometimes. Peter is amazed that Emma had been only a few blocks from home. She says she would wave to Megan, but





Megan would not respond. She also recounts hugging Jack when Dottie died the same night at the hospital that they went to for a check-up. Emma tells Peter she loves him, and Peter is thrilled. They order coffee, muffins, and yogurt. As they go to sit down, Emma recognizes the man who comes out of the restroom.

## Chapter 9

Dottie's memory is getting worse and worse, and she is having trouble remembering things. She writes that she hopes she dies before such a thing occurs.

At the doughnut shop, Emma rushes over to hug Jack. He heads over to see Peter. Doug and Kenny are also there. Jack can tell Peter is not thrilled to see Jack. They don't blame him. Emma insists on Jack sitting with her and Peter. They have never met before. Despite everything that has happened, Peter shakes his hand. Peter remembers holding Megan back the day Emma was picked up. He remembers seeing tears stream down Jack's face. Peter wonders if Jack is truly the monster the media has made him out to be. Jack is a man who has lost his daughter, wife, and the girl he thought was his granddaughter, all the while having to deal with the consequences of his wife's actions. When it is time to leave, Peter says that, perhaps, they'll see each other in the doughnut shop again. Peter realizes he will have to call Detective Riley to make sure such a thing is legal and that everything will have to happen without his wife's knowledge, or making Hannah and Alexis jealous. As they leave, Peter shakes Jack's hand once more and says that he is sorry for Jack's loss. Emma then asks if they can come back the next day.

## Chapter 10

Jack looks out over his overgrown property. He wonders when Dottie's memory first began to go. When she died, Jack could have buried her in Hanton, where their friends are buried, or in Kinrich, near Emmie. Owing to Dottie's family's traditions, he plants a tree in her memory around which to put her ashes. He speaks to Dottie, telling her about the day and telling her that he can't ever let Emmie down because she is like a granddaughter to him.

## Analysis

As "Emma's Secret" continues, the character of Peter evolves and becomes increasingly complex. A tender love is displayed between him and his daughters, especially when he tucks them in at night. Hannah goes so far as to tell Peter that it is nice to finally have him home at night. This appears to be in sharp contrast to the nature of the text messages that Peter receives from his business partner Samantha, urging him to tell his wife. What it is that she wants him to tell his wife is not yet revealed to the reader; but, given the nature of the text messages and the hour at which they occur, something very important must be the subject. It looks unfavorable for Peter, for such suspicions that Megan harbors about him and Samantha clash in every possible way with his love and actions as a father.



Peter's character becomes more complex and baffling when he brings Emma to the doughnut shop, where she sees Jack for the first time in weeks. Emma is absolutely thrilled to see Jack. Peter becomes something of a bystander, not wanting to tear his daughter away from something she obviously needs. It is a tense meeting between Peter and Jack, as Peter allows Emma to ask Jack to sit with them to eat and have coffee. Peter knows that he must keep the meetings a secret from Megan, who would be enraged if she knew such a meeting had occurred –or that the stage was being set for a possible future meeting. This now creates a second secret that Peter is keeping from Megan . Peter's character is called into question, especially when his decisions seem so stark in contrast to his apparently incredible abilities as a father.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why do the text messages that Peter receives from Samantha seem to be in such a stark contrast to Peter's nature as a father? What is the apparent nature of the text messages themselves?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What confessions does Emma make to Peter about Megan? What does Peter do with these confessions?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Peter decide to keep the doughnut shop meetings with Emma and Jack a secret? Is his decision justifiable? Why or why not?

## **Vocabulary**

absentmindedly, perpetual, incarnate, dementia, tentative, relentlessly



# Chapters 11-15

## Summary

### Chapter 11

Dottie's journal recounts more of her memory missing in the second week of December. She hears about a missing girl on the radio, but she doesn't connect it to Emmie. Dottie promises her daughter Mary, who is in Heaven, that she will be a better grandmother than she was a mother.

Megan sits out on the bench swing in the early summer evening. She has suspicions about Peter working so late, but she also envies the closeness which is growing between Emma and Peter. Inside, the girls fuss about sharing popcorn. Megan is waiting for Peter to get home, so she can have a girls' night out with Laurie. Laurie shows up a little early. Laurie asks if Megan is ready for Alexis's birthday, which is in five days, but Megan has forgotten all about it. Peter gets home, and looks weary. Not only has Megan forgotten the birthday, but she has also forgotten to pick up a purple golf bag as a present for Alexis. Since she has been so concerned about Emma, Megan knows she has forgotten how to prioritize. She needs to make her entire family a priority, now. Laurie suggests a surprise go-kart birthday party, and Megan likes the idea.

Meanwhile, Jack works on a Victorian dollhouse he wants to give Emma for Christmas. Doug swings by to visit. Jack believes that Dottie would be unhappy with Doug's presence. Doug says that the three of them are lonely: Kenny knows he is dying, and Doug senses something is wrong with Jack. He suggests the three of them live together. Jack considers working on it.

### Chapter 12

It is Christmas Eve, and it is snowing. Dottie writes about the day's activities of snowman building and snow angels. Dottie confesses to having moments of doubt about who Emma is, but she believes Emma is Mary's daughter. It is the first Christmas Dottie can remember being happy for in years.

