

# **The Silent Wife Study Guide**

**The Silent Wife by A. S. A. Harrison**

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## Plot Summary

"The Silent Wife" is the tale of a long-term relationship gone bad without any possible way to fix it. Jodi Brett and Todd Gilbert have been together for 20 years but Todd's infidelity lead to the demise of his relationship with Jodi, and, ultimately the end of his life. Todd is a successful entrepreneurial builder and Jodi is a part-time therapist who works out of their lovely high-rise condominium in Chicago. Jodi and Todd meet when she is driving a van filled with her household items during a move 20 years ago and they have been together ever since. Todd has been unfaithful throughout their relationship but Jodi has managed to look the other way in order to maintain the upscale lifestyle to which she has become accustomed. Todd's latest indiscretion is a college-aged girl named Natasha who also happens to be the daughter of his lifelong friend, Dean Kovacs. When it is revealed that Natasha is pregnant, Todd leaves the well-ordered home he has shared with Jodi to live in an apartment with Natasha who begins making plans for the baby and for a wedding. Todd cannot maintain two residences so Jodi is notified by Todd's attorney that she is to vacate the condo. Jodi is in disbelief that Todd is capable of removing her from the home and life they have shared for so many years. Ultimately, one of Jodi's friends, Alison, tells Jodi that she needs to take care of the situation before Todd marries Natasha and the assets in his will will revert to Natasha and the baby. Alison's ex-husband can make problems disappear for the right amount of money so Jodi begins to sell valuables for cash, so as not to leave a paper trail. Jodi then makes a trip to Florida to attend a psychology conference so that she will have an alibi when Todd is murdered. A few days before his scheduled wedding to Natasha, Todd has made a lunch date with a waitress he met a week before. He is happy on his way to the lunch but is suddenly startled to find that he has been shot while he sits in his car at a stoplight. Jodi is notified of Todd's death while in Florida and she returns to face the questions from detectives as well as the funeral. Todd's lawyer informs Jodi that all his assets will go to her since Todd would have waited to be married to Natasha to revise it to include her and the new baby. Jodi becomes reclusive and hallucinatory and ends up in the hospital for dehydration. One of the detectives visits her to tell her that it was Dean Kovacs who had Todd killed by hitmen and Jodi simply cannot believe the twist of fate. Alison has disappeared with the money that Jodi gave her to pay her ex-husband for the job. Jodi is barely affected by the new circumstances as she is allowed to retain her home and way of life, with all her problems solved.



# PART ONE: HER AND HIM, 1: Her, 2: Him, 3: Her, 4: Him

## Summary

45-year-old Jodi Brett makes dinner in her high-rise Chicago condominium, contemplating the comfortable life that she has created with her long-term partner, Todd Gilbert. Their 20-year relationship is crumbling, however, and it will take only a few months for Jodi to turn into a killer. Their dog, Freud, waits for scraps as she continues with the dinner preparation ritual. Jodi recalls the rainy day she met Todd when she was moving household items in a van which collided with Todd's car. A few days later, he took her to dinner and they have been together ever since. At the time of their meeting, Todd's real estate development business was just in its early stages but Jodi was impressed by the way he moved through life, so different from the college boys she was used to.

Todd, a real estate developer, arrives home and their evening ritual of his mixing cocktails while she finishes dinner begins. Jodi, a part-time psychotherapist, talks about her day and includes brief notes about her clients, giving each of them code names to keep their privacy. Jodi thinks that perhaps Todd's depression has passed because he seems much happier lately. Todd tells Jodi that there's a fishing trip with the guys this weekend and Jodi knows that he is lying because neither Todd nor his friends go fishing. Todd gives Jodi a present, a small Rajput painting of an elegant woman in a walled garden and Jodi appreciates Todd's fine taste. At the end of the evening, Jodi cleans the kitchen, tidies the other rooms and lays out their night clothes, all comfortable rituals for her. Jodi is grateful for the stability in her life and the spaciousness she enjoys by never marrying or having children. But Todd and Jodi have been together for so long that most people know her as Mrs. Gilbert.

In the morning, Jodi's rituals continue as she walks the dog, Freud, along the waterfront. She thinks about starting her small practice right out of school and continuing for a year until a young patient of hers jumped to his death from his parents' apartment. Jodi enrolled in the Adler School for more training so she could have better control over the type of clients she took on. Jodi's schedule allows for just two clients a day, both in the morning, so she has her afternoons and evenings free to pursue interests such as cooking, flower arranging and dinner with friends.

In Chapter 2, Todd's morning ritual consists of a quick cold shower, downing a vitamin with some orange juice and arriving at his office before seven a.m. The building where his office is located was his first large scale renovation as a real estate developer. Todd smokes a joint before beginning his day because it calms him down as he waits for his breakfast to be delivered. Todd's secretary, Stephanie, arrives late every day but he does not say anything because he cannot really function without her, plus he finds her sexually attractive. Todd makes a phone call to the girl he has been seeing, Natasha.



He is grateful to Natasha because she has brought him out of his depression. Before leaving the office, Todd calls Jodi to tell her that he won't be home for dinner, but she already knows that he has plans to see his friend, Dean Kovacs.

Todd and Dean have been friends since high school and Dean is almost like a brother to him. Dean is also Natasha's father and Todd is not sure how he will react when he learns about Todd's relationship with her. Natasha says she'll tell her dad when the time is right. Natasha would like to marry and have a family, and the prospect of having children is very appealing to Todd who would like an heir. Natasha had arranged their weekend away at a country inn when he had told Jodi he was going fishing with the guys. Since he has started seeing Natasha, Todd has begun to work out and finds that it also helps keep his depression at bay.

Todd meets Dean at the bar at The Drake Hotel. Dean is a sales executive for a plastics company and he talks easily about his job. Dean's wife has been dead for ten years and he has not remarried because he still loves her. This love, however, has not stopped Dean from having a string of relationships. After Todd and Dean say goodbye, Todd heads to The Four Seasons Hotel for an encounter with a high class prostitute.

In Chapter 3, Jodi tries to make some plans for the weekend since Todd is going away with his friends and leaves voice messages for friends. One of the last friends she calls is Alison who cannot have dinner over the weekend but is free on Monday. Jodi had met Alison at a cooking class and she does not know for sure what Alison's job is but it involves scantily clad girls.

On Saturday, Jodi runs errands and tries to fill her day, knowing that Todd will not be home until tomorrow night. Jodi knows that Todd will not call her this weekend either and she reflects on how their relationship is losing vitality. When they were dating, Todd and Jodi talk about their families. Todd's family was ruled by an alcoholic, abusive father who controlled his passive mother and Todd was not sad when his father died.

In Chapter 4, Todd drops Natasha off at home at the end of the weekend and heads home. When he arrives, Todd finds Jodi lying half naked on a lounge chair on the balcony and he cannot help but be captivated by the sleek lines of her body. Todd thinks about how different Jodi and Natasha are; Jodi is refined and controlled while Natasha is primal and lusty. Over the weekend, Natasha had reminded Todd that he has promised to marry her in June so they will need to find a place soon. Jodi asks Todd about his "fishing" weekend and he answers evasively before taking her out to dinner. That night they make love for the first time in a month.

The next day is a series of misadventures for Todd. He arrives at the office but his office key is not on his key chain so he waits on the janitor who quits when Todd berates him for being late to work. Todd is forced to break into the janitor's office and then gets a call from Stephanie who will not be in today because one of her kids is sick. Natasha calls at noon and pouts when Todd tells her he has not had time to call the lawyer but she pouts so he agrees to meet her for lunch. While at lunch, Natasha tells Todd that she is pregnant. Todd erupts in anger which frightens Natasha who always believed that Todd



wanted children. Natasha stomps out of the restaurant and Todd follows her and they fight about whether she should have an abortion. Natasha has already told her father (Dean) and he is not at all happy about the situation. Dean has also said that he is going to talk to Jodi about it. Todd calls Dean to try to preempt his calling Jodi and Dean furiously states that he is going to have Todd arrested for sexual assault on his daughter.

Todd walks to calm down and remembers the first time he saw the post pubescent Natasha and how he was hooked from that moment. Todd returns to his office and is so rattled at the prospect of his two worlds colliding that he smokes a joint to calm down. Todd decides to go home and sees that Jodi's parking spot is vacant so it is possible that Dean has not been able to reach her today. Todd checks the answering machine and there is no message from Dean so Todd heads out again to get a drink at The Drake. Todd alternates between being happy about being a father and being upset because he has to talk to Jodi before Dean can get to her.

## Analysis

The author tells the story in alternating voices, first Jodi's and then Todd's. This gives the reader insight into their individual thoughts instead of just telling about their activities. It is easy to gauge character motivations, needs, hopes, etc. quickly this way. The point of view is third person omniscient which means that the author uses an unseen narrator to not only talk about what Jodi and Todd do but also what they're thinking.

The author also quickly establishes the fact that Jodi will turn toward murder in just a few months. Most mysteries and thrillers take the entire story to reveal that fact but this author states it plainly and the reader now has to find out how and why Jodi is pushed to being a killer.

