

Tara Road Study Guide

Tara Road by Maeve Binchy

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Plot Summary

The story begins with the author describing the teenage lives of Ria and Hilary Johnson. Ria is 16; Hilary is the elder sister. The girls also talk about their future plans. Ria wants to travel the world.

Ria gets a job at a real estate firm and one of Ria's co-workers, Rosemary Ryan, becomes a fast friend.

Ria meets a new member of the team, Danny Lynch, who arrives at the real estate office. He is attractive and charismatic and Ria falls for him immediately.

Instantly smitten with Danny and after dating for a time, Ria investigates his temporary home on Tara Road. The house is beautiful but in need of major repair.

"Tara Road was very higgledy-piggledy. Big houses with gardens full of trees, small houses facing right on the street. No. 16 was a great old house, Danny said. Falling down, damp, shabby now. Poor Sean O'Brien's uncle must have been a bit of a no-hoper like Sean himself, it must have been a great house once." Chap. 1, p. 10

Danny tells Ria he dreams of owning the house on Tara Road. He is so enthusiastic that Ria also feels hope for the old house.

Danny and Ria fall in love and the couple becomes inseparable.

Danny tells Ria that their first time at Tara Road is a date to be remembered - December 28, 1982.

The real estate agency struggles to sell a large mansion belonging to mogul Barney McCarthy. The house is not selling and the agency works on various ideas to make the sale. Danny tells Ria on the side that he has a plan to sell the house. He plans to approach McCarthy directly and make suggestions on how to sell the house. Ria is surprised that Danny would undercut his own company. Danny says it is for their future. If his plan is successful, they will have enough money to buy the house on Tara Road.

Danny goes to work with Barney McCarthy.

The story moves quickly from this point on. Ria becomes pregnant and she and Danny marry. Ria throws herself into remodeling 16 Tara Road and making it into a home. Meanwhile, Danny works hard and spends a great deal of time with Barney McCarthy and his mistress Polly. Ria feels guilty about the affair because she likes Barney's wife Mona as well as Polly, who is also her employer.

More people move to Tara Road including Rosemary and Ria's mother, Nora. Nora blossoms at Tara Road and Rosemary enjoys her posh new flat. Also present on Tara Road is a restaurant owned by recovering alcoholic Colm Barry.



Danny and Ria have two children, Annie and Brian. When Ria proposes having a third child, Danny confesses that he is with a 22 year old woman who is pregnant. Danny wants a divorce. Ria falls apart.

On a whim, Ria decides to exchange houses with an American named Marilyn Vine. The new situation helps each woman come to terms with her own life as well as her future.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Chapter 1

The story begins with the author describing the teenage lives of Ria and Hilary Johnson. Ria is 16; Hilary is the elder sister. The girls talk about fellows. Hilary is much more experienced with dating and is a bit promiscuous. Ria is curious. Hilary tells Ria to keep her voice down because their mam (mother) will hear them and then no one will be allowed out of the house. Hilary tells Ria that her time will come. The girls also talk about their future plans. Ria wants to travel the world.

The girls' work history is also examined. Ria gets a job at a real estate firm. She does not know the business but is willing to learn and likes the job as well as her co-workers. One of Ria's co-workers, Rosemary Ryan, becomes a fast friend. Ria is envious of Rosemary's flair and style. All the men want to be with Rosemary but Rosemary is not an easy woman.

Hilary meets and marries Martin Moran. Moran is a negative and quiet man who always seems to fret over everything from money to the state of the economy. The book discusses how the 1980s are "worrying times." Ria is surprised that Hilary would marry such a man.

Ria learns that a new member of the team will be arriving at their office. The man, Danny Lynch, is attractive and charismatic. Ria falls for him immediately. To Ria's surprise, Danny falls for her instead of the vivacious Rosemary.

Rosemary learns that Danny lives with two roommates in a house inherited by his friend Sean. Sean does not live in the house. The house is beautiful but in need of major repair.

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Danny tells Ria he dreams of owning the house on Tara Road. Danny is so enthusiastic that Ria also feels hope for the old house.

Danny and Ria fall in love and the couple becomes inseparable.

After a while, Ria tells Rosemary about her romance.

At the company Christmas party, Orla King humiliates herself. Danny steps in and manages to get Orla to leave the party. Danny and Ria take Orla home.



Ria invites Danny to lunch at her mother's house. Ria is nervous, worried that Danny will not find the home or her family suitable. Danny goes to the house and meets Ria's mother, Nora, Martin, and Hilary. Danny manages to impress them all. The family plays a game of Trivial Pursuit and everyone does well, complete with praises from Danny.

At the end of the day, Hilary tells Ria that she worries Danny is too handsome and not right for Ria. Nora warns that Danny is a heart breaker and Ria should stay away.

Danny takes Ria to 16 Tara Road for the first time.