After the movie, at Bewster's, Jan reveals that Peter has called in to order a pie for Megan to bring home. As Megan sits down for coffee with Laurie, Laurie says there might be someone new in her life. Megan tells her that four years since the death of Laurie's husband Kris is a long time. It is okay for her to move on. Laurie says she met someone at the shooting range and had some drinks, but that it didn't seem to go anywhere. As they talk, Martha Greer and Evelyn McNish come in. They are the two people whom Megan detests the most. They are wealthy and stuck-up. They gossiped about Megan losing her mind following Emma's disappearance. They express their concern, mixed with disdain, for Megan. Martha says that in her day, mothers took care of their own children, rather than worrying about things like the Safety Walk which



Megan started. Megan is angered by this and challenges them to help. She then leaves the bakery.

At home, Megan sees Samantha Grayson's name light up on Peter's cell phone. She wonders why Sam would be sending a text so late. She believes that Peter and Samantha might be having an affair. At first, she refuses to look at the phone, knowing that trust must be rebuilt between them. Then, she looks at the message which reads, "She needs to know." Stunned, Megan drops the cell phone. When Peter comes down, she asks him about who is sending him a text so late at night. He dismisses it as business with Sam. She can tell there is something he isn't telling her. He turns off the phone and leads Megan upstairs to bed. Afterward, Peter tells Megan that Emma said that while she was with Dottie and Jack she had seen Megan at the doughnut shop, but Megan did not recognize her. Megan is enraged, knowing that they could have found Megan sooner, and she is even more incensed that Peter did not believe her. Megan wants to know how she could not have seen her own daughter waving to her, but Peter tells her it must have been someone else that Emma mistakenly thought was Megan.

### Chapter 13

Dottie remembers Jack reaching out to Mary at Valentine's Day, but believing it will not do much good. She recounts the last words Mary said to her. She had said, "I hate you." She knows Mary meant those words. Dottie has no idea why she has earned Mary's hatred.

Megan gets back from running, her shirt soaked from the humidity. Peter brings her some water. He carries her upstairs and starts the shower and helps her undress. They shower together. Afterward, Peter tells Megan that Emma has a surprise for her downstairs. She is wearing clothes Megan purchased for her. Megan announces to the girls that she will take them to the beach. They are thrilled. Emma looks for her drawing she made for Jack, but she cannot find it. Peter says he will find it and mail it. Hannah finds the drawing under a table. Peter tells Emma to put it in his briefcase. As she leaves the room, he whispers in Megan's ear, telling her in an accusing tone that she never meant to mail it.

### Chapter 14

Jack goes to the doughnut shop for his daily outing. Doug and Kenny are already there. Kenny says he wants to spend the rest of his life out at Jack's. Jack decides that he will go with Kenny and Doug to the races in Hanton to play the slot machines.

### Chapter 15

Peter and Emma go to the doughnut shop. Peter feels guilty about keeping things from Megan. He thinks it could backfire in his face. He knows he has to keep a secret from Megan for the time being. Meanwhile, Megan makes plans for Alexis' birthday with her mom, who is unhappy that it is so last-minute. It is no secret that her mother, Sheila, had been disgusted when Megan didn't keep her strength and hope that Emma would one day be found.



Alexis comes thundering downstairs, furious that Megan did not bring her bathing suit in from drying outside. Megan explains that it is Alexis' own fault for not bringing in her own bathing suit. She wants to be loved the way Emma is loved. Peter has watched the entire event unfold, and Megan asks why he didn't step in to help her. He says that she needs to listen, more, and go out on mother-daughter dates with her girls. Peter also wonders why the alarm system has been off so much in the past few weeks. She invites Peter to join them for lunch at the beach, and he says it sounds like a good idea. She backs down from him, worried that he thinks their marriage is not worth fighting for. She knows he was willing to walk away before, and knows he could again.

At work, Sam comes to speak to Peter. She tells Peter that he needs to tell Megan that she doesn't want Megan thinking there is something going on between them and that she wants to leave on good terms. Peter reflects on the good working relationship he and Sam have had. He handles home-buying clients and customer relationships, while she goes after larger businesses and local government. Sam only cares about herself. But, she says she will provide the champagne when Peter tells Megan and the paperwork will be done by the end of the week.

## Analysis

As the summer gets underway, dynamics in the household begin to change. Truths which have either been ignored, glossed over, or unknown, make themselves apparent. Each of these truths ultimately revolves around Megan in some way, shape, or form, adding to her distress and concern. Megan's single-mindedness about caring for and tending to Emma's every need actually causes her to forget about Alexis' birthday. Alexis is feeling unloved by Megan. Alexis demands to be loved just as much as Emma, but Megan cannot adequately address the issue. Instead, she looks to Peter for some sort of assistance, but Peter is not forthcoming with such help. He is gentle, but truthful with her, both in the instance of the birthday party planning and the declaration of inferiority by Alexis. Megan has not been focusing on the rest of the family enough. It is a difficult truth, which Megan does not entirely believe, but she does understand she needs to better prioritize things.

Yet, through these trials, Megan's character also further evolves. Megan has been so focused on Emma and concerned about her well-being because Megan blames herself for Emma's disappearance. It is something she brings up over and over again. She cannot seem to let go of feeling guilty, even though Peter patiently and constantly reassures Megan that she is not to blame. This again draws a sharp contrast between Peter's role as a husband and father and an occurrence between him and Samantha.