The author establishes a measured pace as she tells how Jodi and Todd's life runs on routine and ritual, an important theme in the story. Jodi brings a measured sense of security to Todd's life through her planning and attention to detail. Jodi is very domestic and enjoys providing a beautiful environment for Todd to come home to. She loves to cook and prides herself on the lovely, appointed home. This arrangement has worked for them for 20 years but now Jodi senses that Todd's depression has lifted recently. Jodi does not yet know that Todd's improved mental state is due to his relationship with a younger woman, Natasha, who has brought Todd back to life emotionally. Natasha is very sexual and uninhibited, the exact opposite of Jodi. The reader knows early on that Todd is enjoying the best of all worlds and that this cannot continue without some type of impact. That moment comes when Natasha tells him that she is pregnant and she has informed her father, Dean, who is Todd's best friend from high school. Todd's world is about to crumble and, although he is happy that he will be a father, he knows that his life with Jodi is essentially over and everything that has been measured and calming will be gone.



The reader has yet to find out how Jodi will react to the news of Todd's relationship with Natasha and impending fatherhood. There is a clue in that the author provides some foreshadowing when Todd gives Jodi the Rajput painting of the elegant woman in a walled garden. The woman looks as if she is totally protected in her environment without a care in the world. This gives some clue as to what Jodi's life will be like by the end of the story although there are many twists and turns yet to get to that point. The author sets up suspenseful points throughout the book and in this section, Todd's mind races with all kinds of thoughts about how Jodi will react when hearing the news about him and Natasha and even more critically, Todd needs to talk to Jodi before Dean reaches her but he does not know whether or not that has happened yet.

## Discussion Question 1

What role does ritual play in the lives of Jodi and Todd?

## Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Jodi and Natasha.

## Discussion Question 3

Why does the author let the reader know so soon in the book that Jodi will be pushed to murder?

## Vocabulary

unobstructed, containment, delineating, eroding, disintegration, incomprehension, yearning, progeny, misogynist, marvel, imbecile, tirade, renovation, craze, spliff, interim, trump, stupendous, nuance, savors, futility, gratifying, insatiable, proliferating, infatuated, finials, compelling, endorphins, pervert, swill, resurrection, contradiction, conquest, monologue, largesse, murk, benign, aura, habitual, capitulating, skepticism, monogamy, provisional, synapses, dulcet, pummels, prone, virtuoso, bumptious, proclivity, progeny, flak, riled, pristine, fray, hapless, ingest, carnal, veneration



## 5: Her, 6: Him, 7: Her, 8: Him

### Summary

Jodi has taken her revenge on Todd for going away for the weekend with another woman by removing his office key from his key ring. Jodi has a couple of client sessions, has lunch and checks messages and finds a voice message from Dean Kovacs who needs to speak to her right away. Jodi recalls having Dean and his daughter to dinner many times in the years after Dean's wife died. Jodi cannot imagine what Dean wants to tell her but she calls him back and leaves a voice message. Jodi then drops off some clothes at the dry cleaner where the attendant finds something in the pocket of a pair of Todd's pants. Jodi drops the item into her purse and heads to a seminar on eating disorders. During a coffee break, Jodi pulls the item from her purse--a bottle of pills--and confirms with a psychiatrist that they are sleeping pills. As Jodi leaves the seminar, she wonders why Todd would have a bottle of sleeping pills prescribed for Natasha Kovacs.

When Jodi arrives home, it occurs to her that Natasha is the reason for Todd's recent lift in spirits and Dean's phone call now makes sense. As Jodi is about to leave for dinner with her friend, Alison, Dean calls again and Jodi picks up the phone.

Alison works at a gentlemen's club called The Garnet Club where she manages the girls who entertain there. Jodi meets Alison at Cite on top of Lake Point Tower where they get caught up on each other's lives. Jodi is mentally distracted by what Dean has told her--that Natasha is pregnant and she and Todd have plans to marry. Jodi asks Alison about her ex-husband, Renny, a French Canadian who is not good for her but Alison cannot get over losing him. Renny stays in contact with Alison because he is always trying to get money from her. Jodi tells Alison that she is feeling a little dizzy so Alison drives Jodi home where she tells Alison about Todd and Natasha.

After Alison leaves, Jodi prepares for bed and puts the dirty clothes in the hamper. The bottle of sleeping pills falls out of her purse and Jodi reads the label's instructions. When Todd arrives home, she fixes him a cup of hot Ovaltine and toast with jelly. Todd casually asks whether Jodi has talked to Dean today and she replies that she has no reason to talk to Dean.

The next morning, Jodi awakens on the couch where she spent the night because Todd had collapsed into the bed and was too heavy for her to move. She recalls grinding the 11 sleeping pills in her mortar last night before dropping them into Todd's hot Ovaltine. Jodi is not sure what effect the pills will have on Todd but thinks that it is only fair that he has ingested them because he brought them into their life. Jodi avoids the bedroom for as long as she can but she eventually enters to get dressed and can see that Todd's form in the bed has not changed since last night. Jodi walks the dog and gets a latte before returning home where Todd has still not stirred. While Jodi is with a client, she





hears Todd's phone ringing but he does not answer it. Later she begins to think about the questions that the authorities will ask her and how she will respond.

In Chapter 6, it is 1:30 in the afternoon and Todd has finally awakened but in a state of confusion. Todd questions Jodi about why she did not wake him and she tells him that he apparently needed to sleep off the liquor he had last night. Natasha calls Todd and wants to know what Jodi had said after talking to Dean and Todd declares that Jodi never talked to Dean but Natasha contends that they did talk. Todd knows that it is Jodi's pattern to behave as if nothing has happened when she is upset and that is probably what is going on now. Todd knows that what he is experiencing is more than an ordinary hangover but Jodi offers to make him some chicken soup and make up the bed so he can rest.

In Chapter 7, Jodi realizes that 11 sleeping pills are not enough to kill Todd. Jodi now thinks that Dean is probably exaggerating things and she calms down to face her day. Jodi is proud that she is sane and capable as opposed to so many people in the world. Jodi recalls psychotherapy sessions she took when enrolled in the Adler School when the prof thought it would benefit her to understand what a patient feels like during therapy. Jodi's therapist was Gerard Hartmann, an Adlerian who believed that a person's thought constructs were formed as a child, long before entering the world at large.

Jodi liked Gerard right away and their sessions were filled with his attempts at getting her to remember early experiences which she does. Jodi's entry into psychology had probably been natural as she had been the only one in her family who could calm her younger brother, Ryan who was prone to nightmares, tantrums and self biting. Gerard liked to return repeatedly to the topic of Jodi's parents' silences because he thought it might lead to some revelations about Jodi's own behavior but he was never able to really break through.

In Chapter 8, Todd and Natasha spend hours shopping for baby items, going to the obstetrician and looking at apartments. Toward the end of September, Todd signs a lease on a two-bedroom apartment which Natasha loves because it is modern. Natasha wants Todd to stay at a hotel in the interim because she does not want him to spend any more time with Jodi but Todd realizes that Natasha does not understand the pull of being with someone for so many years. Todd is still attracted to the stability that Jodi offers him and is not willing to completely let go of that.

## Analysis

The really bad day that Todd had in Chapter 4 was initiated by Jodi who had taken his office key off his key ring. She has been silent about Todd's infidelities for years, but after he lied about going on a fishing trip with his friends, Jodi feels the need to get some revenge. She simply takes his office key, knowing that his daily ritual will be interrupted and his day's schedule thrown into chaos as a result. Jodi is not one to make a scene or initiate an argument, she quietly does damage without any fanfare. This



plays into the theme of silence as the book's title suggests. Jodi observes and receives information but never lets her emotions get the best of her. She is silent when Todd humiliates her with his infidelities. She is silent when they do not agree. She is silent when her patients confide their secrets. All her life, Jodi has been silent. Her therapist, Gerard tried to get to the core of her silence, thinking that her parents' long bouts of not speaking to each other could be an impetus, but he was never really able to zero in on why Jodi withholds everything.

The author also masterfully uses intrigue as she continues with the mystery of why Jodi will be driven to murder. Natasha tells Todd that she has told Dean about her pregnancy and that Dean is going to call Jodi. This sets Todd into a swirl of panic and he tries to preempt Dean's talking to Jodi by checking for voice messages at home. Little does Todd know that Jodi has already spoken to Dean. However, when Todd sees Jodi at home that night, she acts as if she has not talked to Dean and has no reason to do so. The reader knows what Todd does not, that Dean, in fact, has talked to Jodi and told her about Todd's affair with Natasha and the pregnancy and wedding. The sleeping pills then come into play. Earlier, at the dry cleaner's the attendant gave them to Jodi after retrieving them from the pocket of a pair of Todd's pants. The author does not say what the item is, only that Jodi drops the item into her purse and heads to a seminar. The reader is kept in suspense wondering what the item is and it is not revealed until Jodi shows it to a psychiatrist at the seminar who confirms that the item is a bottle of sleeping pills.

