

The Girl on the Train Study Guide

The Girl on the Train by Paula Hawkins

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Plot Summary

NOTE: Due to the structure of the novel, summaries and analysis sections are divided by page numbers, and chapters are also referenced by page number in addition to paragraphs. This study guide specifically refers to the 2015 Riverhead/Penguin Books Hardcover Edition.

“The Girl on the Train” is a mystery and suspense novel by Paula Hawkins. It follows the lives of three women – Rachel, Anna, and Megan – and the events surrounding Megan’s murder, ultimately bringing the lives of the three women together. Each day, Rachel takes the train to work in London, heading past the town of Witney. There, she can see her old house, where her ex-husband, Tom, and his new wife, Anna, live, and she can also see the home of another married couple a few houses down. Rachel becomes endeared by this couple, whom Rachel nicknames Jess and Jason. They appear to have the perfect life, and Rachel is both jealous of, and happy for them. One day, she discovers that Jess is having an affair, and this enrages her. Rachel has no idea how someone could cheat on someone as seemingly perfect as Jason.

When Jess – who turns out to be Megan Hipwell – goes missing, Rachel is sure that the man she saw cheating with Megan is the culprit. She thus involves herself in the investigation, going to great lengths to try to get to the bottom of things. This includes meeting Jason – Scott Hipwell – and offering him all of the knowledge she can give him, especially in regards to the affairs that Megan was carrying on. Ultimately, Rachel also comes to discover that Megan was babysitting for Tom and Anna – and had an affair with Tom. This likewise shocks Rachel, and encourages her to dig deeper for the truth.

It turns out that Megan was suffering from depression based on a void in her life, caused by the accidental death of her baby girl years before. It is revealed that, although she loved Scott, it wasn’t enough to fill the void, and Megan sought to fill the void in any way that she could. This includes the affairs that she carried on. When Scott reacted violently to news of Megan’s affair, Megan left home, only to meet up with, and reveal to Tom that she was pregnant with Tom’s child – and have Tom kill her for it. When Rachel discovers the truth and confronts Tom, Tom attempts to kill Rachel, but she stabs him in the throat with a corkscrew. Endeavoring to protect herself and her own daughter, Anna twists the corkscrew in further, making sure that Tom will die. When the police are called and arrive, Anna and Rachel cover for one another, for they know they have discovered the truth about Tom’s real nature.



Pages 1 – 92

Summary

Rachel – On Friday morning, July 5, 2013, Rachel notices a pile of light blue clothing on the side of the train tracks, along with something white, while she is commuting from Ashbury to Euston for work. Whenever she sees these sorts of things, she wonders about who they belong to, and why they were left behind. As she passes through suburbs, Rachel enjoys seeing people safe at home, which comforts her. On the way home, she drinks premixed gin-and-tonics, thinking of the first holiday she and Tom ever spent together, on the Basque coast in 2005.

Monday morning rolls around. Sitting in carriage D, stopped at a signal, Rachel can see into her favorite house, Number 15. Inside and outside, she often sees a married couple, whom she nicknames Jess and Jason. Jason is handsome, and Jess is beautiful. They appear to be perfect. Often, Jason is away on business, and so Rachel only ever sees Jess. Rachel also notices things about the Victorian house in which they live, such as peeling paint on the bathroom window and the color of the upstairs curtains. Jess and Jason live in a house four down from the one that used to be Rachel's - 23 Blenheim Road. Every day, she does her best not to look at the house, but always ends up looking. Rachel now lives with her friend from back in college, Cathy. Rachel is unhappy that so much of her life is out of her control. Likewise, she does not feel attractive or desirable, but lonely.

Wednesday morning, July 10, Rachel does not see Jess and Jason, and it disappoints her. Sometime that night, she drunk dials Tom, but doesn't remember. She is humiliated at what led to her and Tom breaking up, though she does not yet say what this is. Thursday, July 11, Rachel sees Jess and feels like Jess is lonely. Tom then calls Rachel and tells her she can't keep calling him all the time, and that she needs to attend an AA meeting.

Megan – One year earlier, on Wednesday, May 16, 2012, Megan Hipwell listens to the train as it goes past her house, and she waits for Scott to wake up. Megan laments that she hasn't been out in a long time, and hears a woman screaming that evening. She runs up to the terrace to see two woman arguing, and then one carry a baby into a house. Megan decides against calling the police, sensing that things have worked out. Megan misses her old friends at the galleries, and wonders if they would recognize the suburbanite she has become. Formerly an art gallery manager, she is now a nanny. She heads down the block to the house where she tends to the baby, and meets Tom on his way out to work. In August, she tells Tom Watson and his wife, Anna, that she quits.

In September, Megan begins going stir-crazy, looking for something to do or somewhere to go. She thinks about her brother, Ben, and how the two of them had planned to travel widely, but Ben was killed in a car accident. Scott suggests that Megan go and see a therapist about her restlessness, panic attacks, and insomnia, which she does. She



meets with Dr. Kamal Abdic. While jogging in the mornings, Megan sometimes sees Tom, who ignores her, but Anna takes Megan's quitting very personally. On Tuesday, September 25, 2012, with Scott working late, Megan goes down to house number 23, but decides not to ring the doorbell because she doesn't know what she'll say. On the way home, an unidentified male smiles at Megan as she walks past.

Rachel – It is Friday morning, July 12, 2013. In and out of sleep on the train to work, Rachel thinks of Tom. At the signal, Rachel is stunned to see Jess kissing another man, other than Jason. It causes her to remember going onto Tom's computer to check his work schedule, and instead discovers a list of sexual e-mails to and from Anna Boyd. As such, Rachel takes Jess's cheating very personally.

At a coffee shop, Rachel runs into three coworkers from Huntingdon Whitely, her public relations firm, Martin Miles, Sasha, and Harriet. Rachel quickly makes an excuse to leave, saying she has an interview to get to. A short time later, Rachel gets a call from Anna, telling her the phone calls to Tom are too much. Even their child, Evie, is suffering because of the calls, Anna says. Rachel can only think of whether or not Jason is aware that his wife is cheating on him.

Cathy gets up early on Saturday morning, as always, to do cleaning. When Cathy heads out, Rachel drinks and decides to go and see Jason. She knows she needs to get off at Witney, though she risks running into Tom and Anna. She sees a man on the train she thinks is laughing at her. The next morning, Rachel wakes up naked in her bed, and badly hungover. She has a voicemail from Tom at 10:15 p.m., making her wonder what on earth she did while she was drunk the night before.

When Cathy gets home, she tells Rachel she cannot live like this, pointing to vomit out in the hallway and down the stairs. Cathy gives Rachel four weeks to move out. Tom leaves another voicemail later, saying he is sorry for what happened and for the argument the night before, but he can't have Rachel showing up or bothering him anymore.

Megan – It is Tuesday, October 2, 2012, and Dr. Kamal Abdic recommends that Megan begin keeping a diary, but Megan feels this would be disloyal to Scott. On Saturday, October 13, she has a sexual liaison with the unidentified male, he tells her it can't keep happening. At home, Megan has sex with Scott, making him believe she is only his.

Rachel – On Monday morning, July 15, 2013, Cathy gives Rachel her formal eviction notice. On the way to work, Rachel cries, wondering how she ended up where she has. She wonders where it all went wrong. She knows that meeting Tom after the death of her own father was not it, but after moving into Number 23, and planning a family, things began to unwind when Tom seemed to become disappointed. When the train stops at the signal, Rachel sees Jason alone, looking down at the track. It makes her feel as if Jason is looking right at her, and she feels afraid. She goes to the library to e-mail her mom, and on Yahoo.com, she sees a local story about a missing woman from Witney, Megan Hipwell – Rachel's Jess. Megan is last seen Saturday night when departing for a friend's house. This causes Rachel to run out of the library and get hit by a cab. She is



taken to the hospital, and released with no real injuries to Cathy, who comes to pick her up.

Megan – It is Thursday, January 10, 2013, and Megan hopes Scott will come home early so she can have sex with him. She tells Kamal about her being a bad wife and all the things she has done wrong, and Kamal tells her she needs to find a way to make herself happy, that she needs to stop looking for happiness elsewhere. Megan thinks life is too short for this, but can't help but know that sometimes, all she needs is Scott. Megan recounts to Kamal how she began sleeping with a bartender named Craig McKenzie when she was only 16, not long after the death of her father.

On Friday, February 8, 2013, Megan goes walking in the woods. Scott is away on business overnight, and she tells Scott she will be out with her friend, Tara. She has gotten into a fight with Scott over his going through her computer, and discovering she had run a search for Craig McKenzie, which leads Scott to believe she is cheating on him. Kamal asks if Megan is afraid of her husband, but she says she isn't, because Scott is merely jealous and possessive. She follows Kamal home, attempts to sleep with him, but he turns her down. Instead, she goes to sleep with her unidentified man, who says they can't keep doing what they're doing. Megan comes to feel nervous and jittery, and can't wait for Scott to get home.

Rachel – It is Tuesday morning, July 16, 2013. Instead of going to work, Rachel is going to Witney, worried about Jess/Megan. Megan's disappearance is now gaining coverage in larger media outlets, such as the BBC website and the Daily Mail. Scott and Megan argued the evening she disappeared, with Megan saying she was going to her friend, Tara Epstein's, in Corly Wood, but Megan never arrived. Megan, 29, was last seen heading toward the train station around 7:15 Saturday evening. Megan's family is deceased, Rachel learns from the news, and she is unemployed, having formerly managed an art gallery. Scott is a self-employed IT consultant. He and Megan have been married for three years, and have lived at their home on Blenheim Road since January 2012. Rachel knows the police will be looking at Scott as the chief suspect, and wonders if the police know about Megan's affair.

Cathy later calls Rachel to retract the eviction. Rachel feels strange being in Witney, knowing it is no longer her home. Cathy calls again, telling her the police have arrived to talk to her. Rachel panics, wondering what she did Saturday evening while she was drunk – and this is indeed why the police want to talk to her, it turns out. She reveals she went to see her ex-husband, Tom, but then thought better of it. Detective Inspector Gaskill questions Rachel about her movements while in Witney. He asks if he saw Megan Hipwell the night she was in Witney, and Rachel says she doesn't think so. She explains she had been drinking, but was not drunk. When the police leave, Rachel resolves to tell the police the truth – that she has been unemployed for months, that she was very drunk on Saturday night, and that she believes Megan Hipwell was having an affair.