It is in part because of Megan's current condition –of stress and self-loathing –that Peter refuses to tell her about the doughnut shop dates with Jack. Peter knows that they may somehow backfire in his face, but he continues to take Emma to the doughnut shop because he wants Emma to be happy. Peter is disappointed to learn just how much of the past –of Emma's happiness – Megan is trying to cut off. For instance, she never mailed the letters from Emma to Jack.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does Peter continue to keep the doughnut shop dates a secret from Megan? Can he be justified in his continuation of this secrecy? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

What revelations about Emma's two years with Jack and Dottie come to light for Peter as he continues to take Emma to the doughnut shop to see Jack? Is this important? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Peter tell Megan she needs to remember how to prioritize things once more? Is Peter being fair when he tells Megan this? Explain.

## Vocabulary

accusation, mishmash, audacity, metabolism, interjected, opulent, exclamations, tumult, integrating, censure, palpable



# Chapters 16-20

## Summary

### Chapter 16

Station Beach is packed. Megan, Hannah, Alexis, and Emma set up a little spot for themselves. Then, they go and get ice cream. Alexis goes to see her friends Hailey and Taylor. Hannah and Emma work on building a sand castle. Megan relaxes, doing a little reading, watching Hannah and Emma from time to time. Finally, looking up, she can't find Emma or Hannah. Peter arrives, and she explains the situation. She also reflects on how Emma first disappeared –by wandering out of the house through the door.

### Chapter 17

Peter assures Megan that they will find Emma and Hannah. A woman in a red bikini brings them along. She explains that they knew Emma back when Emma lived with Jack and Dottie and their children would get together for play dates. The woman is Sherri. Her daughter is Marie, who is partially deaf. Peter says the play dates will have to resume. Megan knows now that Sherri is the woman who first told the police about Emma. Sherri reveals that Emma was always happy. Sherri says that Emma missed Megan dearly, believing her to be dead. They agree to schedule a play date and get together so Megan and Sherri can talk. The rest of the day goes well. Peter even stays longer at the beach to play with the girls.

After dinner that night, Alexis and Emma get into it because Emma does not want to play a different game with Alexis. Emma cries. Alexis is not amused. The girls agree to try to get along better. Megan and Peter sit together outside. She thanks him for not freaking out when she freaked out at the beach. Peter tells her she has nothing to thank him for because kids will be kids. Megan should not worry. Peter tells Megan he trusts her. He also asks her what is going on between her and Alexis lately. Peter tells her that Alexis is very sensitive and feels neglected. Both he and Megan need to fix things with her. Peter says they need to work together.

### Chapter 18

Sherri and Marie come over for a play date. Sherri and Megan talk. She explains that she and Matt and their daughter had only moved in after Emma had been kidnapped, so they didn't know what was going on. Sherri confirms that Emma was well-cared for. This helps put Megan's heart at ease.

### Chapter 19

Megan and the girls go to Laurie's to swim and hang out. Laurie's backyard is beautifully gardened by Laurie, herself. Megan finds Laurie kissing Riley. She decides to take the girls and leave. At home, Megan is horrified. She had once betrayed her marriage by





kissing Riley. To see Laurie kissing Riley was just too much. Even Peter knows about the kiss and the emotional connection shared with Riley. Megan now feels betrayed by Laurie. Megan had reached out to Riley because Peter had given up. What hurts Megan most is that Laurie has kept a secret from her.

## Chapter 20

Peter continues taking Emma by to visit Jack at the doughnut shop. Jack knows that Peter has not told Megan about the breakfast dates, yet. Jack tells Peter that keeping secrets from one's wife always backfires. Peter also notices that Jack is having heart troubles. Jack goes on to tell Peter to tell his wife, that their marriage is not worth the morning visits. Peter knows Jack is right. Peter tells Jack he's got to take care of himself because he has a granddaughter to live for.

## Analysis

While Peter quickly comes to the realization that Emma was indeed well-cared for by Jack and Dottie, such a thought is harder to accept by Megan, who has nothing but hatred for Jack and Dottie. Peter comes to Megan's aid when Hannah and Emma wander off by themselves, as Emma seeks out her old playmate, Marie, and Marie's mother, Sherri. Sherri was responsible for leading the authorities to Emma, Jack, and Dottie. Speaking to Sherri, Megan's mind and heart are put at ease a little with the discovery –from the woman who saved the day –that all of Emma's days were happy and carefree. Megan understands that at least Emma was able to enjoy something of the past two years and that Emma did have friends.

Megan's character also becomes startlingly more complex. Throughout the novel, Megan has appeared as a mother struggling to deal with the return of her daughter and blaming herself for her daughter's initial disappearance. It appears as if she is not just emotionally unstable. She may have reason to be insecure, especially when it comes to her husband. It does appear that he is having an affair, even if all evidence says otherwise. But, it is Megan who has been unfaithful to Peter, having had an emotional affair with Detective Riley, and even going so far as to share a kiss. Despite this straying, Peter has maintained his marriage with Megan. He could have left her for good, but he decided to remain with her. Why, the reader wonders, would Peter remain with an unfaithful woman if he himself could simply end the marriage and go after the woman with whom he is having an affair? The answers will be forthcoming.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you believe Peter is having an affair? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do you believe Peter remained with Megan, even following her infidelity?