"And then they were there. And they stood together in the overgrown front garden and looked up at the house on Tara Road. 'Look at the shape of the house,' Danny begged her. 'See how perfect the proportions are. It was built in 1870, a gentleman's residence.' The steps up to the hall door were huge blocks of granite. 'Look how even they were, they were perfectly matched.' The bow windows had all the original woodwork. 'Those shutters are over 100 years old. The leaded glass over the door has no cracks in it. This house was a jewel,' Danny Lynch said." Chap. 1, p. 17

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The real estate agency struggles to sell a large mansion belonging to mogul Barney McCarthy. The house is not selling and the agency works on various ideas to make the sale. Danny tells Ria on the side that he has a plan to sell the house. He plans to approach McCarthy directly and make suggestions on how to sell the house. Ria is surprised that Danny would undercut his own company. Danny says it is for their future. If his plan is successful, they will have enough money to buy the house on Tara Road.

Danny's plan works. Barney outfits the house with a new music studio and sells it to a famous producer. Danny gets the money. The real estate agency finds out but does not fire Danny because they want to keep Barney McCarthy as a client. Danny resigns, saying that it would be too awkward to continue at the agency.

Danny goes to work with Barney McCarthy. Ria stays at the agency.

Danny buys the house on Tara Road. Ria splits her time between Tara Road and her mother's house. Ria gets pregnant. Ria and Danny plan their wedding.

Ria meets Barney for the first time. She is impressed but wary, especially after she learns that he has a mistress. Hilary warns Ria.

Ria quits her job before anyone can accuse her of passing information to Danny regarding real estate deals. Rosemary is unhappy with Ria because all she talks about is Danny.

Barney arranges for Ria to have a job at a dress rental shop named Polly's. Ria learns that Polly is Barney's mistress.



Ria meets Danny's parents. She is surprised at how different Danny is from his quiet and reserved family. Danny's parents will not come to the wedding because it is too far to travel.

Ria is told that her entire wedding party can be outfitted at Polly's at no charge. Ria is ecstatic.

Ria attends an event at Barney's house and meets his wife, Mona. Ria likes Mona immediately.

Danny gets a new job with Barney.

Ria meets Polly at the store. Gertie, Ria's co-worker, has a great fondness for Polly.

Gertie comes to work one day with a noticeable bruise on her face. Polly tells Ria that Gertie's boyfriend, Jack, often beats Gertie. Ria is appalled. Polly says Gertie will not leave Jack.

Ria and Rosemary go to see the psychic recommended by Hilary. The psychic tells Ria that she will have two children and a miscarriage. The woman also tells Ria that she will be successful in her own business and travel to America. Ria is puzzled. Rosemary's reading is unsatisfactory. There is no husband in Rosemary's future, nor are their children. Rosemary will, however, be very successful in business. Rosemary dismisses the psychic's visions.

Ria and Danny spend every spare moment working on the house. They discuss buying a car. Barney presents the couple with a new car.

Hilary stops coming round Tara Road. Hilary is extremely jealous of Ria and her new life.

Ria gets Hilary involved with the new baby. Ria and Hilary make up.

Ria goes into labor. She cannot find Danny. Ria calls Hilary, who takes her to the hospital.

Polly calls Danny in a panic. Barney is having a heart attack. Danny rushes to Barney's side and takes him to the hospital. Danny is unaware that Ria is in labor.

Gertie has another episode with Jack. They make up and decide to get married.

Barney recovers from his heart attack. Danny gets to Ria too late - the baby has been born. It is a girl. Hilary is furious at Danny.

Nora moves to Tara Road and takes a job caring for an older woman. Nora thrives.

Polly wonders about Barney's influence on Danny. Polly knows that Danny is cheating on Ria.



Rosemary meets Colm Barry. Colm tells Rosemary he is in AA.

Ria wonders if Mona knows about Barney's affair and chooses to keep her head in the sand.

Ria promises herself to take many photos of baby Annie.

Ria and Danny enjoy going to sales and auctions to find items for the house. The couple spends a lot of time at home.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The reader meets the essential characters up to this point. At first Ria is a shy girl with low self esteem. She lives in the shadow of her vivacious sister, Hilary. Rosemary plays the same role in Ria's life. Meanwhile, Ria is constantly being lectured about appropriate behavior from her mother who says that she will not raise "cheap" daughters. If a girl gives herself to a man, then no man will marry her. Hilary ignores her mother's advice. Shockingly, the party girl Hilary completely changes her behaviors and marries Martin, a dull, frugal and worrisome man. Hilary becomes stodgy and reserved.

Rosemary brings out Ria's more confident side. Although Rosemary is stunning and vivacious, she is not at all a flirt or tease. There is a joke that the office has a pool on which man, if any, will ever get past Rosemary's defenses.

Ria is instantly smitten with Danny Lynch. Danny is Ria's dream man - ambitious, charismatic, and handsome. Danny is a charmer who sweeps Ria off her feet. Ria feels lucky. Rosemary is somewhat jealous because she eventually wants to get married and have children but there is no man in sight.

Nora is right to warn Ria about Danny. However, Ria is in love and is not willing to listen to her mother or sister. Ria also ignores the red flag regarding Danny's parents and the fact that he has distanced himself from them. Ria is determined to have a relationship with Danny's parents, particularly after Annie is born.