The intrigue continues that night when Jodi acts perfectly normal at home with Todd, leading him to believe that she has not talked to Dean and that he still has time to intercept any communication between the two. Todd drinks the hot Ovaltine drink that Jodi has prepared for him as a gesture of comfort and it is not revealed until later that Jodi has ground Natasha's sleeping pills and poured them into Todd's drink. The reader wonders whether this is the moment that Jodi has decided to kill Todd because he has passed out on the bed and has not changed position by the next morning. Jodi begins to formulate in her mind how she will answer the authorities if Todd is found dead and she avoids going into the bedroom to check on him. It is almost as if she wants to make sure he is properly deceased before taking any action. But when Todd wakes up that afternoon, Jodi acts as if Todd has just needed some extra sleep due to a hangover. Jodi's silence continues and the reader knows that she will try to kill him at another time.

The themes of infidelity and deception are important in this section. Throughout their relationship together, Todd has been unfaithful and deceived Jodi, but now Natasha is pregnant and the stakes are higher for Todd so he has to work even harder to control the events in his life. The author also uses the technique of foreshadowing when Jodi has dinner with Alison who talks about her ex-husband, Renny. Renny is a drug user and scam artist but Alison still loves him, even falling for his bogus requests for money. Later in the book it will be revealed how Alison gets a large sum of money for Renny and Jodi is the unwitting victim.



## Discussion Question 1

How does the author use suspense to keep the reader engaged in this section?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Jodi is called "the silent wife?"

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Jodi decide to take revenge on Todd now after she has tolerated his infidelities for so many years?

## Vocabulary

dismal, cajoling, carping, goading, rabidly, self-effacing, intermediary, relapse, refuge, embattled, manic, compelling, guilt, cloistered, ornate, pallor, prelude, vertigo, stupefying, foyer, soused, castigate, surreptitious, unsullied, intimation, portent, prevaricating, eluded, fetid, unmitigated, cassoulet, pretense, chasms, vindicated, prima donna, emanates, distraught, emulate, benevolent, strife, concede, innate



## 9: Her, 10: Him, 11: Her, 12: Him

### Summary

Natasha calls Jodi to tell her that both she and Todd are sorry about what has happened and that she appreciates everything Jodi did for her after her mother died. Natasha also tells Jodi that they have found a nice apartment and she hopes Jodi will visit them one day. Jodi tells Natasha that she is not making good decisions for her life and that Jodi has no interest in what she does. Jodi now wonders if she should have married Todd and cannot really recall why she did not when he proposed several times.

In Chapter 10, Todd awakens and snuggles up to Jodi's back before it hits him that it is October 1st and he and Natasha are moving into their apartment today. Jodi finds Todd sitting at the kitchen table when she gets up and he offers to walk the dog with her so they can talk. Eventually Todd musters up the courage to tell Jodi that he is moving out. Jodi erupts in rage, screaming and hitting him before calming down and telling him that he has ten minutes to get his things out of the condo.

In Chapter 11, Jodi tries to adapt to life without Todd at home, although it is not him she misses as much as she does her routine. It does not help that Dean bombards her voice mail regularly with tirades against Todd. Jodi does better when she is with her clients or when there is something to look forward to such as her flower arranging class. Jodi is also seeing more of Alison who tries to get Jodi to face the painful truth that Todd is not coming back. But Jodi is unsure of how to proceed because people make mistakes and maybe Todd is waiting for a sign from her that he is forgiven.

In Chapter 12, Natasha helps Todd shop for new clothes and he gets a new hairstyle and the overall effect makes him look and feel younger. The two of them even get matching tattoos one day which Natasha likes for their permanence. Natasha sets a December wedding date and Todd is energized by the changes taking place in his life. The only downside to things is that Natasha pushes Todd to finalize things with Jodi which he is reluctant to do. Todd contacts his lawyer, Harry LeGroot, to tell him that he is leaving Jodi and plans to marry Natasha. Harry is incredulous that Todd would consider such a move when he has life made. And Harry is even more surprised to hear that Todd and Jodi are not actually married which means that Jodi is not legally entitled to anything from Todd.

### Analysis

For the first time in her life with Todd, Jodi wonders if she should have married Todd on one of the occasions that he had asked her. She sees now that his relationship with Natasha is different from the others he has had and that Jodi is in danger of losing the security of the lifestyle she has enjoyed. If she had married Todd, she would be entitled to half of everything he owns, but she now has no claim to anything. The author begins



to set up Jodi's desperate state of mind to create more intrigue about how she may be pushed into murder.

The theme of silence is presented in reverse in Chapter 10 when Jodi erupts in anger when Todd tells her he is moving out. This is the only time in the book that Jodi breaks her silent persona. From this point on, she will be poised and calculating again, back in the character recognizable to Todd and others. It is very telling that Jodi does not really miss Todd as a person after he moves out. She just misses her routine that kept Todd's life in motion such as cooking, shopping and caring for his clothing. The reader begins to understand that Jodi is cold and calculating and perhaps some of her silence is not an act, perhaps she really does not feel things to the depth that other people do.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Todd feel like he has a second chance at life now?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What does it say about Todd's character that he can be so duplicitous in his relationships with Jodi and Natasha?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Jodi now wish that she had married Todd when he had asked her to so many times?

## **Vocabulary**

implausible, culminating, prattle, spiteful, visceral, exaltation, exuberant, irrevocably, indeterminate, specter, ambivalence, fixates, sarcastic, intonation, fitful, peevish, forgo, vocation



## 13: Her, 14: Him, 15: Her, 16: Him

### Summary

One day Jodi calls Todd to ask how he is and to invite him to dinner. Jodi happily plans dinner for the following night and runs errands to the supermarket, the florist, the fishmonger and the cheese shop. Jodi is in a dreamlike haze of renewed love and counts the hours until Todd's arrival. Jodi thinks about Todd's drive to prove himself in the world and realizes that it stems from low self esteem according to Adlerian thinking.

Jodi recalls Gerard's questioning her about her family and she focuses on her younger brother, Ryan, whose outbursts began when he was a toddler. Jodi still loves Ryan even though she thinks he is wasting his life by dropping out of school and traveling randomly around the world. Jodi never had a way to get in contact with him, waiting until he reached out to her for her to be able to offer any help to him. Jodi's older brother, Darrell, had followed in their father's footsteps by becoming a pharmacist and returned home to marry his childhood sweetheart. Gerard is able to get out of Jodi that she and Darrell had always conformed and Ryan was the rebellious one in the family.

In Chapter 14, Todd is apprehensive as he heads to the condo to have dinner with Jodi. He has told Natasha that he is having dinner with Harry but he knows that she will sniff out his lie at some point. Todd lets himself into the condo and is welcomed by Jodi who comments on his longer hair. Todd makes the drinks as Jodi finishes dinner and their conversation is strained and polite throughout. Todd is struck by the fact that Jodi has set the table for everyday dining and is even wearing her basic tan trousers and white shirt, nothing special or out of the ordinary. Then it occurs to Todd that Jodi wants him to think that life can go on as normal, that nothing has changed. Todd tries to find out if Jodi is dating anyone and he accuses her of having a dalliance with the teenage neighbor. Her agitation makes him realize that he must be crazy to try to give her up and they go to the bedroom to make love.

In Chapter 15, Jodi receives a call from Harry LeGroots secretary, Daphne, who tells Jodi that Harry needs to know who Jodi's attorney is so that he may contact him. Jodi is unaware that Todd plans to proceed with the separation because she thought they had made a new start on the night he came to dinner. Daphne finally suggests that Jodi get a good lawyer and Jodi hangs up on her. Later that day, Todd calls and Jodi wants to know why she needs a lawyer. He tells her that they both need to let their lawyers work things out so that the two of them can remain friends. Jodi is outraged that Todd thinks they can remain friends after everything that has happened.

In Chapter 16, Todd is weary of the constant talk of wedding details from Natasha every night. Everything is falling into place with the exception of Dean's refusal to attend. Todd misses the orderly life he had with Jodi because life with Natasha is busy, the apartment is cluttered and there are always other people hanging around. Todd's stress level goes up even more when the dentist discovers a white legion of thrush on the inside of his



cheek and he is encouraged to have it checked by a doctor. Todd's mind immediately goes to the AIDS virus where lesions appear due to lowered immune systems. The prostitutes that Todd visits insist on his using condoms but those can break so Todd's nerves are in overdrive that he could be seriously ill. At night, Todd thinks about dying and the only thing that comforts him are thoughts of his unborn son.

## Analysis

Jodi seems to have trouble coming to grips with the reality of her situation with Todd. Again, the theme of her silence emerges as she does not address Todd's betrayal, she simply invites him to dinner as if nothing ever happened and they could start again where they left off. Jodi thinks that Todd's self esteem issues will bring him back to the security she provides for him. She has a history of providing for and taking care of people starting with her brother Ryan whose outbursts could only be calmed by her presence. Even though she invested a lot of her life in Ryan, he is still remote and uncommunicative, which could also be said of her relationship with Todd. Perhaps the sessions with Gerard reveal more than Jodi thinks they are disclosing about her behavioral patterns.

Jodi finally gets the wake up call she needs when Harry LeGroot's secretary calls her to ask about who her attorney is. Jodi had thought she and Todd would get back together when Todd still has plans to go ahead with the end of their relationship. And Jodi is rightly outraged when Todd tells her that he would still like to be friends with her. Todd has taken advantage of women for so long that it doesn't occur to him how offensive this is to Jodi. The reader knows that the author has promised the Jodi will be pushed to murder and this may be the straw that breaks the camel's back in terms of Jodi's willingness to put up with any more of Todd's behavior.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Jodi really invites Todd to dinner after he has moved in with Natasha?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Jodi not make the dinner with Todd seem to be a special occasion when it is clear she is very excited to see Todd again?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is Jodi outraged when Todd tells Jodi that he wants their attorneys to work out the details so that they can remain friends?