## Discussion Question 3

Why does Jack press Peter to tell Megan about the doughnut shop dates with Emma?

## Vocabulary

eons, bewildered, infidelity, berate, ramifications, permeated



# Chapters 21-28

## Summary

### Chapter 21

Megan's parents, Sheila and Daniel, stop by before taking Alexis out for ice cream. Daniel asks Emma to come and sit by Papa, but Emma freezes. Daniel then heads into the kitchen, and Peter asks Emma what is wrong. Emma is confused and worries about names. Peter says that everyone has their own names. Emma consents to calling Daniel "Grandpa," and then begins to warm up to him. Alexis's birthday party at the go-kart track and mini-golf course is perfect. Wilma, who runs the place along with her husband, has arranged for her famous, pro-golf-playing son, Stephen Brown, to meet Alexis. Megan also checks her phone to see if Laurie has responded to any of her messages. She hopes a man will not come between them.

### Chapter 22

Following the party, the family goes to eat pizza. Alexis is thrilled. She says it is the best birthday ever. Emma is a little tired from too much sugar and too much sun, so a cool bath is drawn for her. Hannah insists on taking care of Emma, but Megan knows what the truth is, and tells Hannah so. Hannah blames herself for Emma's disappearance. Megan tells Hannah that it is not her fault. Hannah is not totally convinced. Hannah walks away, telling Megan that she does not trust her.

Jack, meanwhile, knows he has a new reason to live. He's living for Emma. He has to take care of himself and things around the house. He decides to pack up some of her books for the next meeting at the doughnut shop. He also realizes he will have to begin to donate some of Dottie's things, to begin clearing out clutter.

Emma gets sick to her stomach, and Peter and Meagan tend to her. More than likely, it is heat exhaustion. Emma says she wants Papa. She says she wants to go on her date with Peter to see Papa. Megan's suspicion mounts. She knows something is going on behind her back.

### Chapter 23

After spending the day working on the yard, Jack relaxes on his porch. He looks through a box Dottie had put together, with a blanket and a letter in it. The letter is to their granddaughter. It details a journal, a keepsake, to be given to the granddaughter. She tells the granddaughter she is a gift from God. She should always be good to her mother and love her mother. There is also a letter in the box from Mary. Only three had come to the house since she'd run away. This letter is new to Jack. The blanket has been returned. Mary's daughter Emily had been born prematurely due to Mary's drug use. In the letter, she begs her mother not to tell Jack. Jack rereads the letter, and his heart breaks.



Megan goes to Brewster's and talks with Jan over coffee. Jan wants to open a new store in Hanton. She wants Megan to help her manage the current location. Megan is thrilled, and Jan asks her to think about it. On the way out, she bumps into Riley. He says he has left a message on her cell, but she has left her cell at home. He apologizes and says that Laurie will be talking to her. He also reveals the restraining order against Jack has been lifted. Megan is stunned. He says it is Peter's doing. Megan is horrified. She is enraged.

#### Chapter 24

Dottie writes about keeping a secret from Jack. Megan, meanwhile, takes some time to cool down before confronting Peter. She asks for the truth as calmly as she can. Peter reveals he had the restraining order dropped against Jack and didn't consult her because she can't see past her own anger and desire to keep Emma safe. Peter apologizes for not trusting her more and for not telling her. She becomes angry when he tells her about the doughnut shop. He tells her that she has been in panic mode and that she can't accept that Emma is home, safe and sound and happy. He asks for her trust, but Megan retorts that it isn't fair to blame her for everything, not trust her, and then ask her to trust him. He then hands out a folder to her. She thinks it is for a divorce, but she finds out that Sam has accepted Peter's bid to buy her out of the company. His extra work has meant a better year. Sam is now able to afford doing it. He says Sam has come between him and his family, and so he leaped at the chance to buy her out. She is moving and will start a new company. Megan is stunned. Peter also tells Megan that Emma needs Jack in her life, and she is ready for that to happen. However, Megan isn't sure that she is ready.

#### Chapter 25

Laurie comes to see Megan. She brings food from Brewster's as a peace offering. They make up. Laurie says she didn't know how to tell Megan she was seeing Riley. Megan says she no longer has feelings for Riley. She worries about how her dead husband would feel, but Megan assures her that happiness is what Kris would want for her. Hannah interrupts with the news that Emma is missing, along with her bike. She calls Peter and tells him that it is her fault because she forgot to lock the garage door and turn on the alarm. Peter says he will go get Emma because he knows where she has gone.

#### Chapter 26

Jack sees Emma riding her bike alone at the doughnut shop. She is crying hysterically. He asks Kenny to put her bike in the back of his truck. Jack then has Doug get a doughnut for Emma. He asks about Megan and Peter. Jack says he will take her home after her milk and doughnut. Doug tells him it will not go over well. Peter arrives a moment later, relieved. Emma wanted to go and see Jack.

Megan and Laurie arrive a few moments later. Laurie cautions Megan to not say anything she will regret. Megan is relieved, but she is also incredibly angry at Peter. She



embraces Emma. Then, Laurie pulls Megan to the side for coffee. She is furious with Peter, but Laurie gives Megan a dose of reality. She tells Megan that she didn't give Peter much choice. Emma is hurting more than Megan and Peter combined. Laurie tells her to stop trying to force Emma to forget the last two years of her life because she cannot forgive. Emma comes over to apologize to Megan. Emma tells Megan she loves her.