She explains this to a female detective, Riley, and Gaskill. Rachel also describes the man she saw on the train and at the station, who had a medium build, average height,



and reddish hair. The detectives press her for her reason for being on Blenheim Road Saturday night, and bring up an incident where Anna accused Rachel of breaking into her home and taking her baby. Rachel is given leave to get something to eat and return, during which time she thinks about her own inability to conceive and have children. Even attempts at IVF didn't help, which Rachel ultimately considers is what broke her, and then she broke apart her marriage by isolating herself and drinking more and more. Rachel believes she is better now, and only 33, still has time to straighten out her life, and adopt.

Back at the police station, Rachel explains she went to go and see Tom once, to discover the backdoor open, Anna asleep, and the baby crying – so Rachel picked up the baby to comfort her outside. Riley insinuates that perhaps Rachel, drunk, attacked Megan believing her to be Anna. Rachel insists this is not true. Riley explains that Megan had temporarily been a nanny for Anna's baby. This is unknown to Rachel, who is amazed that Megan has been in her old house. Rachel then reveals Megan's affair before she leaves, and Gaskill tells Rachel not to go near Blenheim Road, not to go near Anna or her child, and not to contact Tom unless it is important.

On Thursday, Rachel reads more about Megan in the papers on the train. Megan was born in 1983, had a relationship with an older man who was into drugs and lived with him in the village of Holkham in north Norfolk. Later, at 24, Megan found herself a waitress in a North London restaurant when she met Scott, four years older than she. They married two years later. Rachel decides she must tell Scott about the affair, and must remember what happened to her on Saturday night. She e-mails Scott after finding his website, and asks him to contact her for information about his wife. On a train home, Rachel sees the red-haired man again, who stares at her. Rachel then wonders if hypnosis will allow her to remember what happened Saturday night, but decides it will not be useful because memories are not made during a blackout.

Analysis

"The Girl on the Train" is a mystery and suspense novel by Paula Hawkins. It follows the lives of three women – Rachel, Anna, and Megan – and the events surrounding Megan's murder, ultimately bringing the lives of the three women together. When the novel begins, Rachel is a passing observer to life on Blenheim Street in Witney, and it is during her view into the homes on her old street in her old neighborhood that she first sees Megan and Scott, whom she nicknamed Jess and Jason. From the very start of the novel, the themes of memory and fantasy are prevalent, as Rachel alternates early on between recalling memories of her married life with Scott – often a mix of drunken reminiscences – and things the way they appear to be between Jess and Jason, a fantasy of perfection that Rachel constructs in her mind.

This is due in large part to Rachel's own past, where her husband cheated on her following her alcoholism. Much of her later marriage with Tom is a blur at best to Rachel because of this, and some of it is even totally unknown to her. Since her marriage, she has been drinking heavily, and very excessively at other times, causing her to continue



to have periods of faded memories and total blackouts at other points. Indeed, the reader quickly realizes that Rachel's drinking is problematic - especially the fact that doesn't ever seem to be without alcohol at hand, or nearby. This also brings into question Rachel's reliability as to what it is that she sees and understands - and this foreshadows greater concerns related to Rachel's drunkenness and reliability later on.

When Rachel discovers that Jess is having an affair, the fantasy Rachel has constructed comes crashing down around her. She is incensed that Jess would risk having a perfect life upturned by carrying on an affair, a feeling made worse by the fact that Rachel herself was cheated on by her husband. When Rachel learns Jess's real name, and learns that Megan has gone missing, Rachel is sure that Megan's lover had something to do with it.

As it soon turns out, Megan was not the perfect spouse that Rachel envisioned her to be, apart from the affair. In the past, as a teenager, Megan had run away with an older man and gotten heavily into drugs before meeting Scott and marrying him. Despite her cheating on Scott, Megan admits, in her sections of the novel, to loving him – and here, the theme of love emerges – leading the reader to wonder why she would cheat on the man she loves. At the same time, the reader is also easily able to see that Rachel is still not over Tom, and that she is in fact still in love with him.

It is also early in the novel that the theme of betrayal becomes readily apparent. The reader can see numerous acts of betrayal unfolding. These include the two most obvious examples so far – infidelity in marriage. Tom betrays his marriage to Rachel by carrying on an affair with Anna, while Megan betrays her marriage to Scott by carrying on an affair with another man. Additionally, it is through betrayal that the theme of secrets emerges, as Megan and Tom keep their adultery a secret from their respective spouses. They each have reasons for having affairs, and for carrying on those affairs in secret – motives which will be revealed later in the novel. The reader should also pay careful attention to the fact that the novel involves so much betrayal, for betrayal only begets betrayal -and will lead to greater betrayals in the future.

Discussion Question 1

For what reasons is Rachel so incensed to discover that Jess is cheating on Jason? Why does this compel Rachel to feel like she needs to do something about it?

Discussion Question 2

Rachel has constructed a fantasy about what the lives of Jason/Scott and Jess/Megan must be like. Why does she do this? How does this fantasy come undone?



Discussion Question 3

It is easy to see that Rachel is still in love with Tom, despite his affair and the divorce. Why do you believe this is?

Vocabulary

overactive, jolts, decrepit, incongruously, acute, trundles, whinging, triumvirate, impassive



Pages 93 – 155

Summary

Megan – It is Thursday, March 7, 2013. Megan is with her unidentified male lover again, though she still feels hollow. She and the man joke about running away and living on the coast somewhere in another country. The next morning, Scott brings Megan coffee on their terrace, and before he goes to work, he tells her he loves her, which makes Megan feel horrible.

Rachel – It is Friday, July 19, 2013. Scott has not responded to Rachel's e-mail. Rachel spends a lot of time contemplating what she can do to jog her memory from that Saturday night, and what she can do to get Scott to contact her. At the police station, Gaskill shows Rachel photographs of various men, and Rachel identifies one as the man kissing Megan. Gaskill will not tell Rachel who the man was, but as Rachel leaves the station, she sees Scott Hipwell coming in.

That night, Rachel drinks to excess and wakes up on Saturday morning knowing she has done something stupid. She has sent Tom an e-mail, which tells him to tell his wife to stop lying to the police about her, and to leave her alone. Rachel realizes she could be in serious trouble, now, for having sent the e-mail. This causes her to reflect on when Tom finally told her he didn't want to bring her out anymore, for her drunkenness and behavior ashamed him. She then reflects on what truly happened the day of the baby incident. The baby was sound asleep and Anna was not asleep when Rachel picked up the baby and took her outside. She didn't know what she was going to do, but the baby began to cry, bringing Anna outside, and threatening to call the police. Tom then drove Rachel home, telling her that if she ever did anything to harm his baby, he would kill her.

Rachel receives an e-mail from Scott, telling her to call him. Instead, Rachel writes back, saying that she is a friend of Megan's from the gallery, and that she used to live in Witney. She encourages Tom to e-mail her back. It has now been a week since Megan Hipwell disappeared after leaving home at Number 15 Blenheim. Rachel wonders why she persists in involving herself in someone else's life. She travels to meet Tom at his house, at his invitation.

Anna – It is Saturday, July 20, 2013. Tom wakes Anna along with Evie. It is Anna's birthday, and he serves her breakfast in bed. He then gives her presents – a silver bracelet from baby Evie, and a black silk teddy and matching lingerie from Tom. Anna knows that the risks of sleeping with a married man, moving into his house and marrying him, and having a baby with him are high – but it is a risk she has gladly taken. It has paid off largely for her, except for the noisy trains. Tom is annoyed by an e-mail from Rachel, and Anna tries to comfort him, wondering aloud why Rachel can't just leave them alone to be happy. Tom says that they are happy. It makes Anna happy, but that evening, she sees Rachel walking down the street, which frustrates her and ruins her day.



Rachel – Rachel meets with Scott. She explains she saw Megan Friday morning with another man, kissing. The man, Rachel reveals, was dark-skinned, perhaps Asian or Indian. Scott passes between anger to sadness, and he becomes hopeful that Megan has merely run off. Rachel confirms that she is Tom Watson's ex-wife, and used to live several houses down. Scott shows Rachel a photograph of Dr. Kamal Abdic, who can be confused as an Indian from a distance, but is really from the area around Bosnia. Rachel confirms that Kamal is the man she saw with Megan. Scott explains that Kamal was Megan's therapist. Scott asks if he has seen Rachel before, but Rachel tells him she doesn't think so.

The next evening, Sunday, July 21, 2013, Rachel and Cathy go out to eat. Cathy is unhappy that her boyfriend, Damien, has gone to visit his mother in Birmingham, and Cathy was not invited to go. Cathy is also concerned about Rachel getting sober, and Rachel explains that it won't be a smooth process. Later, Scott calls Rachel. Scott explains he told Detective Riley to look into Kamal, though he did not say he had spoken to Rachel. Scott then thanks Rachel for coming forward, saying it was nice to have someone he didn't know to speak to rationally about things. He explains he had a terrible verbal argument with Megan the night she disappeared. Scott himself went to the local pub, the Rose, on Kingly Road, and then went home without calling Megan. The next morning, he went to Tara's, figuring that Megan had spent the night, only to learn that Tara had not seen Megan since Friday night. Scott and Rachel then end their call.

On Monday, July 22, the newspapers carry word that an arrest has been made in Rachel's disappearance, but who has been arrested has not been revealed. Rachel goes to Scott's house, and is yanked inside.

Megan – It is Thursday, March 21, 2013. Megan hasn't heard anything from Kamal, and it angers her. She feels rejected. She ignores Scott's calls all afternoon and goes to see Kamal. Kamal explains that what is going on is called transference. She kisses Kamal, who grabs her by the arms and pushes her away when she bites hard on his lip, drawing blood. Megan leaves, knowing she can't go home now because she won't be able to explain the bruises on her arms. Megan wants revenge, but she doesn't want to hurt Kamal, either.