Hilary's new lifestyle does not afford her the same kind of luxuries as Ria, although Ria explains that those luxuries are hard won and bought at discount. Hilary thinks that Ria no longer needs her since she has the perfect life. Ria tells Hilary that she needs her, particularly during the pregnancy because she is scared.

The appearance of Barney presents opportunities. However, Barney is very slick and perhaps should not be trusted wholeheartedly as Danny seems to think. Barney openly flaunts his mistress, Polly. Barney takes Polly to all public affairs and also travels with her while Mona stays at home. Ria feels like a traitor because she genuinely likes Mona. It is assumed that Mona is happy with her luxury-style life and does not want to rock the boat by confronting Barney.



Barney is a generous and likeable man. However, it is apparent that Danny has become beholden to him rather quickly. It does not go unnoticed that Danny has lied about Barney's whereabouts when he has his heart attack. In some ways, it seems - at least to Hilary and Ria - that Danny has chosen Barney over his wife. Hilary will not forgive Danny for not being with Ria when Annie is born.

The situation with Gertie and Jack is frustrating for all of Gertie's friends. Polly tells Ria that she has tried to get Gertie to leave Jack but Gertie always refuses. Since Polly and Gertie are close friends, it seems that no one will be able to convince Gertie. Still, Ria tries. Gertie falls into the cycle of abuse. Jack remains sober for a time and Gertie is convinced that this time he has changed. No one else believes it. Gertie marries Jack much to everyone's dismay. It is clear that Gertie's life will get worse as times goes on.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Rosemary's mother is a woman who believes she and her family belong in society and should act with class. The family does not have money but the attitudes are there to a degree. Rosemary's mother remains dismayed that Rosemary is unmarried.

Rosemary's sister, Eileen, is a lesbian.

Rosemary tries to get her mother to go to dinner at Quentin's. Rosemary's mother feels the place will be filled with "jumped up" politicians, the wealthy and business people while they will be unknowns. Rosemary wins the argument. In Quentin's, Rosemary points out the booth where people go when they want to be discreet. When she peeks into the booth, she sees Danny and Orla.

Danny believes that Nora knows all and constantly compliments her on her vast knowledge. Danny also says Nora looks like Audrey Hepburn in "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and begins to call her Holly after the Holly Golightly character.

Rosemary goes to the bank and is admired by all of the people there as she is a smart and successful woman that is always well turned out.

Rosemary runs into Orla. Orla has joined AA.

Colm opens a restaurant on Tara Road.

Ria goes to visit Danny's parents. Ria's father asks if they were in town. Someone had spotted Danny. Ria was not with Danny. Ria assumes the other woman was Polly as she often traveled with Barney and Danny.

Ria and Danny throw a lavish party. Danny instructs Ria to invite Barney and Polly and not to mention the event to Mona. Ria feels guilty.

Rosemary is angry with Danny for his behavior. At the party Orla gets drunk and rages about Danny's infidelity to her. Ria learns the truth. Danny breaks off the relationship with Orla. Rosemary tells Orla to let go.

Much to everyone's surprise, Jack remains sober.

Nora becomes social butterfly and begins to play bridge.

Ria invites Sheila and Max to visit. The couples discuss big changes in Ireland. Sheila thinks about moving back to Ireland from Connecticut. While Sheila visits, she takes Ria and others to see the psychic. The psychic tells Ria she is pregnant. When Danny finds out, he is upset. Ria strikes back.



Orla returns to AA. Orla wants to become a singer. Colm offers her a part-time position at his restaurant.

Ria gives birth to Brian. Gertie and Sheila also have children around the same time.

Rosemary continues to have a high profile around Dublin. Rosemary is still not content and decides to try a marriage agency.

Colm's restaurant opens.

Rosemary talks to Danny about buying a house. One is chosen and renovations begin.

Ria worries about Gertie. Gertie leaves Jack and moves in with her mother.

Ria is upset about Rosemary's comments that her house is musty. Ria asks Gertie to spruce up the parlor.

Barney begins to worry about his cash flow. The house on Tara Road is put up for mortgage on his behalf.

Rosemary moves into her new house.

Ria thinks about going back to work now that the children are older. Ria puts aside the work issue and wants to focus on the garden. Ria decides to at least do a patch up job since Danny is against complete renovation.

Sheila invites Hilary to go to the U.S.

Ria goes to visit Mona. Mona does not seem at all worried about money. She has been broke before. Besides, Barney always has a back up plan.

Colm makes a deal with Ria. He will fix up the garden if he can grow vegetables for his restaurant. Ria agrees.

Ria and Danny have a seventh birthday party for Brian. Annie fusses over spending the afternoon with children younger than herself. Annie also worries about her looks and wants to look more like Rosemary.

Gertie arrives at the house to help with the party. Jack demands that she bring ten pounds from the house and waits on the road. Gertie tries to preserve her dignity and says she will work for the money. Rosemary tells Ria to stop enabling Gertie.