#### Chapter 27

Hannah and Alexis go out with Laurie while Megan takes out her frustrations by cleaning the house. Peter gets home with a bouquet of white roses. He apologizes for not telling her, but he will not apologize for tending to Emma's needs. Peter also explains that Emma is all the family that Jack has left. He sees in him something of his own dead father. He reveals that Jack is dying. Megan gives Peter a box. His eyes widen when he sees what is inside, and she tells him that she does trust him.

#### Chapter 28

Dottie has a day of clarity in which she writes a beautiful last journal entry—a note of love to Jack, knowing that the end must be coming. She remembers that Emmie is not Mary's daughter, and she asks Jack to do the right thing. Jack reads this in her journal. Kenny and Doug have since moved in. He tells Kenny the past must stay in the past.

Megan hosts Thanksgiving dinner. Sheila and Daniel are there. Laurie is there, too. Jack arrives—invited by Megan. He has dropped Doug and Kenny off at the retirement center for an afternoon of bingo. Megan thanks Jack for accepting the invitation. In the months since summer, Jack has become a regular visitor. Jack gives Megan Dottie's last journal, so Megan could understand why Dottie did what she did and to see that Emma was well cared for. Megan tells Jack he is part of the family now, and Peter welcomes him and brings him inside. Megan sits down on the steps to read the last entry in the journal.

## Analysis

By the end of Steena Holmes's novel "Emma's Secret," all of the apparent secrets in the novel have been worked out. The secret morning doughnut shop meetings are revealed to Megan. Trying to heed the advice of Laurie, Megan does her best to handle the meetings patiently, recognizing that Emma suffers more than she and Peter. Peter had explained to Megan that given Emma's situation, her needs must come first. He knew that Megan would not have been amenable to the idea that Emma would be seeing Jack in the first place. Yet, it is something Emma needs, and Peter will not deny her the visits. His duty and love as a father come first. Megan ultimately accepts and respects this. This encourages her to want to keep working things out with Peter, who says they have to move forward together.

The even larger secret—of Peter's suspected affair with Samantha—is also revealed to be exactly what it is not. Peter has been working longer hours and later nights in order



to do better in business, so that he can buy Samantha out. What Megan believes to be divorce papers in a folder handed to her by Peter actually turns out to be the proposal for the buyout—which Sam has accepted. Sam will be moving away and starting a new business. This also helps to strengthen the bond between Peter and Megan, who need to trust one another again and move on with their lives.

Ultimately, Megan herself finally comes to a place where she can accept things as they are. She has learned to forgive not only Jack, but herself. Things are the way they are. Jack has become a regular at their house, and Megan even goes so far as to invite Jack to Thanksgiving. Jack entrusts Megan with Dottie's journal, so that Megan can finally understand that Dottie was not really a bad person, but a wonderful human being who was kind, caring, and compassionate. It will allow Megan to see firsthand just how well-loved and cared for Emma was while she was with Jack and Dottie.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Laurie's relationship with Riley cut Megan so deeply? Does Megan have the right to feel anything at all about this? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Megan believe Peter will want to leave her? Why does Peter not want to leave her?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Megan ultimately allow Jack into their lives? Do you believe this is the right thing to do? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

evident, elaborate, authoritative, quavered, cascading, tentative, flitted, meticulous



# Characters

## Emma

Emma is the five year-old main character in the novel "Emma's Secret" by Steena Holmes. It is Emma's kidnapping and return which create the core of the novel. Emma is a bright, loving, and patient child who wandered out the door when she was three, only to be picked up by Dottie. Dottie and her husband Jack care for Emma for two years. They call her "Emmie," and she looks on them as though they were grandparents. When Emma is found and returns home, she misses Jack terribly. She writes and draws pictures for him all the time. She gives the pictures to Peter and Megan to mail for her. Emma gets along relatively well with her older sisters, Hannah and Alexis; though, like any siblings, there are some issues.

## Megan

Megan is mother of Emma, Hannah, and Alexis, and the wife of Jack. Megan is a caring woman, though she has let her priorities in life go because she is so focused on Emma. This causes a strain in her marriage and in the relationship with her other daughters. Megan ignores advice from their family counselor and tries to shut off Emma's two year stay with Dottie and Jack. However, in the end she allows Emma and Jack to share visits.

Megan's relationship with her best friend Laurie is also strained in the novel. Laurie has begun a romantic relationship with Detective Riley, whom Megan once had an emotional affair with and shared a kiss.

Laurie's and Megan's friendship is repaired, as is Megan's marriage to Peter and her relationship with her other daughters. Megan is also able to forgive herself for Emma's disappearance.

## Peter

Peter is the kind, loving, and compassionate husband of Megan, as well as father of Emma, Hannah, and Alexis. He is unfailingly patient and kind toward his wife, doing his best to support her and be there for her. However, out of his love for Emma, he sometimes does some things behind Megan's back. For example, he allows Emma to visit with Jack at the doughnut shop. He knows that Megan is not ready emotionally to understand that Emma's needs must be a priority; so, he keeps the visits a secret. Peter and Megan begin to rebuild and repair their marriage. By Thanksgiving, all is well.