## Vocabulary

warbles, berate, conjure, resurgence, prone, dismemberment, eccentricities, undemonstrative, mainstay, buoyancy, aversion, pragmatic, compliant, contrary, paranoid, onslaught, clavicle, forbearance, dalliance, idyllic, exponential, veer, tang, lesion, voracious,





## 17: Her, 18: Him, 19: Her, 20: Him

### Summary

Jodi receives a letter from Harry LeGroot telling her that she has to vacate the condo in 30 days or she will be evicted. Jodi's first reaction is denial that Todd is capable of doing this to her so she calls him and he apologizes that she received the letter before he had a chance to talk to her. Todd can't afford to keep the condo now and he hopes Jodi can see the logic of that. Dean calls Jodi later that day and tells her that Natasha has moved the wedding date up a couple weeks. Dean wants Jodi to try to talk some sense into Natasha about what she is doing to her life but Jodi declines.

In Chapter 18, Todd calls Harry, angry that he sent Jodi the eviction letter without Todd's having had a chance to talk to her first. Harry reminds Todd that no matter how Jodi heard the news, she was not going to take it well and Todd needs to have the condo vacated. Todd rationalizes that Jodi is a practical person and she'll be able to find a nice place to live after she has calmed down.

In Chapter 19, Jodi has an appointment with Barbara Phelps, a lawyer recommended to her by a friend. Jodi is not pleased when Barbara tells her that without a marriage license, Jodi has no claim on anything that Todd owns. Jodi claims that she has functioned as a wife to Todd for 20 years but Barbara tells her that common law marriage does not exist in Illinois. Jodi is also not entitled to any maintenance from Todd although he has said she may take anything she wants out of the condo. Later that evening, Jodi rationalizes that she is in this position because she always thought life would treat her well. Now she realizes that her life has been built on wishful thinking.

In Chapter 20, Natasha calls Todd while he's on his way to the gym saying that she needs him home by seven and he needs to stop and get the wine. Todd bristles at Natasha's expectations and goes to The Drake instead of the gym and he stays for several drinks and eats a couple hamburgers before Natasha calls him again. He tries to sweet talk her while she demands that he leave and come home immediately.

### Analysis

The theme of deception is still important in this section of the story. Todd wants Jodi out of the condo because he does not want to pay for it anymore, yet he does not extend her the courtesy of talking to her about it first. Todd, in his usual manner, tries to rationalize his behavior by saying that Jodi is a practical person and will surely see the logic in his decision. Todd's behavior throughout the entire book has been very self centered and this is just another example of that.

Jodi gets a big dose of reality when she visits the divorce attorney. Jodi has no rights to anything that has been part of the life she and Todd have built for 20 years. She has



been living in a cloud of wishful thinking all this time and is quite unnerved when the reality of the situation is pointed out to her.

Todd is already beginning to pull away from Natasha. He had thought that their life together would just be an extension of the times they had during his affair with her but now that a baby is on the way, Natasha wants a more visible commitment from Todd who is reluctant to do so.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Do you think it is inappropriate for Dean to ask Jodi to talk some sense into Natasha?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What is it about Jodi that leads Todd to believe that she will see the logic in his needing to sell the condo?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Jodi now think that her life has been built on wishful thinking?

## **Vocabulary**

vacate, eviction, disenchanting, catastrophic, encroaching, foisted, commiserate, digression, impending, perceptible, ebb, hennaed, inhospitable, scenario, hubris, inquisitors, plausible, clairvoyantly, burnished, succumbs, secular, accoutrements, enigmatic, rapture, thwarted, opportunist, fret

## 21: Her, 22: Him, 23: Her, 24: Him

### Summary

Jodi has not left home for eight days, relying on home deliveries and the dog walker to take of what she needs. She wishes she had some sleeping pills to help her get through the long nights when she is worried that someone will come in and remove her from the condo. She does her best to put on a good front with her clients because she can't afford to lose them now. When the cleaning lady arrives for her weekly cleaning, Jodi tries to stay out of her way. Alison is the only one of her friends who maintains contact, calling almost every day.

In Chapter 22, Todd has been to the doctor regarding the lesion in his mouth and the doctor has drawn blood to test for several sexually transmitted diseases in addition to AIDS. Todd worries that he may have already put Natasha and Jodi at risk. By the time Todd will get the results, the wedding will be just a few days away. To make him even more uncomfortable, Todd has been experiencing an almost constant itching on his penis. Todd's stress level about the wedding is high too as Natasha has exceeded budgets on every item. They argue about it every day and he has even slapped her once. Todd doesn't sleep well at night and has a dream that he can't stop running on a treadmill and it won't be long before he collapses.

In Chapter 23, Jodi makes dinner for Alison and updates her on what is going on regarding Todd, the wedding and the eviction. Alison tells Jodi that she can help make Jodi's problem go away, they just need a little time to arrange things. Alison confirms that Jodi is still in Todd's will and tells her that Renny knows people who can take care of things. He owes Alison a favor anyway and could use the money. Alison says the job will require cash but Jodi cannot withdraw from any accounts because there can be no paper trail. Alison advises Jodi to sell some valuables online and to arrange a trip because she will want to be away when it happens.

In Chapter 24, Todd is in his office feeling groggy from taking some of Natasha's sleeping pills last night to help him forget about the irritating itch in his groin. Todd hears Stephanie come into the office and he is irritated because she is never on time but he senses that she is not in a good mood so he doesn't bring up her lack of punctuality. Todd tells Stephanie to close out all of Jodi's credit cards and Stephanie is appalled that Todd does not plan to tell Jodi. When Stephanie leaves his office, Todd prances around his office because his groin is on fire. He is terrified that it might be something serious in addition to the AIDS scare. Todd wonders if this is some sort of punishment for what he is doing to Jodi but he can't very well leave Natasha with a baby on the way. Todd feels that his new son will be the answer to make all their anxieties vanish.



## Analysis

The theme of self preservation becomes important for Jodi at this point. She has become a recluse in an attempt to absorb the news that she has to leave the condo and essentially start a new life. Even though it does not seem as if Jodi is actively making any plans at this point, she is adjusting to her new circumstances internally and her instincts are working on how she can now take care of herself. Self preservation really kicks in, however, when she meets with Alison who tells Jodi that this problem can go away. Alison can make arrangements for her ex-husband, Renny, to kill Todd if Jodi can come up with the money. Jodi's self preservation instincts are strong because the idea of murder does not really give Jodi any pause. She does not protest or even take time to consider it. All along in the story, it appears as if Todd is the one who is cold-blooded by his infidelities and the way he has treated Jodi but it is now clear that she does not really love Todd, she has loved the lifestyle he has been able to provide. Not once does she reconsider the idea of having him murdered because he is a person she has loved, she simply wants him and the Natasha issue out of her life and she has stumbled upon a way to make that happen.

Todd's life of infidelity and lack of commitment is catching up with him. His emotional stress is creating nightmares and now his physical health is suffering. Deep down, Todd knows that he has treated Jodi badly because he wonders if his current suffering is payment for what he is doing to Jodi. Todd's relationship with Natasha is draining him too, because she requires him to be present for the relationship. Todd longs for the days of being with Jodi who made no demands on him, yet continued to provide a secure and beautiful lifestyle for both of them. Stephanie seems to be more considerate of what is happening to Jodi than Todd will ever be. In fact, Todd is irritated when Stephanie suggests calling Jodi to alert her to the fact that her credit cards are being cancelled. Todd is a little sadistic in that he wants Jodi to be embarrassed when she attempts to make a purchase someday and her credit cards are denied. Todd has gone into his usual mode of self preservation and looking to something better to fix his life, this time he feels it will be his newborn son who will make all the difference for him.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Jodi not come out of the house for more than a week?

## Discussion Question 2

What is your analysis of the dream Todd has of not being able to stop running on a treadmill?



## Discussion Question 3

Are you surprised at how easily Jodi accepts Alison's conversation about Renny helping Jodi's problem go away?

## Vocabulary

demarcations, alienate, verge, borne, fatuous, entrenched, psyches, sheaf, enunciate, resilient, distraught, ramparts, antifungal, immunodeficiency, luridly, perverse, tremolo, retrospect, fawning, duress, hermetic, viscous, froth, benign, risotto, prevaricates, null, fractious, plausible, concede, volatile, paradox



## 25: Her, 26: Him, 27: Her, 28 Him

### Summary

Jodi begins selling her valuable items online and meeting people at places such as the Art Institute and the Crystal Gardens to exchange them for cash. Jodi even comes to enjoy the sense of intrigue of dressing in semi-disguise and meeting perfect strangers. Jodi keeps the accumulating cash in a Louis Vuitton briefcase and gives the full amount to Alison for payment up front. It eases Jodie's financial anxieties to know that she knows how to get cash if she needs it now. One day Stephanie calls Jodi to tell her that Todd has cut off her credit cards and Jodi smiles to herself knowing that she has a credit card of her own which she rarely uses. Jodi can't escape the voices that tell her to call off the job she has set in motion but she feels as if destiny must run its course.