Annie leaves the house and goes for a walk. She goes to Rosemary's and sees Rosemary engaging in sex with a man. Annie is shocked and horrified. Annie runs and falls down in front of the restaurant. Colm picks Annie up off the ground and soothes her. Colm takes Annie home.

Ria has everything she has ever wanted and is grateful.



Chapter 2 Analysis

Time begins to go by quickly. New friends are introduced into the mix. Danny maintains his friendship with Barney and almost seems to become Barney's slave, even putting up 16 Tara Road to secure Barney's financial future. Oddly enough, Ria supports this gesture even though it was already done when she learned about the mortgage.

Brian is now seven years old; Annie is 12. Ria begins to feel restless. Danny likes the way things are and likes knowing that Ria is at home. Ria considers having another child as a way to fill her days but knows Danny will most likely not be receptive.

Rosemary's life seems picture perfect to those on the outside but Rosemary is not content and wants to be married with children. Thus far the psychic's predictions have been right, much to Rosemary's dismay.

Ria seems fine with ignoring Danny's relationship with Orla. Rosemary seems to be angrier about Danny's infidelity. One might surmise that Danny and Ria are patterning their marriage after Barney and Mona's marriage, even if it is unintentional.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Ria and Annie go shopping. Annie is 14 years old now. Nora had given Annie a large gift card to buy anything she likes. Annie and Ria cannot agree. Annie becomes frustrated with Ria although Ria offers no advice. Annie thinks Ria has given up. Annie compares Ria to the always well dressed Rosemary. Ria decides to leave Annie to shop on her own while she returns home to wait for the delivery of a sander. Ria is refinishing the floors in the house.

People often visit Tara Road, especially on Saturdays. Danny does not like having so many people in and out of the house. Nora never drops by uninvited nor does she ever stay long, lest she wear out her welcome. Nora often leaves her strange little dog, Pliers, at the house while she goes to the nursing home.

Rosemary now owns the printing company and continues to be very successful.

Ria and Rosemary continue to agree on almost everything but Gertie and her situation.

Ria thinks about getting a job or having one more baby.

Gertie continues to beg for money, much to Ria's dismay.

Danny talks about how the house on Tara Road is now worth a fortune. Ria reminds him that they have no intentions of selling it. Tara Road is changing with new neighbors and new developments plus the addition of Colm's restaurant.

Ria laments that her sex life with Danny is dwindling. Ria begins to wonder if her family is falling apart. Danny seems to be gone a great deal of the time. He tells Ria that he is working hard. Ria begins to feel the effects of the empty nest syndrome. She feels especially sad when she learns that no one will be home for dinner. That night when Danny returns early, Ria insists that they go to Colm's restaurant for a nice meal.

During dinner, Ria calmly announces that it is time to have another baby. Danny's face goes white. After a few minutes of discussion, Danny tells Ria that he has been seeing another woman, Bernadette. Bernadette is pregnant. Danny wants to leave Ria and the children to be with Bernadette. Ria faints. Colm cares for Ria and Danny goes home.

Ria goes home late. She and Danny talk. The scene turns ugly. Danny explains that there is no turning back. He wants to be with Bernadette. Danny says they have fallen out of love. Ria says she has not changed, nor have her feelings. Danny tells Ria not to make it harder than it has to be. Danny says they must talk to the children. Ria says Danny must explain since she does not understand herself.



The scene with the children turns nasty. Both children are angry and cry. They understand that Danny has another woman and that they are going to have a baby. Brian tells Danny that if he is going to go, he should go now. Danny leaves. The next morning Ria suggests that the children speak to Danny so that they can ask questions and better understand the situation.

Ria makes a list of things to do which includes calling her mother, Hilary, Rosemary, Gertie and Colm. Hilary, Rosemary and Nora tell Ria to hold onto the house on Tara Road. Ria functions on autopilot.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Ria could not be more shocked by Danny's news. Ria is happy and feels that they have made a life together. They are older and busier, especially with the children but it is a good life. Danny disagrees. Danny also tells Ria not to make it more difficult than it already is. Ria is stunned by Danny's callousness. Ria realizes that Barney and Polly knew about the other woman. Ria also realizes that while she likes Polly and Mona, she has never liked Barney.

Ria is in shock and it is unclear how she will react to the situation once she returns to her senses.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Ria continues to work on autopilot. She manages to fill her days with household chores, attempting to have some sense of normalcy. Meanwhile, the days go by without notice. Ria never really knows if it is day or night. Ria maintains the hope that Danny will come to his senses and return home. Even Polly says that the affair with Bernadette will not last. Danny seems determined to go through with the separation and eventual divorce.

Marilyn Vine calls the house on Tara Road looking for Danny. Marilyn explains that she is interested in a house exchange. On a whim, Ria agrees. Marilyn will come to stay at Tara Road and Ria will go to Marilyn's home in Stoneyfield, Connecticut. Ria begins to make plans immediately. Ria will spend one month alone and one month with Annie and Brian. Ria keeps the information to herself until she receives a packet from Marilyn with details. Danny is not pleased, nor is Annie.

Annie and Brian meet Bernadette for the first time.