## Jack

Jack is the kind, grandfatherly widower of Dottie. He is the father of a deceased daughter Mary. He lives alone on his farm. Having been vilified by the press for Emma's abduction, he struggles to get on with life. He misses Dottie terribly, as well as Emma. His best friends, Doug and Kenny, seek to help him move on. Jack runs into Emma and Peter at the doughnut shop, and Peter continues to take Emma back to the shop to see Jack. Eventually, Jack is accepted by Megan and the family. He becomes a regular visitor. They even go so far as to invite him to Thanksgiving.

## Dottie

Dottie is the kind, sweet, and now deceased wife of Jack. At the time of Emma's kidnapping, Dottie was suffering from Alzheimer's. She was still emotionally crushed from losing her daughter Mary to drugs. Those factors led Dottie to pick up Emma on the side of the road when she saw Emma wandering alone and lost. She told Jack that Emma was Mary's daughter, and the two loved and cared for Emma for two years, until the authorities learned of their activities. Dottie passed away not long after Emma was found. She was carried away by guilt at knowing what she had done. She has left a tender love note to Jack in the journal that she kept.

## Hannah

Hannah is eleven years old. She is the eldest daughter of Peter and Megan. She is the older sister of Alexis and Emma. Hannah has taken on the responsibility of caring for and watching over Emma. So, she blames herself for Emily's kidnapping. Hannah is very loyal, caring, and protective of both of her sisters, but especially of Emma.

## Alexis

Alexis is eight years old. She is the middle daughter of Peter and Megan. Alexis feels unloved by her mother. She feels as if Megan does not care about the rest of the family the way she cares about Emma. Eventually, this rift is overcome.

## Laurie

Laurie, who has been a widow for four years, is the best friend of Megan. Laurie grows distant from Megan in the novel when she begins a relationship with Detective Riley. Detective Riley and Megan once had an emotional affair. They shared one kiss. Laurie withdraws from Megan's life upon Megan's discovery of the relationship. Then, Laurie returns later in the story. All is forgiven

between Megan and Laurie.



## **Detective Riley**

Detective Riley is the member of the police who helped to track down Emma. He has an emotional affair and shares a kiss with Megan. Riley has the restraining order against Jack lifted at Peter's insistence. Riley dates Laurie.

## **Kathy Graham**

Kathy Graham is the family counselor for Megan, Peter, and their family. She is very intelligent, and tries to make Megan see that she can't just shut out Emma's past two years.

## **Samantha**

Peter's business partner.

## **Daisy**

Emma's dog.





# Symbols and Symbolism

## Letters

Letters are written and drawn by Emma for Jack, and by Jack for Emma. They are delivered mainly through the mail. Whereas Peter allows Emma to write and mail Jack, and allows Jack to write and mail Emma, Megan attempts -at first- to cut off all correspondence between them, but ultimately consents.

## Donuts

Donuts are baked and served at the local donut shop, frequented by Jack, Doug, Kenny, and Peter and Emma. When Jack, Peter, and Emma meet, they eat donuts. Peter comes to realize that Jack is a good man over donuts.

## Journals

Journals are kept, written in, and saved by Dottie throughout her life. Her last journal, spanning the two years with Emma, and leading up to her death, is read by Jack, and given to Megan so that Megan will know that Dottie was not a bad person, and that Emma was well-cared for.

## Stuffed Lion

A stuffed lion that Emma calls "Tiger" has been kept by Emma since she was three years old. It is the stuffed lion that Emma is carrying when she is first picked up by Dottie, saying that the lion is protecting her.

## Dresses

Dresses are knitted by Dottie for Emma, who wears them because she wants to look pretty. As such, Emma prefers only to wear dresses.



# Settings

## Kinrich

Kinrich is the small, friendly town where Peter, Megan, and their family live. It is the family where Emma first disappears from when she leaves her house without her mother's knowledge. It is where the doughnut shop is located, as well as Brewster's Bakery. Peter takes Emma to the doughnut shop in Kinrich to see Jack as often as he can.

## Hanton

Hanton is a neighboring town to Kinrich, which most of the friends of Jack and Dottie are buried. It appears to be a relatively small and rural town. Jack and Dottie's farm is somewhere between Hanton and Kinrich. It is between Hanton and Kinrich that Emma lives with Jack and Dottie until she is found by the neighbors and recovered by the police.

## Doughnut Shop

The doughnut shop is located in Kinrich. Jack goes there every morning to get coffee and doughnuts with his friends, Doug and Kenny. It is where Emma first sees Jack again. It is where Peter takes Emma to see Jack and where Peter and Jack become friends. It is to the doughnut shop that Emma runs away the second time, and is where Peter later finds her. It is also where Megan comes to terms with the knowledge that Jack is a part of Emma's life, whether Megan likes it or not.

## Brewster's

Brewster's is a famous local bakery run by Jan Brewster and her husband. It is a local hangout for parents and their families, including Megan and Laurie. Megan goes to Brewster's several times throughout the novel, and receives not only good food, but good advice from Jan. Megan often brings home baked goods and coffee from Brewster's for Peter and her kids.

## Station Beach

Station Beach is located near Kinrich. All the families and their children frequent Station Beach on the hot summer days. Megan visits Station Beach for the first time since Emma's disappearance and return during the novel. Station Beach is where Megan takes Hannah, Alexis, and Emma, hoping to get back into some sort of normal routine. Megan first meets Sherri and her daughter, Marie, there and learns through Sherrie's

recollections that Emma was well-cared for by Dottie and Jack. It is Emma who finds Sherri and Marie on Station Beach, and enables a meeting between Megan and Sherrie.