Jodi thinks about Gerard and how he helped her reach the conclusion that she could not project her wants and needs for Ryan onto his life and it was not her place to judge how he chooses to live. Eventually, Jodi began to think that she was wasting Gerard's time until they reached a turning point one day when she tells Gerard about a dream she had about Darrell. In the dream, Jodi was dreaming a dream for Darrell as if he were lifeless but she was doing it for him because she loved him. Jodi then realizes the truth of the dream but knows that Darrell had been 12 and she was only six and she didn't see how it could have been her fault.

In Chapter 26, Todd and Natasha spend an evening at home and he is beyond frustrated with talk of the wedding and baby names. There are still times that Todd wishes he could go home to Jodi in the evenings instead of spending them in the crowded apartment with Natasha and all the people she invites over. Todd has also started drinking at lunch and frequents a bar where he is infatuated with a waitress named Ilona. She is aloof but one day he gets her to agree to meet him for lunch on her day off which will be just five days before his wedding to Natasha.

In Chapter 27, Jodi decides that she will attend an out-of-town seminar because Alison had told her that it would be best if she were out of town when the time came. Jodi opts for a conference on anger management in Jacksonville where she finds that she actually enjoys the hotel setting and the rush of people. Jodi is careful not to share personal information with anyone at the seminar. The phone in her room awakens her one night but she does not answer it either time it rings. At breakfast with colleagues a the head of the conference tells her that she has a phone call and she takes it in the lobby.

In Chapter 28, Todd has thought of nothing else but Ilona for the past three and a half days and he is worked up into a state of excitement by the time arrives for them to have lunch. Todd thinks that Ilona is the one who can save him from the mess that his life has become. Todd feels better than he has in weeks, the lesion and the penile itching have both subsided. Todd heads to the restaurant in his Porsche, thinking that he should



trade in the car and rid himself of the other things that tie him down in his life. Suddenly Todd feels an impact and thinks someone has thrown a rock at him. Then he sees a bullet hole in the glass of the car's window and knows that he must have been shot. He then sees a man through the open window of the car in the lane next to him. In the last moments of his life Todd sees Natasha as a little girl holding Dean's hand, Ilona impatiently waiting for him at the restaurant and Jodi sunbathing topless on the balcony of the condo.

## Analysis

Self preservation mode is still very strong for Jodi. When she sells her personal items to raise cash for a hit man, she also realizes that she can be self sufficient by making some money this way. Ironically, Jodi is learning to be more independent but it takes the concept of murder to get her to that point.

Self preservation also comes to the forefront in Jodi's memories of life with her brothers. Gerard has been able to probe Jodi's psyche enough to get her to the point of understanding that something bad happened when Jodi was six and Darrell was 12. All these years, Jodi has blocked the trauma out of her mind as a way of preserving herself, but Gerard wants her to address the issue in order to fully understand and heal. The author does not reveal what had happened just yet, but lets the reader speculate for just awhile longer, adding another element of intrigue to the story.

Todd's deception continues as he flirts with a waitress named Ilona and invites her to lunch on her day off. It is just a few days before he is to marry Natasha and he is still seeing other women. Todd does not like commitment and the upcoming wedding is overwhelming to him but he needs to be honest with Natasha and not just continue his pattern of infidelity. It is almost as if Todd needs validation from many women to support his fragile self esteem but he is behaving irresponsibly toward Natasha just as he had toward Jodi for so many years.

Finally, the author takes the reader to the peak of the story--Todd's murder. She lets the reader in on Todd's thoughts as he realizes he has been shot and that he is dying. The author began the novel by saying that Jodi would be pushed to murder and since she has paid for a hit man, the reader assumes that that is what has occurred but the author has more twists and intrigue in store.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the anonymity of selling her valuable items is such a thrill for Jodi?

## Discussion Question 2

Are you surprised at Todd for inviting Ilona to lunch just five days before his wedding is to take place?



## Discussion Question 3

Why is it ironic that Todd feels so good on the day that he is to have met Ilona?

## Vocabulary

authentication, chevron, anorak, toque, magnitude, perspicacity, propitious, miniscule, caustic, visceral, analogues, complicit, fedora, torso, enunciate, craven, ploy, pertain, paranoia, throng, discern, insatiable, credulous, plaintive, doted, priggish, paradoxically, aberrant, splayed, prone





# PART TWO: HER

## Summary

Jodi answers the Jacksonville hotel lobby phone and a policeman tells her that she needs to return to Chicago right away because Todd has been killed. Jodi faints and later tries to come to terms with the fact that Todd is dead. She also has little doubt that her guilt is so strong that the police have already tracked her down and will be waiting for her at O'Hare when she deplanes. Jodi returns home without incident and thinks that maybe the situation is not as dire as she thought since no one has shown up to arrest her.

The story of Todd's murder is on the front page of the Tribune and it states that one or more gunmen are suspected of the crime. Jodi tries to reenact the scene of the murder in her head and she hopes that Todd had time to register what was happening to him, that it had been Jodi's doing but that he had brought it all on himself. Jodi is then struck by the thought that as his "wife" she is the prime suspect, a fact which had not occurred to her before.

The next morning, Jodi is visited by a detective named John Skinner who apologizes for the intrusion but hopes she will understand that the sooner they can get any information on the case, the better their chances are of solving it. Jodi is very uncomfortable with the detective in her home so she moves to get a cigarette to have something to do with her hands. Detective Skinner questions Jodi about her relationship with Todd, why they never married, and the circumstances surrounding their recent separation. The intrusive questions continue as the detective wants to know how often Jodi attends seminars out of town and why it has been nearly five years since she has attended one. Jodi nearly explodes trying to remain calm but eventually Detective Skinner leaves telling her to call him if she should think of anything that might be important to the case.

Jodi is sure that Natasha must have written Todd's obituary because she and her fetus are positioned as the chief mourners and Jodi is not mentioned. Jodi has not yet decided if she will attend the funeral but it might be the closure she needs for her mind to accept his death. Jodi learns that Detective Skinner has been to visit her family and some of her friends, all of whom declare that Jodi is not capable of committing murder. Jodi would most like to talk to Alison but she is not returning Jodi's calls. Maybe Alison is just being cautious but Jodi would feel better if she had told Jodi to expect this type of behavior from her.

The day before Todd's funeral, Jodi receives a call from Cliff York, a man who did construction work for Todd. Cliff offers his condolences but also would like to talk to Jodi about some business issues related to the project they had been working on. Jodi tells Cliff that he should probably talk to Natasha about getting any payment and Cliff tells her that Todd had not written Jodi out of his will. Todd knew that the minute he got



married, the will would have automatically changed to Natasha's benefit but that had not occurred. Essentially, Natasha is out of the picture.

Two of Jodi's friends escort her to Todd's funeral and Natasha makes a point of avoiding her. Jodi is pleased that many of the guests greet her and she feels like the wife she should have been. Stephanie talks to Jodi because she is worried about her job and Jodi tells her that she will take care of it.

After the funeral, Jodi's life begins to return to normal but she can't help but feel that the police are still working hard to find a reason to arrest her. Jodi meets Harry LeGroot for lunch and he tells her that even though she is named as Todd's primary beneficiary, Natasha will no doubt contest it for herself and her unborn child. Even so, Harry assures Jodi that the estate is large enough that Jodi can afford to be generous to Natasha and still live quite comfortably herself. Harry agrees to begin the process and will inform Stephanie that she will be retained by the estate.

Every day Jodi waits for Detective Skinner to return, but when the knock comes on the door Jodi is surprised to find another detective instead. The detective wants to know if Jodi had been aware that Todd had planned to evict her from the condo to which she replies that she is aware of that. The detective continues by saying that Jodi had no intention of moving and she had made plans to make sure that Todd would not be around to force the eviction. Jodi falls back into the comfort of silence, knowing that the moment that they have you defending yourself, it's all over. Jodi knows the detective thinks she is guilty but if he plans to arrest her, he would not be talking so much. The detective tells Jodi that she can't inherit from the man she murdered. The detective then says that she will be seeing the detectives again very soon and leaves the condo.

Stress and anxiety set in for Jodi over the following days, and she is unable to eat or sleep and thoughts about prison life engulf her. Detective Skinner shows up one evening and apologizes for what he and his colleagues have put her through lately but their first priority is solving the case. Jodi knows that he is leading up to her arrest when he tells her that they have a pretty solid case, that everything came together in the end. He says that the suspect is someone who was very close to the victim and he does not want Jodi to have to read about it in the paper. Jodi is in complete shock when the detective tells her that they have arrested Dean Kovacs for Todd's murder. Jodi says that Dean did not kill Todd and the detective says that he hired men to do it.

Jodi does not know how she can let Dean be destroyed for her own wrongdoing. She also knows now that Alison took advantage of her. The condo now seems like a repellant animal lair to Jodi who begins to scrub and clean all night with the intention of turning herself in to the police tomorrow morning. During the night, though, Jodi falls ill and calls the pet sitter to pick up Freud and then cancels her client appointments. Jodi spends hours in a feverish state of nausea, sweats and wild dreams.