The reader is introduced to Marilyn Vine, who works at a university. Marilyn's husband Greg is in Hawaii on a lectureship. She has opted not to go which puts strain on the marriage. Greg does not understand why Marilyn prefers to stay in Connecticut. Marilyn's friend Heidi lets it slip to Greg that Marilyn plans to go to Ireland for two months. Greg is livid. The relationship between the couple worsens. Marilyn tends to keep to herself and is annoyed that she told her friend about Ireland before she could tell Greg. Marilyn plans to make the trip regardless.

Travel dates approach for Ria and Marilyn. Danny finally seems to accept Ria's decision to go.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Ria's choice to accept Marilyn's offer seems both wise and a bit crazy. As the chapter goes on, Ria's family and friends come to realize that it will be good for Ria to get away from Dublin for a while. Danny is not keen on the idea, in part because it will disrupt his life and he will have to assume the role of the single parent. Danny refuses to tell Ria what part Bernadette will play in the discipline of the children.

Marilyn's history is similar to Ria's and the pair form an early bond. Each does not realize what a good home and life she has and each has fallen for the theory that the grass is always greener.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Rosemary visits Ria. Rosemary says that Bernadette will never be anything to the children. Rosemary, like Polly, does not think that the relationship will last. Rosemary is dismayed to learn that Ria would take Danny back.

Finola Dunne, Bernadette's mother, supports her daughter in this new relationship although she is not keen on her daughter having become pregnant by a married man. Finola inquires about the children. Finola admires the new house Bernadette and Danny have, due in part to the will of Barney McCarthy.

Ria arrives in Stoneyfield and follows Marilyn's directions. Marilyn arrives in Dublin and meets Colm.

Annie and Brian move to Danny's new house. Bernadette says little and the children are unsure how to behave or what to do.

Ria goes to see Carlotta as planned. Carlotta offers Ria a beauty treatment while she waits for Carlotta's shift to end. Ria finally relaxes. Ria is surprised when she receives a large bill for the treatment. Carlotta takes Ria to Tudor Drive. Ria begs Carlotta to come inside. Carlotta resists and finally says that she has never been in Marilyn's house.

Marilyn sees the house on Tara Road for the first time. Marilyn loves the house. Colm introduces Marilyn to Clement the cat.

Both Marilyn and Ria get accustomed to their new surroundings.

Greg calls his house and speaks to Ria. The conversation is both strained and strange. Greg's brother stops by the house, unaware of Marilyn's absence. Greg also calls Heidi. Heidi asks Greg if he will be home for the alumni celebration.

Annie lies to Bernadette about going to see Nora and gets caught in the act. Annie sulks. Meanwhile Brian speaks to his friends Myles and Dekko. Kitty comes by to see Annie. Annie refers to her as "Mary" since her parents do not like Kitty. Finola does not catch on.

Ria spends time with Heidi and Carlotta.

Rosemary drops off a letter for Marilyn. Rosemary invites Marilyn to dinner or for drinks but makes it clear that she has no intention of being bothersome. Marilyn appreciates the gesture but wants to be alone.

Orla goes to see Colm about singing at the restaurant. Colm is stunned that men would offer Orla work if she showed her breasts.



Annie is mean to Danny regarding his relationship with Bernadette.

Nora and Gertie stop by to meet Marilyn.

Danny plans to take the family to Colm's restaurant. The kids insist on calling Ria to let her know that they will be out.

Rosemary and Marilyn arrange to have dinner.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Ria takes a step in the right direction by going to America. This is especially fortuitous since she makes a failed attempt at getting Danny back. Danny struggles with his role as parent and is obviously not used to handling the children. Bernadette seems to have little interest in the children. Bernadette's mother is on the scene and will most likely play a large part in the children's lives in Ria's absence.

Marilyn feels no guilt about going to Ireland and in fact feels that her sanity depends on it. Greg reaches out to anyone who will listen, trying to get an explanation for Marilyn's actions.

This is where the differences between Ria and Marilyn come out - Ria is very sociable and inviting while Marilyn is a solitary person who prefers to keep people at a distance.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Annie and Brian talk about Finola. Brian seems to like Finola since she says nice things about him. Annie does not seem to care. Her main concern is that she cannot see Kitty because her parents don't like Kitty. Even Kitty is surprised by this.

Ria is contacted by Greg's brother Andy. They make a date. Greg checks in with Marilyn to learn more about Ria.

Colm and Marilyn become friendly and speak often. Annie and Brian spend time at Tara Road with Marilyn. They get along well. Nora also likes Marilyn.

Danny and Bernadette take Finola and the children on a cruise on the Shannon.

Rosemary becomes wise to Barney's money troubles. Polly's Dress Hire is advertised for sale. The accountant tells Rosemary that Barney has bounced an \$11,000 check. Rosemary becomes concerned and tries to reach Danny to no avail.

Ria and Heidi take a class on the internet from Hubie, a young boy who teaches the class. Ria learns that Hubie is a friend of Marilyn's son Dale who died in a car accident.