# Themes and Motifs

## Family

Family is a major theme through the novel "Emma's Secret" by Steena Holmes. The concept of family includes mutual love, loyalty, compassion, concern, and emotional and physical support between individuals. Those individuals may or may not be blood-related, but they behave and operate in the structure of the traditional family unit. In this instance, family is blood-related. Together, they are facing the return of Emma to the family unit. Emma was kidnapped at the age of three. She is returning two years later at age five.

Megan deeply loves her husband and her daughters, but for the past two years, her focus has been on Emma. She has failed to take into account the rest of her family, even following Emma's safe return. She has forgotten to prioritize the entire family, failing to remember another daughter's birthday party. Megan undertakes the task of repairing her marriage and her relationship with her daughters. She succeeds by Thanksgiving. Megan sees to the needs of her husband and daughters, providing them emotional and physical intimacy, caring for them, and supporting their endeavors.

Peter, like Megan, deeply loves his family –especially Megan. Whereas Megan has to struggle with her emotions and her focus due to her failure to forgive herself for Emma's initial disappearance, Peter is able to much more competently handle things. He begins to rearrange his work schedule to be with his family more, and puts Emma's needs ahead of his own, as well as the needs of Megan, Alexis, and Hannah. He provides for the family financially, and his love is so strong for Megan that even her infidelity cannot break them apart. Working together with Megan, they repair their marriage and make their family a priority.

## Friendship

Friendship is a strong and underlying theme in the novel "Emma's Secret" by Steena Holmes. Friendship involves mutual platonic affections, support, loyalty, and compassion for one or more other individuals. It can also exist in a romantic fashion. Both forms exist in the novel. Both concern Megan.

Friendship exists between Megan and Laurie. They are best friends. Laurie serves to be a rock for Megan throughout Emma's disappearance and return, offering Megan advice, encouragement, and love. Laurie even goes so far as to defend Megan against acquaintances who question Megan's sanity and her efficacy as a mother. However, a rift grows between Megan and Laurie when Laurie begins dating Riley. Riley is the man that Megan had an emotional affair with, as well as shared a kiss. When Megan finds out that Riley and Laurie are secretly seeing one another, Megan is crushed. Then, she realizes she has no reason to feel bad. Laurie ultimately apologizes to Megan, and the



two resume their friendship. It is Laurie who reminds Megan that Emma is hurting and suffering more than Megan and Peter combined.

Friendship, of a more romantic nature, also exists between Peter and Megan. Though their marriage is on the rocks, they are trying desperately to repair it. During the trying times, they never forget that they are also best friends beyond their married love. They are working on trust issues, but they do confide in one another. They take care of one another as friends, as well as married lovers. Their marriage is based on friendship, and everything else falls into place for them because of that common ground.

## Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a major theme in the novel “Emma’s Secret” by Steena Holmes. Forgiveness is the act of pardoning or renouncing, in word and/or deed, past hostilities and wrongs committed against oneself or others. Forgiveness is a Christian virtue. It moves the faith and actions of Jack, Peter, Hannah, and Megan in different ways and for different reasons.

Characters seeking forgiveness and those needing to forgive are in the novel. They include Megan and Hannah. Hannah has been especially protective and authoritative over Emma because Hannah blames herself for Emma’s wandering away two years before. Megan assures Hannah that Emma’s kidnapping was not her fault, but Hannah still struggles with the idea. Megan is no different. She holds herself responsible for Emma’s disappearance and kidnapping, and she struggles throughout the novel to forgive herself. Even though Peter tells Megan that Emma’s disappearance and kidnapping was not her fault, Megan still finds it hard to let go of the guilt she feels.

Those forgiving others in the novel include Peter, Jack, and Megan. Peter loves his wife so deeply that he forgives her infidelity and struggles to help keep his marriage together. Jack so deeply loves Dottie that he does not turn against her when he learns the truth about Emma, that she is not Mary’s daughter. He forgives her, realizing that, perhaps, Dottie didn’t need to be forgiven in the first place. Eventually, Megan comes to forgive Dottie and Jack for their kidnapping of Emma. Megan learns their intention was not to kidnap Emma. Also, she knows that Emma was well-cared for and loved by Jack and Dottie. In fact, Megan goes so far as to allow Jack into the lives of Emma and her family regularly, going so far as to invite him to dinner at Thanksgiving. She tells him that he is family.

# Styles

## Point of View

Steenah Holmes tells her novel "Emma's Secret" in the first and third-person limited omniscient perspective. This is done for several reasons. The first-person narrative is that of Dottie, whose narration takes the form of written journal entries throughout the course of two years. During those two years, her memory is declining because of Alzheimer's, which will lead to her eventual death. This allows the reader to know Dottie firsthand and to realize that she is not a monster. They understand Dottie through her own words, rather than the opinion of Megan. The third-person sections allow the reader to follow the separate lives of Jack, Peter, and Megan, as they work to move past the two year ordeal of Emma's kidnapping. The third person provides a common and unifying thread between the stories of Megan, Peter, and Jack, allowing the reader to more easily follow their lives. The limited-omniscient mode further allows the reader to know and learn only as much as each of the characters in the novel, and to know and learn things only when the characters themselves do.