Rachel – It is Monday, July 22, 2013. Scott tells Rachel she shouldn't be coming around, that the media has been swarming all over since the arrest of Kamal. Scott is beside himself, scared to death that they haven't found Megan. Scott's mother arrives, and Scott explains who Rachel is. Scott's mother thanks Rachel, then escorts her out. Outside, Rachel encounters Tom and Anna taking their baby on a walk. Both Tom and Anna freeze, but Rachel doesn't care. Rachel is just thrilled to have helped, somehow.

Anna – Anna is so happy with Tom and her baby, Evie, as they walk along through the neighborhood. The encounter with Rachel, however, ruins Anna's mood. Later that afternoon, Anna is relieved to learn that someone has been arrested in Megan's disappearance. Anna worries about Rachel being in the neighborhood. Tom says he'll



take care of it, even though Anna insists they call the police. She wants to get away from Rachel.

Rachel – It is Tuesday, July 23, 2013. Rachel ignores multiple calls from Tom. She waits word for further news regarding Kamal's arrest, but she only learns that he is a Muslim and Bosnian survivor of the crisis in the Balkans, and came to England as a 15-year-old refugee. He has a conviction for domestic violence. This makes Rachel believe she is right in having told Scott and the police about Kamal. Yet that evening, Rachel drinks and is stunned to learn on the news that Kamal has been released without charge. Reports of Kamal's domestic conviction are retracted as erroneous. Rachel drinks herself to sleep, and is awoken the next morning by Cathy, who is worried about Rachel getting fired. Later that day, Scott calls Rachel, now well-aware from the police who Rachel is and that she is a drunk. He hangs up on her.

By Friday, July 26, 2013, Rachel has given up the pretense of going to a fake office. She has swung back into drinking heavily. Rachel, sobered up that night, calls Tom. He demands to know why she was at Scott Hipwell's house. She insists Scott hasn't done anything to his wife, and Tom demands to know how she knows that. Rachel tells Tom he just has to believe her. She goes on to ask what happened on Saturday night. Tom explains that Saturday night, Rachel had shown up in the neighborhood drunk, shouted abuse at Anna, which upset Anna and caused her to rush home and Tom to rush out to find Rachel. He explains he found her with blood on her hand, and went to get his car to drive her home, but by the time he returned, she was gone. Tom then tells Rachel it was right of her to come forward about Kamal.

On Monday, July 29, Rachel returns to Witney under the pretense of heading to an imaginary office. She goes to speak to Scott and catches him on his way out in a downpour. They go to his house. Rachel asks about why Kamal was released. Scott explains the police didn't have enough to charge him. They found skin cells and hair from Megan in his house, but not upstairs, and he has flatly denied an affair. The police did find a smear of Megan's blood on his car, but it has been dismissed as nothing. Scott explains that Kamal told the police Megan was unhappy with Scott, and may have run off. Scott asks about what ended Rachel's marriage, and she explains it was a combination of her drinking and her inability to have a baby.

Rachel, returning home that night, learns from Cathy that, through Damien running into Martin Miles, Rachel lost her job months before. Rachel begins crying, and Cathy tells her it will all be alright. On the news the next morning, Rachel discovers that the police have found a body of a woman in Corly Wood, under floodwater at the bottom of a field. It is believed the body is Megan's.

Analysis

As the novel continues, Megan also continues to keep secret her affair from Scott, further revealing that betrayals only lead to worse situations, lies, and more betrayal. But this underhanded behavior does not always sit well with Megan.



In one poignant scene the reader should not fail to miss, Scott tells Megan that he loves her – which makes Megan feel horrendously guilty. Here, the reader should not fail to note that it is clear that Megan knows what she is doing is wrong, yet she pursues her affair without real regard as to the potential consequences. Yet, it is also during this time that Megan's secret affair with Kamal becomes tempestuous at best, leading her to want to seek revenge on Kamal for rejecting her, and then not wanting to hurt him because she wants him to want her. However, Rachel does not keep the affair a secret from the police, ultimately going to them and to Scott about Megan's affair.

This turns the investigation in an entirely new direction, in which Kamal is investigated as a suspect, though he is later released for insufficient evidence. Rachel also keeps her own secrets as well, both from the reader and from Cathy. Rachel has been out of work for months, something which she has not told Cathy, and the reader is surprised to learn. The reader will recall questions raised about Rachel's reliability as to her judgment and what she is figuring out, but the sections of the novel dealing with Megan confirm everything Rachel is saying. Yet, Rachel's alcoholism will come back to haunt her again in the future, as others will come to question her reliability.

At the same time that Scott ends up doing worse and worse as a result of Megan's murder and news of her affair, and at the same time that Rachel struggles to involve herself in the investigation, the theme of love becomes clear again through the character of Anna. Anna seems to be incredibly happy with her family, and her life.

Anna is deeply in love with Tom, and though she doesn't like where she lives, and doesn't like the fact that Rachel won't leave them alone, Anna's love for Tom is not shaken in the least. It is because she loves Tom so deeply that she allows Tom to handle things with Rachel on his own, rather than Anna or the police getting involved in things. Anna's patience with Tom, and the Rachel situation, is clearly apparent, and is reinforced by her deep and abiding love for Tom. The love that Anna has for Tom stands in stark contrast to the relationship that Megan and Scott had, and even to the relationship that Tom and Rachel had. The reader, to some limited degree, becomes sympathetic to Anna and her desire for a good relationship with Tom.

In this section of the novel, the theme of memory also becomes important as Rachel struggles to remember just what happened the night of Megan's disappearance. She knows she was hideously drunk (and here, her alcoholism returns to haunt even herself) and in Witney around the time of Megan's disappearance, but can't remember anything at all solid or coherent about that night. Everything she knows for sure, Tom has told her about – that she was raving drunk, that she shouted cruel things at Anna, and that she was gone by the time Tom came to pick her up. Rachel now endeavors to recover this part of her memory.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Megan feel so horrible when Scott tells her that he loves her? Why does Megan insist on staying with Scott if she is having an affair?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Rachel ultimately decide to go not only to the police about Kamal, but to Scott as well? Why does she tell Scott she is getting involved?

Discussion Question 3

Why has Rachel kept the loss of her job a secret from Cathy? How does Cathy respond to the truth? If you were Cathy, how would you have responded? Why?

Vocabulary

chirruped, accusatory, ethereal, insubstantial, incredulity, contemptuous, brusquely



Pages 162 – 221

Summary

Megan – It is Thursday morning, June 13, 2013. Megan feels as if she is suffocating in her house, and in her marriage. Megan knows she must go and speak to Kamal. Kamal tells her that he can no longer treat her. She begs him to listen, and he consents. She explains that when she was with Mac –Criag –that she was taking a lot of drugs, and got pregnant at seventeen. Yet, they did nothing to change their lives. Giving birth at home to a baby girl, Megan named the baby Elizabeth, calling her Libby for short. After a fight, Mac left, leaving Megan and Libby home, alone, and cold. Taking a bath with Libby, Megan fell asleep, and Libby drowned. Kamal tells Megan she can come back another time, and then they kiss.

Rachel – It is Saturday, August 3, 2013. Rachel meets with her mom, who gives her three-hundred pounds to tide her over. Rachel doesn't tell her mom how bad her drinking problem has become again. The body of the woman found in Corly Wood has been identified as Megan's, but the cause of death may be difficult to establish due to the body being under water for so long. Riding on the train, the red-haired man gets on at Northcote. He appears to be in his late twenties, and admits to being a little drunk on the train the night he and Rachel first saw one another. The man unnerves Rachel, and she leaves the carriage for the back of the train. Rachel begins to hallucinate, believing she has seen Anna walking away from her wearing a blue dress, or perhaps not. Rachel can't tell if she is imagining things or not.

Anna – With Tom meeting his army buddies for a drink, Anna is lonely and looks for something to do. It causes Anna to reflect on Rachel being in the neighborhood the night that Megan disappeared, and she is worried that the police don't realize that Rachel can be very dangerous.

Rachel – It is Sunday, August 4, 2013. In a dream, Rachel believes everyone, from Tom to her mother, hates her now. She wishes she had someone to go home to. Rachel meets with Scott again, this time about Anna. Rachel says that she remembers seeing Anna near the station Megan went missing, but Scott stops her, saying that Anna has already explained she was near the station that night. Scott thinks Megan's insinuation only has to do with her divorce. He says the police are now figuring that he himself is the prime suspect. Scott says that Kamal has been telling the police many things: that Scott was emotionally abusive, controlling, and that Megan was afraid of him.

Tara Epstein has said that Megan often asked her to lie about where she was to Scott. The last text message Scott says he sent to Megan has all but convicted him of the crime. It read, "Go to hell you lying bitch".

He wonders if Rachel can go to the police to vouch for his happy marriage with Anna, but Rachel explains she is a drunk and an unreliable witness. Scott believes that Rachel



must keep coming around because she knows something about that night, and encourages her to remember. He tells Rachel that Megan's death is believed to have occurred the night she went missing, or shortly thereafter.

Rachel wonders if someone like Kamal Abdic, a therapist, can get her to remember. She makes an appointment with Kamal. At his office, she explains to him that she has blackouts where she can't remember anything, but she wants to take responsibility for whatever she's done, even though she can't remember it. She explains that her drinking triggered her husband's affair. While out walking later, she sees a tabloid headline asking if Megan was a child killer.

Anna – It is now Wednesday, August 7, 2013. At Starbucks with her acquaintances from the National Childbirth Trust, Anna is shown a copy of the tabloid about Megan being a child killer, which horrifies Anna, and causes her to cry. She has always believed something was wrong, or absent, about Megan, and is glad Megan is gone. It makes Anna sick thinking about all the time that Megan was alone with Evie. When Tom gets home, Anna demands they leave the neighborhood, but Tom contends they won't find a good place, they'll lose money on the sale, and they won't be able to afford the new mortgage.

Rachel – Scott calls and tells Rachel that cameras are following him everywhere, now, and asks if he can come to her house for an hour or two to get away from all the attention. Rachel consents. Scott learns that the autopsy has revealed that Megan was pregnant. He has a gut feeling that the baby was his. Rachel tells Scott to take a nap, and goes down to make tea. She does not tell Cathy that Scott is in her bedroom. Back upstairs, Scott tells Rachel that he believes the baby killing story is nonsense, and invented by Kamal.