Andy comes to dinner at Ria/Marilyn's house. Andy is impressed by Ria's skills in the kitchen.

Both Ria and Marilyn feel slighted and angry that the other is having such a grand time in her temporary home.

Marilyn begins to spend time with Rosemary and others. Marilyn begins to enjoy herself and begins to care for the gardens at Tara Road.

Ria learns the story behind Dale's death and figures out that is why Marilyn wanted to go to Ireland to escape. Hubie confides in Ria that Dale was driving the car the night he and Johnny were killed. Everyone assumed it was Johnny and Greg and Marilyn were led to believe it to relieve some of their grief. The boys were up to no good that night and everything was planned by Dale. Marilyn and Greg blame those who survived and forbade them to come to the funeral. Hubie makes Ria swear she will not tell Marilyn. Ria agrees.

Danny tries to reach Barney after learning about Polly's store. Barney is away in Spain, supposedly on a business trip. Danny is panicked. Danny reaches Barney and is given false assurance which Danny does not believe. Barney says they always live in the red and all will be fine. Danny is shaken. Bernadette tells Danny that he has been poor before and that they will manage.



Ria calls Sheila to come and visit. Sheila brings the children and Ria enjoys the company. Marilyn is surprised that Ria is having a dinner party and has also landed a job at the local gourmet shop.

Danny goes to Tara Road. He does not see Marilyn in the garden and lets himself into the house. Marilyn is not pleased by this action. Marilyn and Danny speak. Marilyn makes it clear that she lives in the house now and Danny cannot come and go as he pleases. Danny says he has come to collect Ria's car. Marilyn says she needs the car, has paid for extra insurance, and plans on keeping it. Danny is not pleased but Marilyn wins the battle.

Marilyn drops Rosemary off after a party then realizes that she has forgotten to get something from Rosemary. Marilyn finds Danny and Rosemary together in a compromising position. Marilyn overhears that Rosemary and Danny have been together for many years and that Rosemary is a false friend to Ria. Marilyn makes a hasty retreat.

Chapter 6 Analysis

A great deal is learned about Marilyn in this chapter. Marilyn is steeped in grief over her son and looking for someone to blame. Marilyn blames herself as well as the boys who survived the wreck. Hubie feels terrible and bears the weight of the awful truth.

Marilyn opens up for the first time about Dale. Annie and Brian are good listeners. Marilyn feels herself beginning to revert to her old self and to enjoy the company of people. Marilyn is angry and disgusted by Rosemary's behavior and betrayal of Ria.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Ria and Marilyn continue to keep in contact.

Brian and Annie ask Finola why she and Danny had a falling out. Finola says it has to do with money.

Greg contacts Ria and asks if it is okay for him to stay at the house for the alumni event. Ria insists.

Colm brings food for Marilyn and the kids. Marilyn meets Caroline for the first time. Marilyn, who has experience working in a rehab facility, immediately sees that Caroline is a heroin addict.

Annie and Brian say goodbye to everyone but Rosemary.

Sheila and Ria discover that Gertie has been keeping secrets.

Hubie is invited to work the alumni party. Greg is okay with Hubie's attendance.

Danny is extremely stressed out. News is out that Barney and Danny are on the skids.

Marilyn talks to Brian and Annie about Dale. Marilyn begins to believe that she is turning a corner in regards to her grief.

Danny apologizes to Finola.

Ria meets the kids at the airport. They are happy to see her. Immediately Annie notices changes in her mother. The kids love Marilyn's house. Hubie meets Annie and is smitten.

Danny approaches Rosemary for a loan as a business opportunity. Rosemary refuses and asks Danny to leave.

Marilyn writes a letter to Heidi to catch up.

Barney is on the verge of bankruptcy.

Ria calls Rosemary to get information on Danny's situation.

Rosemary meets with potential buyers for her business but refuses their offer.

Danny meets Barney at Quentin's. Barney says they have to sell everything, including Tara Road. Danny and Barney argue. Barney leaves and sticks Danny with the bill. Rosemary is in the restaurant and goes to Danny's aid.



Annie and Brian meet Sheila's kids. Sean also likes Annie.

Annie and Hubie argue about Marilyn. Annie likes Marilyn; Hubie says she is crazy and horrible.

Marilyn speaks to Colm about Caroline. Colm says he has Caroline at the restaurant to keep an eye on her. Colm reveals that Monto is the one who supplies Caroline with heroin.

Barney tells Mona about his troubles. Danny plans to fly to Connecticut to tell Ria in person.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Marilyn continues to become involved in the community. She surprises herself by approaching Colm about Caroline. Marilyn offers to help with placing Caroline in a rehab center if Caroline is willing to go. Colm believes Caroline is ready.

Danny continues to fall apart. Bernadette is surprisingly comforting. Barney continues to be elusive which hurts Danny on a personal level. Danny goes to Rosemary for a business loan. Rosemary always says no to friends asking for money. Danny tries to use their relationship to get his own way but fails.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Danny is on his way to the airport when he sees Rosemary. Rosemary takes Danny to the airport. Things are a bit strained between them.