## Language and Meaning

Steenah Holmes tells her novel "Emma's Secret" in language that is simple, but emotionally-charged. All too often, it is imagined that deep, complex, and emotionally-compelling writing must be dense, poetic, and complicated. However, that is not always the case as exemplified by Holmes in "Emma's Secret." The simple, straightforward language allows the reader to understand, without any questions, the sheer emotional turmoil being suffered by Megan, Peter, Dottie, and Jack throughout the novel, each for different reasons. As such, the language becomes powerful and evokes strong emotional responses for its clarity and brevity. It is through this language that the themes of family, friendship, and forgiveness are readily understood.

## Structure

Steenah Holmes divides her novel "Emma's Secret" into twenty-eight consecutive, linear, and chronological chapters. These chapters span the time between the month following Emma's return and Thanksgiving. The chapters are arranged in a straightforward fashion, allowing the reader to focus on the plot, rather than becoming distracted by the structure. In a way, it serves as a metaphor for the emotional turmoil Megan experiences, who has to take one day at a time, one after another, just as the book is written one chapter at a time, one after another. Occasionally, chapters will begin with journal entries from Dottie, allowing the reader to keep up with her story and her mental decline. Her influence in the past is still having an impact on the present lives of Emma and her family, as well as Dottie's husband Jack, and so the juxtaposition of those

journal entries helps to lend context to Megan's present struggles with Emma, and how Dottie and Jack have influenced Emma.



## Quotes

Instead of another nightmare of Emma disappearing, last night's dream was as if her little girl had never been kidnapped.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Megan, who has had nightmares of her daughter's disappearance, dreams that her daughter did not disappear. In her dream Emma was never kidnapped. This dream is an idealized vision of what she wants her family to be and what she wants her family to return to.

Her family was healing. Why couldn't she be happy? Because she wanted more.

-- Narrator (Chapter 5 paragraph 40)

**Importance:** Here, the narrator reflects on Megan's unhappiness. Her family is readjusting, moving on, and healing. However, Megan still seems to be stuck in some kind of emotional turmoil. She can't understand it, except that she wants something more than healing. She is unhappy. Later, she will learn that this is because she has not forgiven herself for Emma's initial disappearance.

But I can tell you the first step to loving yourself is learning how to forgive yourself.

-- Jan Brewster (Chapter 7 paragraph 57)

**Importance:** Megan's unhappiness is on clear display at Jan Brewster's bakery. Jan tells Megan that if Megan really wants to move on and be happy again that she must be able to forgive herself.

She wasn't lazy or forgetful. She had simply forgotten how to prioritize. The problem was that she needed to make her entire family a priority now. Not just Emma.

-- Narrator (Chapter 11 paragraph 94)

**Importance:** Having forgotten Alexis's birthday, Emma tries to rationalize such a lapse as something other than laziness or forgetfulness. She is focusing only on Emma. Consequently, she is not thinking about the rest of her family.

You found her when no one else was looking.

-- Peter (Chapter 12 paragraph 113)

**Importance:** Confessing to Peter that she believes she is responsible for Emma's initial disappearance, Megan's unhappiness can be plainly seen and felt. Peter reminds Megan that she kept hope and faith alive. She found Emma when no one else was looking for Emma.

It angered Megan that her daughter had missed so much, but at the same time she had to thank God –because it could have been worse. At least Emma was alive.

-- Narrator (Chapter 16 paragraph 143)





**Importance:** Reflecting on Emma's disappearance, Megan is angry that Emma has been gone for two years and has missed so much. However, Megan is also very thankful to God that nothing worse happened to Emma. Emma was loved and cared for by Jack and Dottie. Megan must grudgingly accept this.

Jack stood and straightened his back. With Emmie back in his life, he had a whole new reason for living.

-- Narrator (Chapter 21 paragraph 189)

**Importance:** Since Dottie's death, Jack has taken worse and worse care of himself, and his health is declining quickly. After Peter explains to Jack that Emma needs him, Jack has a new lease on life. He is determined to do better and get healthy so he can be around for Emma. He has a new reason to live.

Why did she suddenly get the feeling that something was going on behind her back, something that was about to change her life in a way she wouldn't like?

-- Narrator (Chapter 22 paragraph 194)

**Importance:** As time goes on, Megan becomes suspicious of what Peter is doing on his own time, including with Emma. She wonders if, perhaps, Peter is bringing Emma to see Jack. This infuriates her. She knows that whatever is going on will ultimately change her life. She believes that she will not like the change.

Secrets. They can kill a marriage or make it stronger. I've always believed that.

-- Dottie (Chapter 24 paragraph 204)

**Importance:** Dottie writes in her journal about the effect secrets can have on a marriage. Dottie herself kept a secret from Jack to spare his feelings and emotions.

But it's time to stop forcing Emma to forget the last two years of her life just because you can't forgive.

-- Laurie (Chapter 26 paragraph 227)

**Importance:** Megan's best friend Laurie explains that Emma's pain and suffering dwarfs whatever pain and suffering Peter and Megan may be facing, combined. Megan must put her daughter first and allow Emma to hold onto the past few years. It is not fair to Emma that Megan is forcing her to try to forget, when it is Megan herself who needs to learn how to forgive. She needs to forgive Jack and herself.