On Thursday, Rachel goes back to see Kamal. She admits the drinking came as a result of her inability to get pregnant. On Friday, August 9, Rachel goes to see Scott. The news has carried word of the discovery of a baby girl where Megan used to live. Rachel drinks on the way to Scott's, believing that Megan was no longer a good person, but a killer.

Megan – It is Thursday, June 20, 2013. Megan is with Kamal again. She recounts her boyfriend, Mac, returning home and finding her on the bathroom floor with the baby. They bury the baby on the edge of the property, and then Mac leaves and never comes back. Ten days later, Megan, too, left. Kamal suggests contacting Mac for closure. Kamal also tells Megan to return home to her husband. Megan suddenly only wants to get home to Scott. On the way back, she avoids a jogger, only to fall and cut her hand. After Kamal's house, Megan feels as if her peace has been shattered.

Rachel – It is Saturday, August 10, 2013. Rachel wakes up, realizing she has slept with Scott, both of them having been drunk the night before. Megan realizes she slept with Scott because she wanted to be the fictional Jess, and Scott the fictional Jason. Scott tells her that what happened the night before was wrong. Rachel apologizes for it.



Rachel wonders what kind of man Scott is, to sleep with a relative stranger less than a month after his wife disappeared.

Anna – Anna is stunned to see Rachel leaving Scott's house that morning. It infuriates her, and she tells Tom, who says he will handle Rachel. Anna decides the next time she sees Rachel around, she will call Detective Riley.

Analysis

Fantasy becomes incredibly dangerous for Rachel in this section of the novel. Previously, she has idealized the relationship between Jess/Megan and Jason/Scott to the point of pure fantasy, and her insertion into the investigation – and Scott's response and reaction to the investigation – further blurs the line between reality and fantasy. Rachel's alcoholic tendencies also further blur this line.

Rachel goes so far as to sleep with Scott (after drinking alcohol), saying that for one night, she wanted to be part of a perfect life –not with Scott, but with Jason. She, in drunken delusion, has confused reality with invented reality – straining her own involvement in things with Scott, and compromising the criminal investigation into Megan's death by having inserted herself into it. This also puts Rachel directly in the path of Anna, who only wants Rachel to be out of her life, for good. Anna has had enough of Rachel being around the neighborhood, and after seeing Rachel leaving Scott's house, decides she will call the police the next time she sees Rachel around. The reader here will note that oftentimes, Rachel's actions are dictated by her drunken self, and this penchant for drink is putting Rachel in an incredibly difficult situation.

The theme of secrets also comes back to the fore in this section of the novel, as Megan makes a heartbreaking confession to Kamal about her past. As a young mother, Megan was involved in the accidental death of her baby girl, which, as it turns out, is the cause for the massive void Megan now has in her life. She keeps the death of her daughter a secret from everyone except Kamal, and keeps the void she feels in her life a secret from everyone, except Kamal. Secrets, lies, and betrayal only lead to more secrets, lies, betrayals -and even worse. This continues to be the case as it overshadows Megan finally decides to get her life back into some kind of order.

Kamal encourages Megan to seek closure now that she has realized the core of her problems, including by attempting to get in touch with Mac. Kamal also encourages Megan to return home to her husband, but whether or not Megan will reveal any of her secrets to her husband is as of yet, unclear. However, Kamal later betrays Megan's confidence by leaking information to the tabloids about Megan's baby's death years before, leading the tabloids to pronounce Megan a baby killer. This accusation by the media is not exactly accurate, as the reader knows - but also demonstrates the dangers of keeping secrets and the consequences of betrayal -in this case, Kamal's betrayal of Megan's confidences.



Love also reemerges as an important theme in this section of the novel. Anna's patience with Tom continues to be nearly unflinching, evidence of just how much she loves him. At the same time, all Anna wants to do is leave the neighborhood, for it now contains far too many bad memories for her to want to be around any longer – which range from Rachel's constant, unwanted presence, to the idea that Megan has been murdered, was responsible for the accidental death of her child, and used to babysit for Evie. However, Tom reasons with Anna, saying that it is just not financially possible yet for them to leave the neighborhood and settle somewhere else. While Anna is not happy about this, her love for Tom causes her to accept and agree with his decision.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Rachel sleep with Scott? What happens as a result?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Scott believe Rachel keeps coming around? What is the truth of the matter?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Rachel begin to see Dr. Abdic? What, ostensibly is her motive for doing so? What is her true motive for doing so?

Vocabulary

Contempt, transgression, exultation, treacherous, conjuring, sibilant



Pages 222 – 289

Summary

Rachel – Tom meets with Rachel. He tells her that he is really concerned about everything, including Rachel coming out of Scott's house. He tells her he is worried about her, that he still cares about her. He touches her face and asks her to promise to stay away from Scott. He then writes Rachel a check to help tide her over. Rachel desperate wants to be in his arms again. On Tuesday, August 13, 2013, Rachel discovers a pile of dark blue clothing on the tracks in a dream. She dreams about Scott killing Megan.

Rachel then goes to see Kamal. She asks about hypnosis, but Kamal says that memories recovered under hypnosis aren't always real memories, that false memories can be generated by suggestion. Rachel explains that she once had an incident with her husband years before where she tried to attack him with a golf club when she was drunk during an argument –yet she doesn't remember anger in the incident, but fear. Kamal says returning to the scene of the incident could help. Rachel then goes to the underpass in the neighborhood near where she remembers seeing a woman in blue getting into the car with Tom, but the woman was not Anna, because Anna was at home.

Anna – It is Tuesday, August 13, 2013. Anna is envious of Tom leaving home to work, reflecting on her own days as a realtor. She notices that Tom seems a bit distracted. She reflects on her time when she was only a mistress to Tom, and though she told her friends she felt guilty about it, she truly didn't. Though she also misses work, she knows she would miss being a mom even more.

That evening, she sees Rachel in the neighborhood again, Anna has had enough, and calls Riley. The next morning, while having sex, Tom tells Anna they should go away together for a while, just the two of them, that they will figure out something with Evie. Anna worries about the money, wondering how they can afford a getaway if they can't even afford a new house. This annoys Tom, who gets up to go take care of Evie when she can be heard on the baby monitor.

After breakfast, Tom is still annoyed, and angry when Anna tells him that Rachel was around the previous evening. He says he told her in person to say away, which annoys Anna, because Tom and previously told Anna he had spoken to Rachel on the phone. Tom apologizes for the deception, which Anna quickly forgives him for, feeling a little guilty about going behind his back by speaking to Riley. Still, she worries about Tom having lied to her, and worries that something else is going on with Rachel. Before Tom gets home from work, she decides to try to hack into his laptop while enjoying a glass of wine, believing she is owed the right to explore his computer for his having lied to her – and then she realizes she is behaving just like Rachel.



Rachel – It is Thursday, August 15, 2013. Cathy tells Rachel she has secured Rachel a job interview. Scott calls later to ask for a meeting with Rachel, to which Rachel agrees. When she arrives at his house, the inside now in disarray, she knows he is drunk. He reveals that the baby inside Anna did not belong to him or Kamal, and he knows that Rachel had never even met Megan. Scott is beside himself, not knowing who Megan truly was. Rachel's phone then beeps, but before Rachel can get the phone, Scott reads the message –an appointment confirmation text with Dr. Kamal Abdic.

Enraged, Scott grabs Rachel by the hair and begins pulling her upstairs, blaming her for the police coming down on him. He forces her into a spare room, used for storage, and she cuts her heel on broken glass from a smashed photo of Scott and Megan. He locks her in there, goes downstairs, and then comes back up, and releases her. He tells her he ought to break her neck, then throws her purse at her and tells her to get out of his house.

She runs to Tom's house, bangs on the door, and when no one answers, leaves him a note. She then heads home. She then calls the police to tell them what has happened. Detective Riley tells Rachel to come down to the station in the morning and make a statement, and to stay away from Scott.

Rachel now believes that Scott is responsible for Megan's murder. The next morning, Rachel makes her statement, though Riley and Gaskill are both out of the office. The new job Rachel takes is in Witney. At the station, she runs into the red-haired man again. He introduces himself as Andy, and Rachel apologizes for her behavior during their previous encounter. She asks about what happened that night Megan disappeared. Andy explains that they were both drunk, chatted, and he helped her off the train, catching her when she slipped. Andy explains he went to the Crown bar for a drink, and then on his way back through the underpass near the station to another bar, and he found Rachel having fallen down, apparently just having had an argument with a man in a car into which a woman entered. Rachel does not feel relieved at having learned all this, but still feels as if something is off. She wonders where Evie was when Anna was walking to Tom's car.

She decides to speak to Tom again. Tom is not happy to hear from her, or to learn that she had left him a note. He now knows why Anna has been annoyed with him the past few days. Rachel asks about that night. He explains that Anna was supposed to go out, but came and cancelled her plans at the last minute. Rachel asks Tom if she had a cut on her head when he found her that night. Tom tells her she was disgustingly drunk and had fallen over. He then tells Rachel to leave him alone.

Rachel recalls how there were numerous times in her marriage when she was too drunk to remember what she'd done the night before, only to wake up knowing she needed to apologize to Tom. Eventually, he stopped telling her what she'd done. As she falls asleep, she remembers Tom approaching her in the underpass, slapping her in the mouth and then smashing his fist –keys in hand –onto her head.



Anna – Anna has been crying, suspecting that something is going on between Tom and Rachel. She was home the night Rachel banged on the door and left the note. Tom, getting off the phone with Rachel, is furious with Anna for having read the note, and for having attempted to go through his computer. He tells Anna she is behaving exactly as Rachel. When Tom goes out to the gym, Anna drinks and then cracks Tom's password. She goes through his e-mails and messages for half an hour, only finding work-related things. She feels reassured. She decides to pretty herself up for Tom when he gets back, but then discovers his gym bag under their bed, with a cell phone she has never seen before.

Terrified, she tries to turn on the phone, only to discover it has no power. This means, to Anna, that the phone is either old, unwanted, or is something Tom found while at the gym. Nevertheless, she plugs in the phone and goes through the text messages. Many of the texts and calls coincide with the dates and times of the harassment log Anna has kept relating to Rachel. When Tom gets home, he is drunk. He wants sex, and Anna, though she doesn't want to have sex, consents. Early the next morning, while Tom is asleep, Anna takes the phone and again and calls its voicemail. The recorded answering message is a woman's, meaning the phone is not Tom's.