On the fifth day of Jodi's illness, the cleaning lady finds her with bluish skin and sunken eyes and calls an ambulance. Jodi awakens in the hospital and a nurse tells her that she had almost died because she had been so dehydrated. Jodi is shocked when she



looks in the mirror and is told that she had cut off her hair and she remembers seeing it lying on the bathroom floor. She also remembers lots of phones ringing and a call from Dr. Ruben telling her that Todd's test results were fine so she does not need to worry about that. Harry LeGroot stops in to tell her that the two gunmen who killed Todd are in custody, both of them corroborating that Dean had paid them to do the job. Apparently, Dean had left a paper trail that inevitably led to his arrest.

As Jodi regains her physical stamina, her mental acuity improves too and at first she is not sure how to process all that has happened. She has been given her life back on a technicality. Jodi is not sure what to think about Alison; maybe she had no intention of honoring the deal, maybe she just caved at the sight of all that money, or maybe it was Renny who backed out.

When she returns home from the hospital, she finds a voice message from Ryan and she is sorry that she missed talking to him. Jodi knows that through her work with Gerard, she had learned to examine her life instead of trying to live as if certain things had never happened. Jodi has never thought again about what happened to her during her childhood but that does not mean that her innocence can ever be reclaimed. She is grateful to Gerard but still does not know how he coaxed it from her. Jodi had cut off all contact with Darrell and he knows the reason why. Jodi is sure that her parents never knew anything but she blames herself because she should have stopped Darrell before he got to Ryan. Ryan has also cut off all contact with Darrell and he and Jodi have agreed to never speak of it again.

Harry informs Jodi that a court date is set for probate and that Natasha will contest the will but will probably settle because the trial is coming up as well as the birth of her baby. Stephanie will help with the sale of Todd's commercial properties. Cliff will be the hardest hit financially because Todd had been his biggest client but Jodi knows that he will find new business. Jodi finds that she has a new softness about her regarding her clients because she now has a better feel for some of their experiences. They all seem to be making more of an effort to improve for her and she is amazed by this. Jodi allows herself to think that a child of Todd's will soon inhabit the earth and she wonders if she would recognize him if she ever saw him. Jodi thinks that Natasha would be smart to marry another man to give Todd's child a father but Natasha is probably the type who will insist on telling the truth, whereas Jodi has always been comfortable with blurring the facts a bit.

## Analysis

Jodi's cruelty reaches its peak after Todd's murder and she hopes that he had time to know that he was being murdered and that it was Jodi who was behind it. She wants Todd to not only pay for kicking her out of her home, but also for how he has emotionally abused and humiliated her for so many years with his infidelities.

Jodi again kicks into self preservation mode when she is questioned by the detectives. She has mastered the art of knowing how to interact with people so that she does not



reveal anything about herself. Her responses are measured and calculated and she employs her standby tactic of silence so that she does not give the authorities anything to implicate her. Jodi remains cool under pressure to everyone around her and the only glimpse of doubt she has is wondering why Alison is not returning her calls. The author wants the reader to consider the possibility that Alison could turn against Jodi and reveal what she knows to the police which creates yet more intrigue.

The author continues the suspense when Detective Skinner visits Jodi for a second time. He tells Jodi that they have a solid case and that the suspect is someone who had been close to Todd. The reader thinks that this is the moment that Jodi will be arrested, but in a surprising twist, Detective Skinner reveals that it had been Dean who was behind Todd's murder and he has been arrested. Jodi had been ready to be arrested and she has a hard time getting her mind around the fact that not only is she not accused of the crime but that Dean will be punished for something for which she should have been. She also now knows that Alison has betrayed her, further cementing this theme. Acknowledging these facts sets Jodi's mind into a panic and she collapses into a feverish state for many days. It is not clear whether Jodi's distress is emotionally or physically based but she is hospitalized near death.

The theme of silence continues to the end of the story when Jodi finally allows herself to remember that she and Ryan had both been abused by Darrell as children. She had chosen to stay silent at the time to protect the two of them. It was the much younger Ryan who acted out as if in anger and outrage that he could not voice. Jodi has felt guilty about her silence regarding the abuse which has led to her being very protective of Ryan. Jodi found that being silent was the only way she could survive her childhood trauma and so she maintained that persona throughout her adult life and especially as the silent wife.

## Discussion Question 1

Did the author do a good job of surprising you about Dean's being arrested for Todd's murder instead of Jodi?

## Discussion Question 2

What do you think happened to Alison after she took Jodi's money to kill Todd?

## Discussion Question 3

Why had Jodi adopted a pattern of staying silent throughout her life?



## Vocabulary

despot, menacing, equivocation, vertiginous, assimilate, allotment, bravado, detained, disembarked, lucid, conjecturing, madcap, speculation, superfluous, oblivious, auspicious, mercenaries, volley, sloughed, coalesce. psychosexual, poky, diffident, virtuous, ghoulishly, unperturbed, trivial, mettle, prosaic, eviscerate, funereal, mawkish, congruity, plinth, pensive, indignity, postmortem, necrosis, insidious, cynicism, supplants, philandering, maverick, dissident, contralto, roiling, fitful, rancid, vacillating, duvet, fathomed



# Characters

## Jodi Brett

Jodi Brett is a 45-year-old psychotherapist who lives in Chicago, Illinois, with her partner of 20 years, Todd Gilbert. Jodi is a small, sophisticated woman who dresses in expensive clothes and maintains her home with fine furnishings and attention to detail. Jodi creates a serene and orderly life for Todd and herself and lives with daily rituals which are very comforting and reassuring for her.

Jodi keeps things to herself, never revealing much, because she knows that people can take advantage of you if they know about your secrets. Jodi feels that she had a natural inclination toward the psychological field because she had been the only one who could soothe her younger brother, Ryan, when they were children.

When Jodi was studying psychology, she went into therapy with a man named Gerard who helped her uncover traumatic secrets from her childhood which initiated her persona of silence. Jodi becomes "the silent wife" to Todd because she never confronts him about his infidelities because maintaining her comfortable lifestyle is more important than dealing with the personal betrayals. Jodi's traumatic childhood scars her and prevents her from really being able to get close to anyone.

## Todd Gilbert

Todd and Jodi have been together for 20 years but he has never been faithful to her during that time. Todd is always looking for more excitement or the next woman who can turn his life around. Todd lives his life betraying Jodi who maintains the security he needs in his life, and while he needs that, it is not enough to satisfy him completely.

Todd doesn't seem to have any filters on his behavior and he even engages in an affair with Natasha, the daughter of his childhood friend. Most people would be able to say that such an arrangement would be inappropriate but Todd is used to getting what he wants and has no real conscience about it. Even after Todd and Jodi separate and he has ordered her to leave the condo, he still wants them to be friends and expects to visit her regularly. Just a few days before his wedding to Natasha, he makes a lunch date with another woman confirming that Todd is self-centered and unable to commit to a relationship.

## Natasha Kovacs

Natasha Kovacs is the college-aged woman with whom Todd is having an affair. Natasha is the opposite of Jodi in that she is very sexual and uninhibited which Todd finds very alluring. Natasha is different from Jodi, though, in that she has expectations for Todd's behavior and is not afraid of voicing those.



Natasha is the daughter of Todd's childhood friend, Dean, and is afraid of what her father will say about their affair. Natasha grew up without a mother so she had no one to guide her in how women need to maintain boundaries to protect themselves. At the end of the story, Natasha is pregnant and alone because of the choices she has made.

## Dean Kovacs

Dean Kovacs is Todd's friend from childhood. They see each other a few times a year to catch up. Dean is a sales executive for a plastics company who loves to talk which makes him really good at his job. Dean's wife died several years ago and he has not remarried.

Dean has a college aged daughter named Natasha who is having an affair with Todd. When Dean finds out about the affair and Natasha's pregnancy, he is outraged, refuses to attend the upcoming wedding and ultimately pays two hit men to have Todd killed.

## Stephanie

Stephanie is Todd's secretary at his real estate development office. Stephanie is very comfortable with her position and is usually late coming in to the office. Todd is attracted to Stephanie sexually so he does not address her lack of punctuality.

Stephanie does not approve of Todd's affairs with other women and remains loyal to Jodi, even telling Jodi that Jodi's credit cards have been cancelled after Todd had told her not to say anything. In return, Jodi is loyal to Stephanie and makes sure she has employment after Todd's death.

## Alison

Alison is a friend of Jodi's who she met at a cooking class. Alison works as a hostess at a gentleman's club where she acts as a mother figure to the girls who work there. Alison dresses up for every occasion and knows how to enjoy the finer things in life. Alison's past is questionable as evidenced by her marriage to the con man Renny. Alison stays in contact with Renny, though, and gets Jodi to agree to hiring Renny to murder Todd. After the murder, Jodi never hears from Alison again, and Jodi believes that Alison has betrayed her and taken her money.

## Gerard

Gerard was Jodi's therapist who she saw while studying at the Adler school. Gerard is a large man with a big presence and Jodi feels very comfortable around him. Gerard helps Jodi uncover her buried feelings about childhood trauma so that Jodi can understand why she behaves the way she does.