Danny arrives in Stoneyfield. Ria and the children are happy to see him.

Barney tells Mona everything about the business and how he is going bankrupt. Mona says she has never cared about being rich. Mona reveals that she has saved and invested money over the years and can bail Barney out of the mess he is in at present. Mona makes a list of demands of Barney which include giving up Polly and the business. Mona also insists on selling the mansion for a smaller house, giving up Polly's flat and the dress shop, returning Tara Road to Danny and Ria, and paying off all debtors. Barney reluctantly agrees.

Hilary decides that she wants to move. There is some information about trees given to Hilary by Mrs. Connors the psychic. Hilary asks Nora to live with her and Martin.

Greg arrives in Ireland. Marilyn is surprised and thrilled. Greg is happy to see his wife and her changed attitudes.

Finola calls Danny to say that Bernadette is in the hospital and will most likely lose the baby. Danny prepares to fly home.

Annie and Brian return early from Sheila's to see Danny. Annie pouts about having to leave Sean.

Danny tells the family he is broke and that Tara Road will be sold.

Danny goes to see Bernadette after returning to Ireland. Finola is with her. Bernadette has had a miscarriage. Bernadette wants assurance that Danny still loves her.

A friend of Colm's from AA tells Colm that there will be a raid at the restaurant. Colm makes arrangements with the police to catch Monto and his cohorts. Caroline is safe in rehab. Monto is smug and belligerent.

Marilyn tells Rosemary that Ria plans to open a shop when she returns to Dublin. Rosemary applauds Ria's plans but refuses to help. Marilyn makes it very clear that Rosemary will help or she will tell Ria about Rosemary and Danny's long time affair.

Jack and Gertie continue to fight. Jack approaches all of Gertie's clients to ask if she is really cleaning for them. Rosemary denies Gertie's claims. Shortly after Jack leaves Tara Road he is struck by a truck and is killed on impact.



Chapter 8 Analysis

In this chapter, karma is key. Danny's life continues to get worse by the day. Barney will be saved by Mona but Danny has lost his job and the two houses will have to be sold. Rosemary has all but ended their relationship. Danny can also see that Ria is blossoming since her trip to America and has plans to launch a catering business. Ria is bound to be a success which was predicted by the psychic.

Rosemary is also receiving her share of karma as her betrayal of Ria is going to cost her in the way of money and effort regarding Ria's new business.

Barney's karma is set into motion as well. Mona is a very savvy woman which surprises Barney and others. Mona holds the purse strings and is determined to call the shots from now on.

Bernadette is feeling distraught and is sure Danny will leave her but Danny assures her that this is not so.

Greg and Marilyn stand a very good chance of repairing their marriage now that Marilyn has been able to let go of some of the guilt.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Polly, Nora, Colm and Marilyn go to Gertie to tell her the news about Jack. Gertie is in shock and denial. Gertie begins to sing Jack's praises. No one has the heart to shatter Gertie's delusions at this point. Ria and Rosemary receive word that Jack is dead. Ria plans to fly home immediately to be with her friend. Annie balks at leaving early until she learns that the Maines will be flying on the same plane back to Dublin.

Rosemary calls Danny to tell him about Marilyn's blackmail. Danny tells Rosemary it's over between them.

Annie and Brian say good bye to their new friends. Hubie is sad that Annie will be so far away. Zach is excited about plans to visit next year. Ria says goodbye to her new friends and each is sad to see her go back to Ireland.

The plane back to Dublin hits bad weather. Ria thinks they will miss the funeral. In the end, Sheila, Ria and the kids make it to the church in time for the service.

Danny tells Bernadette that he will go to Jack's funeral.

Gertie says everyone is being very kind to her at this difficult time.

Ria meets Marilyn. The children are happy to see her.

Mona speaks to Gertie about Polly. Mona says Polly should be decorated by the mayor since it was Polly's moving van that killed Jack.

Ria and Mona have a long talk. Although Barney's estate will not require Tara Road to be sold, Danny's work situation will force the house to be put on the market. Ria talks about knowing that her life with Danny is truly over.

Sean tells Annie that he might approach Gertie about staying in Ireland and going to school. Annie is cautious but hopeful.

Marilyn changes her plans to stay with Ria for a few more days.

It is arranged that Sean will stay in Dublin. Gertie says she will be fine with the insurance policy and the launderette.

Danny comes to the house to talk about selling it. Danny suggests that Ria sell it with Colm's help and they will all find new places to live.

Ria and Marilyn spend time together as old friends. It is mentioned that they see Kitty who is now pregnant.



Several women go to find out that she has disappeared literally overnight. Hilary says her work is done.

Marilyn and Ria both find that the experience has greatly changed their lives and that things are definitely looking up.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Rosemary sees the errors of her ways. Mona continues to speak her mind for the first time in many years.

Danny continues to suffer for his misdeeds and says that Ria will have to sell the house. This continues to give Ria power that she was previously denied.

Colm's business continues to grow, as does Gertie's launderette. Almost everyone believes that Gertie will finally have a worthwhile and happy life now that Jack is dead.