Analysis

In this section of the novel, suspicion about Tom and his lifestyle begins to grow. The reader is at a loss as to why Tom continually insists that he, rather than the police, handle Rachel – no matter how many times Rachel refuses to listen to Tom, continuing to contact him and try to get a hold of him, even though he repeatedly has told her to leave him alone. At the same time, his decision to give Rachel money (along with his insistence of going on a vacation with Anna) – when he claims to Anna that they can't leave the neighborhood for financial reasons – strikes the reader as altogether odd, along with the very intimate acknowledgment that Tom still cares for Rachel.

Indeed, he goes so far as to touch her face – a very romantic, and highly inappropriate action considering he is married. As noted earlier, betrayal begets betrayal, and Tom clearly has adulterous tendencies at a minimum. It is apparent here, too, through the theme of love, that Rachel is still very much in love with Tom, for she imagines would it would be like to be in his arms again. Here, it is this particular encounter between Rachel and Tom that Tom keeps secret from Anna -more lies, and more betrayal. Anna, meanwhile, at long last begins to grow suspicious of Tom, believing that he may indeed be cheating on her with Rachel, which in turn causes Anna to begin going through his things. This reflects Rachel's own previous actions when she was married to Tom -but also indicates a foreshadowing of worse things to come -as had been the case for Rachel.

In reflection on Tom's actions, it does become clear that Tom is manipulating Rachel, as well as Anna – though for what reason and to what extent, is currently unclear. Anna's love for Tom, the reader realizes, makes it easier for her to be manipulated by Tom. Likewise with Rachel, her love for Tom - taken together with her alcoholism - makes her



easier to manipulate as well. The more and more the reader learns about Tom, the less and less sympathetic a character he seems, and this is an understanding that should remain fixed in the reader's mind.

Memory becomes a critical theme at this stage in the novel. At the same time that the reader's suspicion of Tom begins to grow, Rachel continues to struggle to recall the events of the night that Megan went missing. No matter what she does, she cannot remember, due to how very drunk she was at that time. She decides to return to Witney, at the suggestion of Kamal in earlier chapters, to jog her memory. It is while she is on the train that she runs into the red-headed man, Andy, who is able to fill in bits and pieces of her memory that night, most of which is still blank to her. Her blank memory also leads to numerous red herrings, such as seeing Anna walking away from her, or believing that Scott is responsible for Megan's murder.

Only a few pieces of the puzzle now remain with respect to Rachel's memory. She now knows, through Andy, that she was in the underpass on the night that Megan went missing, and that an unknown woman got into the car with Tom before driving away. This woman Rachel assumes to be Anna, but that leaves open the question of where baby Evie was at. Much of what Tom has told Rachel about that night – about his having tried to find her in the car, and about Rachel being drunk – is all true. But to what extent Tom has withheld information, and what that information actually is, has yet to be revealed. Rachel now believes that Tom is responsible for Megan's murder – but the motive and the proof are as of yet unclear. While falling asleep, Rachel remembers the last few details needed to solve Megan's murder – including that Tom physically attacked Rachel the night of the incident.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you believe that Tom continually insists that he, rather than the police, handle Rachel?

Discussion Question 2

How does Rachel attempt to recover her memory of the events of the night Megan disappeared, and was murdered? What does Rachel eventually recall? What does this lead her to conclude in terms of the identity of the murderer? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What is the last part of Rachel's memory from the night Megan was killed, that doesn't make sense? Why does this not make sense to Rachel?

Vocabulary

Wheedling, feint, jeopardize, corrosive, innocuous



Pages 290 – 323

Summary

Rachel – Rachel now remembers more about the night of Megan going missing. She knows she has confused the memory of Anna walking away from her with the memory of that night. She knows Tom hit her, and she knows Megan got into the car with Tom.

Anna – Anna hurls the phone over the fence. Moments later, Tom appears, and asks Anna what she is doing. She explains she thought she heard something. Tom then tells her to come back to bed, and that he is not taking no for an answer.

Rachel – It is Sunday, August 18, 2013. Rachel goes to her old house, and meets Anna out in the back. She asks where Tom is. Anna says Tom is out with some old army buddies. Rachel tells Anna they need to go.

Anna – Anna wonders what on earth Rachel is talking about. She realizes it won't be long before Tom notices the phone is gone. Rachel begins asking Anna questions, wondering whether Anna has ever met Tom's army buddies or if she's ever met Tom's family. Anna says she never has. Rachel says she never has, either. She says Tom lies about everything. Anna says she knows that Tom and Megan had an affair. Anna realizes now that all of the calls on the hidden phone were from Megan.

Anna explains she knows about the affair between Tom and Megan, as of only that morning. Rachel wonders aloud if the baby inside Megan was Tom's. Anna says she will not leave Tom over an affair; but Rachel says that Anna knows Tom is responsible for the murder of Megan. Anna can't believe Tom would do it. It is then that both women see Tom watching them from the kitchen.

Megan – It is Friday, July 12, 2013. Kamal is at Megan's house. She has learned she is pregnant, and it terrifies her. Kamal tells her it will be different this time, that she is a new person. He kisses Megan, telling her she doesn't need him anymore. Megan decides to be totally honest and come clean with Scott. Her revelation of someone else leads Scott to become enraged, and he puts his hands on her, slams her into the wall, and chokes her before letting her go.

She decides to pack and leave. She decides as well that Tom will own up to his responsibilities. Scott, crying, apologizes for what he has done, but Megan doesn't want to hear it. She tells him that if he follows her, she will never come back. As she heads toward the underpass, Tom arrives in his car, and tells her to get in. She agrees, and as she heads to Tom, she thinks she has seen someone in the underpass.

Rachel – It is Sunday, August 18, 2013 – Tom asks Rachel and Anna what is going on. Rachel says she saw Megan get into Tom's car the night she disappeared. Tom tells Rachel that he did not hit her, but fell. Rachel persists in saying she saw Megan get into Tom's car. Tom continues to brush it off, saying Rachel was totally drunk. Anna tells Tom



she knows about the phone. Tom admits to the affair, saying Anna was so caught up in the new baby. Rachel goes to call the police, but Tom catches her, kicks her in the back, knocks her down, and her phone goes flying. Inside, Anna puts on tea, and Tom says he wonders what he is going to do with Rachel.

Megan – It is the evening of Saturday, July 13, 2013. Megan notices there is blood on Tom's hand. He says he is having problems with his ex. He and Megan drive to Corly Wood. Megan tells him she is pregnant. Tom tells her to have an abortion, because she wouldn't be a good mother, and he doesn't want another kid. She begins to insult him, his life, his wife, and his child. She tells him she will not have an abortion, and that he'll be paying for his baby the rest of his life. Tom then proceeds to kill Megan.

Rachel – Rachel, Anna, and Tom sit down to tea in the living room. Tom says he was always good to Rachel, but Rachel knows this is a lie. Anna changes Evie's diaper, and Tom explains that Megan had it in her mind to run away with him, to leave everything behind –and that the end of the affair was a relief to him. He reveals that Megan called him that Saturday, telling him she needed to talk to him about something, and that was why he brought her into his car.

Tom blames it all on Rachel. Anna was supposed to go out, but because Rachel showed up, drunk, Tom had to deal with Rachel instead of Megan. It was then that he hit her in the underpass to make his point that he didn't want her around anymore. Then he saw Megan heading toward his house, and he intercepted her, not wanting Anna to find out about the affair. They then drive to Corly Wood. There, she came clean about the pregnancy, and when she wouldn't stop speaking, Tom hit her with a rock, and seeing the bloodied state she was in, decided he had to finish it. He then buried Megan in a shallow grave, which was exposed and submerged by the rain. Tom tells Anna to bring Evie upstairs, close the door, and not call anyone, or it will all turn out very badly. Tom then drags Rachel into the kitchen, and knocks her out.

Anna – Anna puts Evie down to sleep, and knows that what she has wanted – a life without Rachel –will not be possible, but she and Evie will never be safe from Tom, for Anna is a witness to what is transpiring. She goes downstairs, sees Rachel, bloodied and unconscious, and has a beer with Tom. He promises Anna they can move away, now. He tells her to go back upstairs, and she does –taking the phone as she goes.

Rachel - Rachel regains just enough consciousness to hear Tom talking to her. Rachel knows Anna will not help her. Rachel tells Tom to let her go, that she won't tell anyone because she still loves him. Tom then kisses her, during which time she lunges forward, knocking him back, driving her knee into his face, grabbing a corkscrew on her way outside. Tom follows her, and attempts to kill her, but she jams the corkscrew into his neck, and turns away from him.

It is now Tuesday, September 10, 2013. Rachel is on the train, looking at the now-empty houses at 15 and 23 Blenheim. She recalls how Anna called the police the paramedics, and the two of them waited on the couch for help to arrive. It is Anna who explains that



everything that happened was totally in self-defense. Tom has died, and Anna says she tried to stop the bleeding.

In the papers since that night, Rachel learns that Tom had never been in the army, that he had been rejected twice, and he cut off ties with his parents after they had loaned him massive sums of money. Rachel and Anna both fell for his lies out of love for him. With some money from her mother, Rachel is traveling north, and as she passes through Holkham, she visits the graveyard where Megan and Libby are buried. She also e-mails Scott to apologize for everything, but he never responds. Rachel has now been sober for twenty-one days, and she reflects on the night of Tom's death. Anna did not try to stop the bleeding, but twisted the corkscrew further into Tom's neck to make sure he would die.

Analysis

As the novel comes to an end, each of the themes in the novel do so as well. Most notable among them is the theme of love. Anna, even after she has evidence in front of her that Tom is the killer of Megan, doesn't want to believe it. She exists, for a short time, in a state of willing disbelief, going so far as to throw Megan's phone over the fence. She is so deeply in love with Tom that reality doesn't mesh with her idealized fantasy of a perfect family – and here the theme of fantasy also comes back to the fore.