## Ryan

Ryan is Jodi's younger brother who relied on Jodi for comfort when they were children. Jodi was the only one in the family who could soothe Ryan when he had his outbursts. Throughout their lives, Jodi has tried to support Ryan in many ways and feels guilty for some of the choices he has made. Jodi's therapist helps Jodi to understand that Ryan has his own life to lead and his choices are his own. At the end of the book, it is shared that Jodi and Ryan had been abused by their older brother, Darrell.

## Darrell

Darrell is Jodi's older brother who is six years older than she. Darrell followed in their father's footsteps and became a pharmacist. Jodi has no contact with Darrell which is understandable when it is revealed that Darrell had abused both Jodi and their younger brother, Ryan, when they were children.

## Jodi's clients

Jodi has a small list of clients who come to her home for therapy sessions. She assigns names to them such as Sad Sack and the Judge based on their personalities so that she can discuss them with Todd without revealing their true identities.

## Harry LeGroot

Harry LeGroot is Todd's attorney. Harry is pleased that Todd is not married to Jodi because Todd can maintain everything in the separation. After Todd's death, Harry helps Jodi with estate matters and gives her courteous, professional advice.

## Ilona

Ilona is the mysterious waitress with whom Todd becomes infatuated a few days prior to his wedding to Natasha. Todd asks Ilona on a lunch date, and he is on his way to meet her when he is shot while sitting at a stoplight in his car.

## Detective Sergeant Skinner

Detective Skinner is the first police officer to question Jodi about Todd's death. It is Detective Skinner who later shows up to tell Jodi that Dean Kovacs has been arrested for Todd's murder.





# Symbols and Symbolism

## Condo

Todd and Jodi live in a beautiful lakefront condo in Chicago. It is beautifully furnished and Jodi creates a sanctuary for them as an escape from the world. Actually, Jodi loves the condo and their lifestyle more than she loves Todd because when he orders her to vacate during their separation, it is the possibility of losing her way of life that sets her on the path to murder.

## Rajput painting

The Rajput painting is small, elegant and refined, all of which characterize Jodi perfectly. The woman in the painting seems serene and protected in the surroundings of a beautiful garden, all of which symbolize Jodi's life.

## Porsche

Todd envisions himself to be a mover and shaker and the Porsche symbolizes his view of himself. While he is driving the Porsche on his way to meet Ilona for lunch, he sees a Ferrari and decides that he needs to trade in the Porsche because it now makes him seem older while a Ferrari would indicate that he is very wealthy and sleek.

## Sleeping pills

When Jodi discovers the bottle of sleeping pills in the pocket of Todd's slacks, it is the turning point in her view of him. It takes her just a short time to determine that Natasha's sleeping pills mean that he is closer to her than he should be. Therefore, Jodi puts the sleeping pills into Todd's hot Ovaltine drink to see if they will kill him which would serve him right because he brought them into their world.

## Dog

Todd and Jodi's dog, Freud, is the only happy element of their home. Jodi walks the dog faithfully by the waterfront each day which is part of her ritual while Todd loves the dog for the unconditional love supplied.

## Liquor

Drinking alcohol is a big part of Todd and Jodi's life. Each night Todd mixes martinis for them and they have wine with dinner. Todd takes refuge at the bar at the Drake Hotel



frequently and even starts to drink at lunch. Jodi and her friends also drink when they go out and wine is as much a status symbol as it is a beverage.

## **New Baby**

The new baby Todd will have with Natasha signifies the start of a new life for him. He has the sense that his life is not on the right track but thinks that when his son arrives, everything will change because he will have new purpose and direction.

## **Eviction Notice**

When Todd and Jodi separate, it never occurs to Jodi that her life will be impacted all that much. So when she receives the eviction notice ordering her to vacate the condo, she is outraged at the intrusion on her life. She does not miss Todd all that much after he moves out but when she has to face the prospect of defining a new life in a new location, it is the turning point that finally pushes her to murderous thoughts.

## **Jodi's valuables**

Jodi sells off several personal items to get the cash to pay for the hit men to kill Todd. It is interesting to note that Jodi is willing to part with items that she had at once considered to be valuable in order to rid herself of the problems that Todd has created in her life. Nothing is as valuable to Jodi as keeping the condo and the lifestyle that she has worked so hard at maintaining. This is as much for perception as it is for the real value of the fractured relationship they shared while living there.

## **Todd's funeral**

Todd's funeral symbolizes Jodi's return to her position as Todd's long-term partner. Up until now, Natasha had thought that she would gain everything that had been Jodi's but since Todd's will had not yet been changed at the time of his death, Jodi will get almost everything. It is also significant that those attending the funeral recognize Jodi for her role in Todd's life and give her the respect that she feels is owed to her.



# Settings

## Chicago

Chicago, Illinois, is the main setting for the story. This is where Todd and Jodi met and where they have lived together for 20 years. Todd's real estate development business is also based in Chicago.

## The condo

Much of the story takes place at Todd and Jodi's condo in Chicago. It is located on the waterfront where they walk their dog every day. The condo is beautifully appointed and a sanctuary for the couple from the world. Jodi also sees her clients for sessions at the condo.

## Todd's office

Todd's real estate development office is located in a four-story building he has renovated. His space there is relatively small but contains offices for himself and his secretary, Stephanie.

## The Drake Hotel

Todd spends a good bit of time at the bar at the Drake Hotel. It is somewhere he goes when he is not ready to go home either to Jodi or Natasha.

## Todd and Natasha's apartment

Todd leases a new apartment for Jodi and him so they can set up household before the wedding and before the new baby arrives.

## Jacksonville, Florida

Jodi is attending a conference at a hotel in Jacksonville, Florida, as an alibi for when Todd is murdered. She takes a call from a Chicago police officer at the hotel and faints in the lobby after hearing the news.



# Themes and Motifs

## Infidelity

Infidelity is an important theme in *The Silent Wife*. Todd's pattern of being unfaithful continues up until the day he dies. Todd has been with Jodi for 20 years, and while he loves the security of the home she has made for them, he also yearns for excitement and new experiences. When Todd is not seeing any other woman in particular, he visits prostitutes.

Jodi is aware of Todd's infidelity but she does not address it until she learns that he has been having an affair with Natasha, the daughter of his childhood friend. Natasha is pregnant and Todd commits to marry her. This is the last straw for Jodi because she is in danger of losing her lifestyle. Todd's infidelity has never jeopardized her to this degree before.

There are also potential health risks associated with Todd's behavior when he gets a lesion in his mouth and a relentless itch in his groin. If Todd has a sexually transmitted disease or the AIDS virus, it will also affect the women with whom he has been sexually active, particularly Jodi and Natasha.

Infidelity has emotional implications, too, and even when Todd moves out of the condo to be with Natasha, she still thinks he is spending time with Jodi and she can never be sure that he is devoted to her. Natasha is right to suspect Todd. Just a few days before their wedding, he has a lunch date with a waitress he met last week. It is on the way to this date that Todd is killed while sitting in his car, perhaps the author's way of saying that infidelity is the death of so many things.

## Deception

Deception is an important theme in *The Silent Wife*. Todd has a history of deceiving Jodi through his infidelity and that continues when he is living with Natasha too. Todd lies to Jodi about going on a fishing weekend with his buddies when he is actually going to a country inn with Natasha. Who knows how many times he has lied to Jodi about his plans. His pattern continues with Natasha, too, when he lies to her about going to dinner with a friend when he is actually going to the condo to have dinner with Jodi. Every phone call from Natasha to Todd is based in deception because she can never trust that he is telling her the truth. In a way, Natasha should be an expert in Todd's pattern of deception because she witnessed it when he was cheating on Jodi with her.

Jodi is also deceptive because she does not share much of herself and doesn't challenge Todd on his behavior. She is aware of most of his activities but she chooses to look the other way, deceptively leading Todd to believe that his behavior is approved.



Alison also behaves deceptively in the story. She pretends to be concerned for Jodi's welfare after Todd wants to evict her from the condo and launches a plan to make the problem go away. Jodi sells some of her valuable personal items to get the cash to pay Alison's husband to kill Todd, but after the murder Alison cannot be reached. Jodi feels that Alison has made off with the money, deceiving Jodi into believing that she was going to help her.

## Self preservation

Self preservation is an important theme in *The Silent Wife*. Jodi is masterful at taking care of herself and has carefully constructed a life that is comfortable for both Todd and her. Even though she is not necessarily happy, Jodi is content because her life really makes no demands on her. She is able to construct her days to suit her needs and she is comfortable with that.

When that life is threatened by Todd's affair with Natasha, Jodi launches into full self preservation mode. It intensifies when she learns that Todd wants her out of the condo and Jodi will tolerate no interruption in her carefully crafted lifestyle. That's when Alison suggests that she has a way to make Jodi's problem go away, and Jodi does not hesitate in agreeing to have Todd murdered. Jodi even goes so far as to sell some valuables to get the cash to pay the hit men and then go to a conference in Jacksonville to provide an alibi for herself.

Jodi is determined to see the plan through to the end and after Todd's murder, she is characteristically close mouthed in order to protect herself from being implicated. Jodi learned how to take care of herself very early in life after suffering abuse at home and she has maintained that sense of self preservation to the end.