It turns out there is nothing perfect about her marriage to Tom, and her love for Tom, though incredibly strong, is still far less powerful than Anna's love for her daughter, Evie. She will not let anything happen to Evie, and knowing that Evie's life is in danger because of Tom is enough to prompt Anna to act. Though she calls the paramedics, she digs the corkscrew deeper into Tom's throat to make sure that he is dead by the time the paramedics arrive. The death of Tom also means the death of the fantasy world that Anna has constructed with an eye to having the perfect family with Tom.

Ironically, Anna's sober fantasy world with her and Tom and their child proves just as fantastical - and just as dangerous - as Rachel's alcohol-fueled fantasies and memories. Anna is blinded to the fact that her husband is a murderer, as is Rachel. Rachel's alcoholism also blinded her to the truth about Tom's controlling and sociopathic nature. For both women, their blindness (willfully rendered or impaired by alcohol) nearly leads to both of their deaths.

It is also by the end of the novel that memories finally come to completion, in that all of the missing pieces of the puzzle regarding Rachel's time in Witney, and Megan's disappearance, come to light. The woman getting into Tom's car was not Anna, but Megan. Indeed, the secrets that Megan has kept come out –and lead her ultimately to confront Tom as the father of her baby – which leads to Tom murdering Megan. Tom has carefully kept this secret all along, and now with the secret revealed, he knows he has to protect himself by killing Rachel.



Indeed, he tries to blame everything on Rachel, such is the nature of Tom. Tom has not only betrayed his marriage to Rachel, but has also betrayed his marriage to Anna as well, and has betrayed their marriage even further by having an affair with Megan, and by committing the murder of Megan. Tom's own fantasy world – of a perfect family that he controlled – becomes threatened by Megan, whom he kills, and then by Rachel, whom he attempts to kill. In the end, Tom's own sins catch up to him, and together, Rachel and Anna make sure that he is not around to hurt anyone, anymore.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Tom murder Megan? How does Rachel discover it is him?

Discussion Question 2

At the end of the novel, Rachel and Anna protect one another when they are questioned by the authorities about Tom's death. Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Anna decide to make sure Tom is dead by the time the paramedics arrive? Do you believe she is justified in doing so? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

Scree, infidelity, flustered, euphoria, facsimile, premeditated,



Characters

Rachel Watson

Rachel Watson is a young, overweight woman in her early thirties, who serves as one of the three narrators of the novel “The Girl on the Train” by Paula Hawkins. Rachel is the ex-wife of Tom Watson, and now lives with an old friend from college, Cathy. Rachel, while married, was unable to conceive children, and so began to drink heavily, putting a huge strain on her marriage as her drinking got worse. This provides an excuse for Tom to cheat on Rachel, to divorce her, and to remarry with Anna. Rachel is a mess for most of the novel, being still in love with Tom and wanting to take the past back, but being unable to get ahead of her alcoholism in the present. This causes her to lose her job, and to travel to London as if she still had a job in order to fool Cathy, and herself. It is while Rachel is on the train that she begins to see Megan and Scott at home, whom she comes to nickname Jess and Jason. When she discovers that Megan is cheating on Scott, she is horrified. When she discovers Megan is missing, she inserts herself into the ongoing investigation, wanting to be helpful and to do something right for once. As a result, she comes to discover that Tom is the killer, and is nearly killed herself for it.

Anna Watson

Anna Watson is a young woman in her late twenties or early thirties, who serves as one of the three narrators of the novel “The Girl on the Train” by Paula Hawkins. Anna is the current wife of Tom Watson, previously serving as his secret mistress prior to his divorce from Rachel. Anna, with the exception of where she lives near the train tracks, and with the exception of Rachel's incessant need to communicate with Tom, believes she has the perfect family and life. She is pretty, she is in love with Tom, and they have a beautiful baby daughter named Evie. This love blinds her to the truth about her husband – that he was never in the army, and he has lost touch with his parents because he cut them out of his life, and not the other way around, and that he is the murderer of Megan. Until the last possible moment, Anna refuses to believe that Tom could be a murderer, but when he decides to attempt to kill Rachel, and makes Anna a witness, Anna knows that she must act. Her love of Evie far outweighs her love of Tom, and she will do anything she must to keep Evie safe. When Rachel stabs Tom in the throat with a corkscrew, Anna twists it in further to make sure Tom will have no chance of survival.

Megan Hipwell

Megan Hipwell is a beautiful young woman, who at the age of 29, serves as one of the three narrators of the novel “The Girl on the Train” by Paula Hawkins. She is married to Scott Hipwell, and suffers from bouts of depression, inferiority, and a great void in her life based on her past. As 16, she ran away with an older bartender who got her heavily into drugs. Even when pregnant at 17, Megan didn't change her life around. After birth,



while in the bath with her baby girl, Libby, Megan fell asleep, and Libby drowned. This shatters the drug-induced world in which Megan had been living, causing her to leave her old life behind. She later met and fell in love with Scott, and is married to him for three years before the past begins to haunt her again.

She cannot avoid the hole in her life caused by the accidental death of Libby, and so she seeks to fill it with affairs – including with her therapist, Kamal Abdic, and Tom Watson – even though she is in love with Scott. When Megan ends up pregnant with Tom's child, and comes clean to Scott, he is enraged, and puts his hands on her in a violent fashion for the first time ever, causing Megan to flee the house. She is then picked up by Tom, whom she proceeds to tell about the baby, demanding that Tom will take care of the baby – only to have Tom murder her instead.

Scott Hipwell

Scott Hipwell is the 33-year-old husband of Megan. He works as an IT specialist, and is deeply in love with Megan. His whole world revolves around her. When he discovers that Megan has been cheating on him, he is enraged, and puts his hands on her in a violent fashion for the first time in his life. This causes Megan to flee the house, leading to her disappearance and murder at the hands of Tom. Scott is emotionally wrecked by the murder of Megan, hoping up until the last possible moment that she has merely run away. Scott ultimately becomes the primary suspect in his wife's disappearance, until Tom is discovered by Rachel to be the murderer.

Tom Watson

Tom Watson is the current husband of Anna Watson, father of Evie Watson, and ex-husband of Rachel Watson. Seemingly in his thirties, Tom is a sociopathic liar who does whatever he must, and says whatever he needs to, in order to get along in life. This includes constructing a false career in the army, blaming his parents for their falling out, and exaggerating Rachel's alcoholism and drunken behavior as a convenient excuse to cheat on her while married to her, with Anna. When Anna gives birth and her body is getting back to normal, this gives Tom an excuse to begin yet another affair – with Megan. When Megan tells him she is pregnant, and that he will pay for the baby, Tom becomes enraged, for his life – carefully constructed – has been threatened by the unexpected, and he subsequently kills Megan. When he is discovered as the murderer, and when he attempts to kill Rachel, Rachel plunges a corkscrew into his throat, which Anna further pushes in to make sure he is dead.

Inspector Gaskill

Inspector Gaskill is in charge of the investigation into Megan's disappearance, and later, murder. He is old-fashioned, kind, and diligent, and questions the accuracy of Rachel's memories based on her alcoholism.



Detective Riley

Detective Riley is the second-in-command of the investigation into Megan's disappearance and later, murder. Riley is a no-nonsense detective, and she, like Gaskill, calls into question Rachel's ability to remember things when she was drunk. Riley warns Rachel numerous times to stay out of the investigation.

Kamal Abdic

Kamal Abdic is a Muslim, Bosnian War refugee-turned therapist in England. He is seen by Megan Hipwell in her attempt to overcome the void in her life brought about by the death of her daughter years before. Kamal eventually begins a sexual affair with Megan, ultimately breaking it off as Megan begins to recover, and as a matter of professionalism. Kamal becomes the primary suspect in Megan's murder when Rachel sees him kissing Megan at their house one day. Kamal is later cleared of all charges – and cruelly begins to leak information about Megan's past, including the death of her baby.

Craig McKenzie

Craig "Mac" McKenzie is the older man who works at a bar who begins a tempestuous relationship with Megan when she is 16 – introducing her to drugs. When he discovers that Megan has accidentally killed their baby, he helps her to bury the baby, and then leaves Megan.

Cathy

Cathy is an old friend of Rachel's from university, who rents a room out to Rachel following Rachel's divorce. Cathy is dating a man named Damien, and Cathy is incredibly sweet and kind to Rachel, going through great lengths to deal with Rachel's alcoholism, and helping to get Rachel on the right path.



Symbols and Symbolism

Carriage D

Carriage D on the 8:04 commuter train from Ashbruy to Euston is the train car in which Rachel always sits headed to and from her imaginary job. The train stops at a switch just beside Witney, which allows Rachel to look out over her old neighborhood and house.

Alcohol

Alcohol is consumed in copious amounts by Rachel during and prior to the events of the novel. Rachel is a full-fledged alcoholic, which has contributed to the demise of her marriage. She rarely goes without drink in the novel, and is frequently drunk. This causes her to have memory lapses, judgment issues, and blackouts. By the end of the novel, though, Rachel has been without alcohol for 21 days and counting.

E-Mails

E-Mails are sent from Rachel to her ex-husband, Tom, usually when she is drunk. These e-mails are often condescending towards Anna, and Rachel rarely ever remembers writing them when drunk. These e-mails cause friction between Rachel and Tom, and between Tom and Anna.

Phones

Phones – specifically cell phones – are the primary means of communication in the novel. Phones are carried by each of the characters in the novel – including Rachel, Tom, and Anna – and are how they keep in touch with one another. Anna later finds a phone in Tom's gym bag, which turns out to be Megan's phone, and adds proof to the idea that Tom is Megan's killer. Anna ultimately throws the phone over her fence to the railroad tracks.

Gym bag

Tom's gym bag is discovered by Anna underneath their bed after he says he has gone to the gym. While looking in the gym bag, Anna discovers a dead cell phone, which she powers up and discovers belongs to Megan.



Newspapers

Newspapers (and their online editions) are read by Rachel, and are how Rachel gathers much of her knowledge about Scott, Megan, Kamal, and the investigation into Megan's disappearance and murder. She stays up-to-date about the investigation by reading news articles about them, and looks to see what her own discovery – of Kamal being the one of the men Megan was having an affair with – will play out.

Tabloids

Tabloids are sensational form of newspaper, often publishing rumors and gossip, and become a source of information for Rachel relating to Megan's murder and the ensuing investigation. It is through the tabloids that Rachel learns about the death of Megan's baby girl.

Rock

A rock is used by Tom to murder Megan in Corly Wood by the lake. Originally wanting to shut her up after revealing she was pregnant with his child, Tom uses the rock to knock her down, and then realizes he has to finish what he started.

Keys

Keys are carried by Tom when Rachel appears in Witney the night of Megan's disappearance, and he drives out looking for Rachel. When he finds Rachel, he warns her to stay away from him, slaps her, and then punches her in the head with his keys in his fist.

Corkscrew

A corkscrew is used by Rachel to stab Tom in the throat when he tries to kill her. Anna, upon seeing everything that has happened, and upon learning the truth, drives the corkscrew further into Tom's throat to make sure he will die before the paramedics arrive.



Settings

Witney

Witney is a town between Ashbury and Euston Station, and is located near London, England. Witney is, by all appearances, a relatively quiet, staid, middle class suburb full of Victorian homes in which Blenheim Street is located, which runs parallel to the railroad tracks. Rachel used to live in Witney when she was married to Tom, and now rides the train past the town every day, with the town stopping at Witney to let passengers on and off. Witney is also the home of Megan and Scott, whom Rachel nicknames Jess and Jason, for she sees them every day from the train, and imagines them to have the perfect marriage.

Blenheim Road

Blenheim Road is a suburban road in Witney that runs parallel to the train tracks on the Ashbury-Euston line. Blenheim Road is home to middle class Victorian housing, complete with yards and trees. Blenheim Road is the home of Scott and Megan, at number 15, and the home of Anna and Tom, at number 23. Number 23 Blenheim is also the former resident of Rachel, when she was married to Tom.

Corly Wood

Corly Wood is a nearby set of woods with a lake that is popular with families, and teenagers in the evenings. Corly Wood is where Tom and Megan often go to have sex while they are having an affair if they cannot find any other place to go. It is also where Megan later confesses to Tom that she is pregnant, and where Tom murders Megan. He buries her in a shallow grave in a low field at Corly Wood, only to have torrential rains wash away the dirt, and submerge Megan's body.

Ashbury

Ashbury is a village near London, England, in which Cathy lives, and Rachel has taken a room with Cathy. Each day, Rachel embarks from Ashbury to Euston Station in London, traveling to and from an imaginary job which she lost months before.

Euston Station

Euston Station is a train terminus in London, England. It is the train from Ashbury to Euston that Rachel takes everyday on her way to an imaginary job. From Euston, Rachel often travels around London, usually ending up at the library.



Themes and Motifs

Betrayal

Betrayal is a major and important theme in the novel “The Girl on the Train” by Paula Hawkins. Betrayal in the novel, thematically, is the act of being disloyal and/or unfaithful. In “The Girl on the Train”, there is no shortage of betrayal, with many characters engaging in such behavior at various times.

The first instance of betrayal comes in the marriage between Rachel and Tom, when Tom cheats on Rachel with Anna. Rachel has long blamed herself for the affair, due to her inability to conceive a child, and her subsequent alcoholism. However, Tom’s betrayal of Rachel stems from much more than Rachel’s issues with alcohol. Tom is himself a sociopathic liar, doing whatever he wants and saying whatever he can to get what he desires. The worse that Rachel’s alcoholism becomes, the more Tom betrays their marriage by using her drunken blackouts to mask his own cruelty, and his own adulterous affair with Anna.

When Anna and Tom are married, they have a baby. During the early months after birth, when Anna is her least attractive, Tom immediately hones in on Megan, and begins a sexual affair with her, thus betraying his marriage with Anna. The affair carries on for a while, and when Megan comes to Tom with news that she is pregnant, he realizes he cannot lie his way out of it. He becomes incensed with Megan, and kills her, betraying her trust in him that he will do the right thing.

Betrayal is also a large part of Megan’s existence, who vacillates between feeling fulfilled with her husband, and feeling hollow after the accidental death of her own baby years before. As such, she seeks to fill the void however she can. She betrays her marriage with Scott by having an affair not only with her therapist, Kamal, but also with Tom. She further betrays Scott by making him think – and being proud of the fact that she makes him think – as if she is only having sex with him, and not two other men.

Secrets

Secrets form a major and important theme in the novel “The Girl on the Train” by Paula Hawkins. Secrets – experiences, information, and knowledge kept secret for various reasons – fuels the plot of the novel. Many of the characters have some kind of secret, and different motives for keeping secrets.

By far, the most tragic secret is kept by Megan, who, while only 17, accidentally drowned her baby girl during a bad period of her life, in which she was nearly always under the influence of drugs and alcohol. She reveals this information only to Kamal, who later reveals it to the police and the press. However, the truth of the matter – that Megan accidentally killed the baby – is never revealed. As such, everyone else, including Rachel, comes to believe that Megan is a baby killer. This is a secret that, at



least during the course of the novel, is never told. Megan has long feared how people – especially Scott – would react to such a revelation, and it is a terrifying part of her past she wants to bury and forget, so she relegates it to the realm of secrecy.

Megan also keeps other secrets – mainly from her husband, Scott. Megan carries on an affair with Kamal and Tom, both of which she keeps secret from her husband, and from one another. Fueled on by the desire to fill the void in her life since the death of her baby, Megan does whatever she can to feel whole again, though this particular feeling she keeps secret, and reveals it only to Kamal. Megan, at last, only begins to reveal the secrets she has been keeping from Scott, only to have Scott react violently as a result – which in turn causes Megan to leave home and run into Tom.

Tom himself is a keeper of secrets as well. Tom's secrets are the most vile of any character's. Tom carries on an affair with Anna during his marriage to Rachel, and during the worst part of Rachel's life – an affair which he keeps secret. Tom also keeps from Rachel, and later from Anna, the truth about his past – that he was never in the army, and that he cut off contact from his parents after they loaned him immense amounts of money. From Anna, he later keeps his affair with Megan a secret, seeing Megan as only a fling while Anna was recovering after having a baby. He also keeps his increasing contact with Rachel a secret from Anna, not wanting to ruin the stable home life he has built with Anna and his daughter.

Love

Love is an important theme in the novel “The Girl on the Train” by Paula Hawkins. Love, principally romantic love, is essential to the plot, and spurs on the actions of the characters of Rachel, Anna, and Megan, all of which ultimately relate to the way their lives intersect through Tom.

Tom is a sociopathic liar who will do whatever he needs to get whatever he wants. As such, he preys on people – and when he meets Rachel after the death of her father, he sees that she is an emotional mess, and an easy target. He moves in, and she falls head-over-heels in love with him, believing that he will make everything better for her. But her inability to conceive a child, and her turning to drink, ultimately helps to fracture her marriage. Even when Tom has an affair and leaves Rachel, she still continues to love him throughout nearly the entire novel, turning to him in moments of trouble and crisis. Yet, her love for Tom also blinds her to the affair he is having, and to the fact that, though she is a drunk, she is not worthless and undeserving of Tom's love as he made her believe. He manipulates Rachel's love for him against her, blaming her and her alone for the affair and the divorce.

Tom, with Anna, finds her to be easy prey, and the two quickly begin their sexual affair. Anna falls in love with Tom quickly, knowing that she wants to marry him and have children with him. Her deep and abiding love for Tom – which fuels her absolute hatred for Rachel – blinds her to the fact that Tom has an affair with Megan. This also later blinds her to the fact that Tom is interested in anything other than a family, and blinds



her to the fact that he has been in personal contact with Rachel. It also blinds Anna to the secrets that Tom keeps, about his family and his past. Even right until the very end, Anna's love remains unshaken in Tom, until she sees firsthand and personally what Tom is capable of doing. Only Anna's love for her daughter, Evie, is stronger than her love for Tom, and knowing she must protect her daughter compels her to make sure that Tom will never again be an issue.

Megan's situation may arguably be the most tragic when it comes to love. Having spent her teenage years in a drug-addled state with a man she believed she loved, the birth and death of her daughter shook her to her core, and caused her to get out of the situation in which she had become mired. She later meets Scott, and truly falls in love with him. Yet, despite her love for Scott, she feels as if she always needs something more to fill the void left in her by the death of her baby. She seeks this out in the arms of other men, betraying her love for Scott, and undermining what she has so carefully built with him. While sometimes she feels that Scott's love for her is enough, at other times, she either feels suffocated or like it isn't enough at all. Yet, when she finally decides that Scott is enough for her, and decides to tell him the truth about everything, his reaction is too much for Megan to deal with, and far more than she expected. Here, too, as with Anna and her baby, Megan realizes that she must now live for two, and leaving Scott after his reaction is the only plausible option that she has. She has a chance to do things over and make things right, and her love for her new, unborn baby is enough to cause her to leave.

Fantasy

Fantasy is an important theme in the novel "The Girl on the Train" by Paula Hawkins. Thematically, fantasy involves that which is not real. In the novel, fantasy lends a dangerous hand to events, and warps reality in such a way as to make it difficult to discern from fantasy, and even from memory.

The first and most obvious example of fantasy in the novel has to do with Rachel's observations while on the train. Out of work for months, she still takes the same train toward her job, following the same routine every day in an elaborate fantasy designed to fool Cathy. It works to such a degree that Rachel herself does not even register the fact that her train trips are not grounded in reality. This, of course, coincides with her alcoholism, as she often spends the train trips drinking.

It is while on the train to and from her imaginary workplace that Rachel looks back at her old neighborhood, and begins to see the way that Megan and Scott – whom she nicknames Jess and Jason – interact with one another. She imagines them to have the perfect relationship, and her naming them becomes a major part of the fantasy life she constructs for them. She watches how they exist together, seeming to be quite intimate and romantic with one another, and this makes her jealous and happy at the same time. Indeed, she becomes so engrossed with this fantasy couple and their fantasy life that, when Rachel learns that Jess/Megan is having an affair, and later goes missing, she feels the need to involve herself – not just in speaking to the police, but to involve



herself personally with Jason/Scott. Indeed, the morning after she sleeps with Scott, she explains to the reader that she just wanted to be a part of the life that Jess and Jason had, that she wanted to be Jess, and to be with Jason, for one night.