## Rituals

Rituals is an important theme in *The Silent Wife*. Jodi and Todd live their lives by them. Each morning, Todd showers and dresses very early in order to be at the office by seven o'clock. At that point he order the same breakfast every day: two bacon sandwiches and two cups of coffee. Most mornings he will take a few hits of marijuana to take the edge off his nerves.

Jodi's rituals mark her days as well. She dresses, takes the dog to the waterfront for a walk, stops in a shop for a coffee and then heads home to where she will have only two client visits in the morning. The rest of her days are filled with shopping, domestic classes and planning dinners for her and Todd. When Todd arrives home, he mixes two perfect martinis and snacks on the hors d'oeuvres that Jodi has prepared and set out for him. At the end of the evening, Jodi lays out their nightclothes on the bed and carefully puts away her other clothing.

Their lives are so carefully crafted that it seems inevitable that something will happen to shatter them. Todd's affair with Natasha is the tipping point and the stylized life is now a



perfect mess. When Todd is with Natasha, there are no rituals and their life is very busy and noisy. Todd longs to return to Jodi and the rituals that had marked their lives for so many years. Eventually, after everything calms down after Todd's murder, Jodi is able to return to the rituals that keep her balanced and comfortable.

## Silence

Silence is an important theme in *The Silent Wife*. Jodi is masterful at keeping silent, both as an adult and a child. She says nothing to Todd to challenge his unfaithful behavior because instinctively she knows that in doing so, she will ruin the facade of the life she enjoys. Even with her friends, Jodi does not reveal much, letting them pull information out of her instead of offering anything willingly.

Jodi's skills at keeping silent are really put to the test when she is questioned by the detectives who intentionally try to bait her into saying something incriminating. Jodi knows though that once she starts to respond angrily or show any emotion, the detectives will have won because that's what they want from her so she maintains her cool persona.

By the end of the novel it is learned that Jodi and Ryan had been abused by their brother, Darrell, when they were children and she learned to be silent then. Jodi did not want to create any problems or make any noise about their trauma so she kept quiet and buried the trauma deep in her psyche.



# Styles

## Point of View

Like many novels, *The Silent Wife* is written in the third person omniscient point of view. This means that the author writes the story using third person pronouns such as "she" and "he." The author also has insight into what the characters are thinking which makes it an omniscient view, as opposed to a limited view where only the activities of the characters are reported. For example, the author writes, "'Normally, of course, the victim's family and friends are relieved when we make an arrest. But sometimes the news is unwelcome, even disturbing. It all depends on the identity of the suspect. In this case, as it happens, the suspect is someone who was very close to the victim.' She can't believe the way he's beating around the bush. How can you be a policeman if you can't even make an arrest? Standing at the bar top she throws back what's left in her glass before refilling it and wonders how it will be to wake up in prison with a hangover." Not only does the author share what is going on between the detective and Jodi, she shares what Jodi is thinking which adds more depth to the story.

## Language and Meaning

The story is set in Chicago in 2013 so the language is current. The author uses actual location names and street names to lend authenticity and believability to the story. The dialogue for each of the characters remains true to each of them throughout. Jodi's dialogue is refined and spare as opposed to Dean Kovacs who has the buoyant conversation of a salesman. Todd's style is evasive because that is his persona, while Natasha is assertive, almost aggressive, which is appropriate for someone of her age. It is interesting to note the conversations between Jodi and her therapist, Gerard, because the author crafts them in a style appropriate of a therapy session. Alison also has her own style and is believable as someone who works in the adult entertainment business. Harry's polished style and dialogue and perfect for an attorney too. Overall, the author writes in an engaging style and creates several points where she leaves the reader hanging and left to ponder what comes next. The sense of intrigue is crucial to the book and directs the reader quickly forward to learn what and how it will be that Jodi will be pushed to murder.

## Structure

The structure of a novel usually takes one of four forms: character, milieu, event or idea. While a story can contain all four forms, one usually predominates. *The Silent Wife* takes the structure of a character form. These types of novels tend to show a character's personal growth as the story extends. A character structure shows transformation as being important as opposed to an event story which is more concerned with what a character does. It is easy to identify a character structure novel



because there comes a point in the story when the main character reaches a point of frustration with life or a set of circumstances that are no longer acceptable for personal growth. The character then decides on changes, both small and dramatic, that will move the character's life in a different direction. The story concludes then when the character has resolved his or her issues and feels satisfied with the transformation or decides to stay in the current trajectory.





## Quotes

You would if you cared about them. You know my clients are like my children.  
-- Jodi (chapter 1 paragraph 8)

**Importance:** Todd has wanted to have children but Jodi is averse to the idea, so when she says that her clients are like her children, it is a sore subject for Todd. When Natasha becomes pregnant, it is a big motivator for Todd to leave Jodi because he knows he has a chance now of having a family which Jodi would not give him.

Let me know what you decide," she says, using her napkin to blot the corners of her eyes. "If you go, I might have the carpets cleaned. And make some marmalade.  
-- Jodi (chapter 1 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Todd tells Jodi that he is going on a fishing trip with his friends this weekend but Jodi knows he is lying. Jodi's style, however, is one of denial and silence so she pretends to be calm and thinking about some things that need doing around the house even though she has no intention of having the carpets cleaned or making marmalade.

Sleeping pills, right?  
-- Jodi (chapter 5 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Jodi is not sure about the bottle of pills that the dry cleaning attendant retrieved from the pocket of Todd's pants. She shows them to a psychiatrist at the seminar who confirms that they are, indeed, sleeping pills. Jodi will soon grind them in her mortar and put the crushed pieces in Todd's hot Ovaltine drink before bed in the hopes that they will kill him.

Dean," she says. "You've been trying to reach me.  
-- Jodi (chapter 5 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Natasha has told Todd that Dean plans to call Jodi to tell her about his affair with Natasha and the resulting pregnancy. Todd has tried to preempt Dean's call to Jodi and he thinks that he has. Jodi is not sure why Dean wants to speak to her and she is on her way out to dinner when the phone rings again and she decides to pick up to speak to Dean. The reader now knows that Dean has spilled his information but Jodi lets Todd believe that she and Dean have never spoken.

Good of you to tell me," she says. "I'm so happy that you didn't wait any longer. I wouldn't want to be the last to congratulate you.  
-- Jodi (chapter 9 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Todd springs the news on Jodi that he won't be home tonight because he is moving into an apartment with Natasha today. For once, Jodi shows anger and has a sarcastic outburst, the only way that Todd knows she is really angry.



"I've missed you," he says. "I've missed coming home and I've missed getting into bed with you and I've missed waking up beside you--and all I can say is that I must have been out of my mind to think I could give you up.

-- Todd (chapter 14 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Todd has come to dinner at Jodi's invitation and he enjoys the familiarity of their rituals. It is unfair to Jodi for Todd to lead her into believing that he is going to come back to her and it shows his duplicitous nature.

Todd, what's got into you? You need to come to your senses. I'm not moving. And you don't want me to move. Think about it. Think about our life together.

-- Jodi (chapter 17 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Jodi calls Todd after she is served with the eviction notice and she is incredulous that he is serious about her moving out of the condo. This will be the turning point for Jodi in the whole experience and she will never view Todd in the same way as she had before.

"I've made a home for him," says Jodi. "I've cooked, kept house, looked after him. He can't kick me out just because he finds me inconvenient.

-- Jodi (chapter 19 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Jodi has served as Todd's wife for 20 years and she feels she is entitled to stay in what she has considered to be her home. She cannot believe that she has no rights and that her entire life with Todd can be wiped away in one cruel move.

We can make this problem go away.

-- Alison (chapter 23 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** Alison lets Jodi know that Todd can be eliminated if Jodi has enough money because Alison's ex-husband, Renny, has connections. Alison stresses the importance of urgency so that Todd is eliminated before he marries Natasha and his will is changed.

I hope it goes without saying that what happens in this office is strictly confidential.

-- Todd (chapter 24 paragraph 10)

**Importance:** Todd has instructed Stephanie to cancel all of Jodi's credit cards and Stephanie is incredulous that Todd is not going to let Jodi know. It is cold and cruel to let Jodi be embarrassed someday when she tries to use a credit card and it is denied. Stephanie ultimately does call Jodi to let her know, and Jodi later remembers Stephanie's consideration by ensuring that she has a job for awhile after Todd is murdered.

"Oh hell, how should I know?" she snaps. "Maybe it was five years ago. How can you expect me to remember something like that at a time like this?"

-- Jodi (PART TWO: HER paragraph 4)



**Importance:** Detective Skinner is trying to agitate Jodi to the point that she gets angry and may implicate herself in Todd's murder. Up until this point, she has been cool and poised but the detective keeps pushing, knowing that he has hit a nerve with Jodi. She has to maintain her silent persona in order to control the situation.

Dean didn't kill Todd," she says.

-- Jodi (PART TWO: HER paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Detective Skinner has just told Jodi that Dean Kovacs has been arrested for Todd's murder. Jodi had been so sure that she was going to be arrested that she blurts out that Dean did not kill Todd. Detective Skinner takes Jodi's comment as one of shock and disbelief and does not pay any attention to what Jodi is really trying to say.