Fantasy too, for Anna, proves to be a dangerous mindset to have. Anna, who delighted in the affair she carried on with Tom for so long, now delights in being his wife, and having had a baby with him. She believes her life is perfect, except for Rachel's appearances and the place in which they live, and does everything she can to convince herself that Tom is the perfect husband, and she has the perfect life. This fantasy world she has constructed for herself, in addition to her unfailing love for Tom, leads Anna to turn a blind eye to Tom's past, trusting him about everything he says and does. Until such time as Anna knows that her daughter's life is in danger, she does not act to stop Tom.

Additionally, Tom has constructed the most warped fantasy of all. Tom, the sociopathic liar, has created an elaborate fantasy about his own life. He transmogrifies his own past to make it appear as if he was in the army when he never was, and if his own parents have cut off contact with him, rather than he with them. He twists reality to the point that it serves his own interests – making Rachel's alcoholism out to be far worse than it actually is, and using this as a convenient excuse to cheat. He later uses Anna's post-pregnancy body as another convenient excuse to cheat on her in the short-term. Indeed, his fantasy world of a perfect family from which he has the right to stray is threatened to come undone by Megan's pregnancy, and Tom's fantasy, endangered, must be preserved at all costs. This is done at the expense of Megan's life.

Memory

Memory is an important theme in the novel "The Girl on the Train" by Paula Hawkins. Memory, thematically, involves recalling events, situations, incidents, words, and actions of the past while in the present. In the novel, memory is something that Rachel strives for in order to make sense of the present. Oftentimes, memory and reality blur together, making recalling memories extremely difficult.

Throughout the novel, many of the characters – including Rachel, Anna, and Megan – recall memories from their past which help the reader to make sense of the present. For example, the horrible emptiness that Megan feels, an emptiness unable to be filled, makes sense when the accidental death of her baby girl is recalled. Anna, too, reflects with delight about all the time she was the secret mistress of Tom, and how she loved to meet up with him. Rachel, herself, remembers how much it meant to her when Tom swooped in to save her following the death of her father. Each of these memories sets the characters on a trajectory in their lives: Rachel married Tom, who later had an affair with Anna, causing him to leave Rachel and marry Anna. Megan's loss propels her to have affairs with different men, leading her to cheat on her husband with Tom.

Memory is also something that Rachel desperately seeks out during the novel. Given to regular blackouts due to her excessive and repeated drinking, Rachel finds much of the



past difficult to recall. She remembers numerous incidents in which she was drunk, but little else about those incidents, such as the time she chased Tom with a golf club. While she doesn't understand why her one real memory of the event – feeling fear –doesn't equate to what Tom told her happens, she does imagine that, while drunk, she had no control over her actions. Indeed, the most pressing memories that Rachel wants to recall, and spends much of the novel trying to recall, are the events of the night that Megan disappeared. She knows she was in the neighborhood when it happened, but remembers little else – only a few hazy images of what went on.

After meeting with Dr. Kamal Abdic, Rachel decides to return to the neighborhood to see if it will jog her memory. It does. It is during her return to the area – specifically the place where her fragmented memory places her – that she remembers Tom smacking her, and then hitting her in the head with his keys in his fist. She remembers seeing Tom leaving with Megan, and this is how she is able to trace Megan's final moments to Tom.

Styles

Point of View

Paula Hawkins tells her novel “The Girl on the Train” in the first-person limited-omniscient perspective from the points of view of the three primary female characters – Rachel, Anna, and Megan. Because the novel is of the mystery and suspense genre, the limited-omniscient aspect allows the reader to know only as much as the characters do, adding elements of reality, apprehension, the unknown, and anxious confusion. Because the novel is about the lives of those three women – Rachel, Megan, and Anna – all intersecting in one way or another, Hawkins allows them to tell their stories themselves. This allows the author to give her three women three distinct voice, and allows deep and penetrating insight into their lives, thoughts, and motives – all of which adds to the overall mystery.

Language and Meaning

Paula Hawkins tells her novel “The Girl on the Train” in language that is brief, simple and straightforward. This is done for at least two reasons. First, the setting and situations are all contemporary, so everyday language is employed by the characters themselves, and the author. Second, because the novel is of the mystery and suspense genre, the fast-paced, straightforward language lends a sense of urgency to the plot, and allows the reader to move briskly rather than becoming tied down in the language. It is clear that Hawkins has a story to tell, and she wants the reader to focus primarily in the story, and not the language itself.

Structure

Paula Hawkins divides her novel “The Girl on the Train” into 38 consecutive, unnumbered chapters titled by the character which narrates them – between Rachel, Anna, and Megan. Each chapter is further subdivided into smaller sections bearing the date and general time period (morning, afternoon, evening) in which the events of that section take place. The chapters alternate between Rachel, Anna, and Megan, and between the present (in 2013) and the past (in 2012), until the events of the past catch up to the events of the present. Chapters taking place in the past are all narrated by Megan; chapters in the present are all narrated by Rachel and Anna.



Quotes

Twice a day, I am offered a view into other lives, just for a moment. There's something comforting about the sight of strangers safe at home.

-- Rachel (Rachel, p. 2 paragraph 4)

Importance: Riding on the train to and from her imaginary job, Rachel looks out at her old neighborhood. It is while looking out at the houses on her old block that Rachel sees how comfortable people are at home, and it comforts Rachel as well, for she has been without a true home of her own for a while. It is also through these observations that Rachel first sees Megan and Scott, whom she will come to call Jess and Jason.

I wonder whether they are there, whether he knows, whether he's left, or whether he's still living a life he's yet to discover is a lie.

-- Rachel (Rachel, p. 35 paragraph 28)

Importance: When Rachel discovers that Jess/Megan is having an affair, she is horrified and sickened by it, for Jason/Scott seems to be an excellent husband. She wonders if Jason/Scott has any idea that his wife is cheating on him, reflecting on her own experiences where her own husband cheated on her.

I was trespassing. That's what it felt like this morning, because it's their territory now, it's Tom and Anna's and Scott and Megan's. I'm the outsider, I don't belong there, and yet everything is so familiar to me.

-- Rachel (Rachel, p. 65 paragraph 21)

Importance: Rachel, learning the true identity of Scott and Megan, and following Megan's disappearance, heads into the neighborhood. She realizes it is no longer her home, and she no longer has any right to be there – but that it is a place which now belongs to other people. To a large degree, this quote also references Rachel's inability to accurately remember things – including the events of the night that Megan disappeared. It is territory that is “familiar” to her, but not territory that she “owns” – meaning she recalls bits and pieces of memory, but not all of it.

Drunk Rachel sees no consequences, she is either excessively expansive and optimistic or wrapped up in hate.

-- Rachel (Rachel, p. 105 paragraph 50)

Importance: When Rachel drinks, she is an entirely different person. Her drunkenness was, in large part, what led to the dissolution of her marriage. In this particular instance, she has fired off an e-mail to Tom while drunk, which she does not remember doing. The alcohol eliminates her common sense and objectivity, leaving her sober self to pick up the pieces.

They've got him, and I helped. I did something right.

-- Rachel (Rachel, p. 137 paragraph 21)



Importance: Rachel helps to identify one of the men that Megan was having an affair with – her therapist, Dr. Kamal Abdic. Rachel feels, for the first time in a long time, that she has done something right for once. She feels proud of herself, and feels as if she has truly made a difference – a stark contrast to how she has been feeling for most of the novel.

I feel awful, desperately guilty, I just can't think what it is that I've done.
-- Rachel (Rachel, p. 179 paragraph 1)

Importance: Rachel, waking from a dream that reflects upon reality, realizes she has done something wrong, but can't remember what it is. This speaks in great volume to her alcoholism, and the serious situation in which she finds herself presently, unable to recall anything the night of the disappearance of Megan.

You can't help me. No one can help me. My wife is dead, and the police think I killed her.
-- Scott Hipwell (Rachel, p. 182 paragraph 36)

Importance: With Kamal eliminated as a suspect, the police turn their full focus on Scott Hipwell. Based on the argument and physical altercation Scott had with Megan the night she disappeared, as well as the cruel text he sent her, the police now consider him their primary suspect.

I wanted to be with Jason. I wanted to feel what Jess felt when she sat out there with him, drinking wine in the evening.
-- Rachel (Rachel, p. 217 paragraph 8)

Importance: Rachel's dangerous fantasy about Jess and Jason bleeds over into real life, when she goes above and beyond involving herself in a criminal investigation. She sleeps with Scott, wanting to be a part of the elaborate fantasy she has created about Jess and Jason – and does so while drunk. This involves her in events like never before, and puts her in grave danger.

I don't really know what I'm doing.
-- Rachel (Rachel, p. 275 paragraph 1)

Importance: After determining that Tom is Megan's murderer, Rachel goes to see Anna. While waiting for Anna to answer the door, Rachel is in almost a state of disbelief about what she is about to do – tell Anna the truth about Tom. But unlike previous situations where Rachel didn't know what she was doing because she was drunk, the present situation is a matter of considered, sober realization.

Because he lies about everything.
-- Rachel (Anna, p. 279 paragraph 24)

Importance: Here, Rachel reveals to Anna that Tom is a sociopathic liar, doing



whatever he needs to do, and saying whatever he needs to say, to get along. This includes lying about his past – both his parents and his days in the army – as well as exaggerating and twisting Rachel's alcoholism to his benefit and manipulation.

If you'd just left us alone, you'd never be in this situation. I wouldn't be in this situation. None of us would.

-- Tom (Rachel, p. 315 paragraph 3)

Importance: Here, Tom is preparing to kill Rachel, after Rachel has discovered and confronted Tom with the truth. Tom sadistically taunts Rachel, telling her that her nosiness and insistence on involving herself in things which did not concern her have led her to her current situation.

I suppose everyone does it – looks out at the houses they pass – only we all see them differently. All saw them differently. Now, everyone is seeing the same thing.

-- Rachel (Rachel, p. 318 paragraph 18)

Importance: Here, Rachel reflects on the time before and after the truth of Megan's murder came to light. While passing their house every day, Rachel imagined Megan and Scott to have the perfect life, because that was what she saw, and what she wanted to believe. The same is true of everyone on the train – they can look out at the same thing, but see it differently. Now, with the murder and murderer clear to all, all now see the same thing only – the houses where the murderer and the murder victim lived.