Ria and Marilyn have developed a fast but deep friendship. The women realize what a fortuitous turn of events have occurred since they switched houses. For the first time in a long time, both women feel that everything will be just fine.



Characters

Ria Johnson Lynch

Ria Johnson Lynch is the main character in the story. Ria is the younger of two daughters to Nora Johnson. Ria has been raised to be a good upstanding girl with good manners and strict morals. Ria has self esteem issues and always compares herself to others. First she is compared to her older sister Hilary and then to her lifelong friend, Rosemary. Ria's self esteem issue is reflected in her appearance.

Ria meets Danny Lynch and falls in love at first sight. Surprising to Ria, Danny falls in love with her instead of the vivacious Rosemary. Ria devotes herself entirely to Danny, almost to the point of obsession.

Ria becomes pregnant. After Danny leaves the real estate agency, Ria stays until the situation becomes uncomfortable. Ria goes to work at Polly's a dress rental shop. Ria befriends Gertie, an abused woman and co-worker. Ria also meets Polly and learns that she is Barney's mistress. This upsets Ria's sense of morality since she believes in marriage and also likes Mona, Barney's wife.

Ria works diligently to create a beautiful home at Tara Road. Much like Mona, Ria buries her head in the sand when it becomes apparent that Danny is cheating on her. It takes Danny's admission and request for divorce to force Ria to come into her own and become the person she was always meant to be.

Rosemary Ryan

Rosemary Ryan is a vivacious woman. Ria and Rosemary meet at the real estate agency and become fast friends. Ria is envious of Rosemary's flair and style. All the men want to be with Rosemary but Rosemary is not an easy woman. Like Ria, Rosemary dreams of being married with children. Rosemary is more ambitious than Ria and becomes a highly successful and powerful businesswoman.

Underneath all of Rosemary's polish, she is much like Ria in that she wants to be loved and accepted.

Rosemary is often the voice of practicality and reason when it comes to situations with Ria and Gertie. Rosemary is protective and is not afraid to stand her ground.

Danny Lynch

Danny Lynch is a charming, charismatic man who is married to Ria.



Barney McCarthy

Barney McCarthy is Danny's boss and mentor.

Mona McCarthy

Mona McCarthy is the wife of Barney McCarthy.

Polly

Polly is the owner of the dress rental shop. She is Barney's mistress.

Gertie

Gertie is a friend to Ria. This woman is abused by her husband.

Hilary Johnson

Hilary Johnson is Ria's sister.

Nora Johnson

Nora Johnson is Ria's mother.

Marilyn

Marilyn is the woman with whom Ria trades homes.



Objects/Places

Tara Road

Tara Road is the neighborhood where Ria and Danny Lynch live. The first time Ria sees Tara Road is when Danny takes her by to show her the house that his friend Sean had inherited from an uncle. The house is beautiful but in need of major repair. Ria likes Tara Road immediately.

"Tara Road was very higgledy-piggledy. Big houses with gardens full of trees, small houses facing right on the street. No. 16 was a great old house, Danny said. Falling down, damp, shabby now. Poor Sean O'Brien's uncle must have been a bit of a no-hoper like Sean himself, it must have been a great house once." Chap. 1, p. 10

Danny tells Ria he dreams of owning the house on Tara Road. Danny is so enthusiastic that Ria also feels hope for the old house.

"'Look at the shape of the house,' Danny begged her. 'See how perfect the proportions are. It was built in 1870, a gentleman's residence.' The steps up to the hall door were huge blocks of granite. 'Look how even they were, they were perfectly matched.' The bow windows had all the original woodwork. 'Those shutters are over 100 years old. The leaded glass over the door has no cracks in it. This house was a jewel,' Danny Lynch said." Chap. 1, p. 17

Danny and Ria buy the house at 16 Tara Road and begin to fix it up. There is much to be done including buying new furniture, a great deal of cleaning, and general TLC. Ria also dreams of creating a fabulous garden. It is the ideal place to raise their family and to entertain friends.

Tudor Road

Ria goes to stay at the Vines' home at 1024 Tudor Road in Stoneyfield, Connecticut. Unlike the house on Tara Road, Tudor drive is neat and prim, almost to the point of being sterile. Marilyn has almost no photographs or personal effects in the house whereas Ria's home is with filled with photos, warmth and love. The house makes Ria wonder why Marilyn had chosen to leave for Ireland.

Stoneyfield is a quaint town and the house is not far from many amenities such as salons, hotels, and restaurants. It is also near the university where Greg and Marilyn work. The house is also situated next door to Carlotta's home. Ria looks forward to spending time in Marilyn's beautiful garden and enjoying the swimming pool.



Dublin, Ireland

The story takes place in and around Dublin.

Real Estate Agency

Ria and Danny work at a real estate agency in the beginning of the story.

Printing Company

Rosemary Ryan owns a printing company.

The Country

Danny Lynch's parents live in the country.

Barney and Mona's House

Lavish parties are held and business associates are entertained at Barney and Mona's house.

Polly's

Ria and Gertie work at Polly's dress rental shop.

Laundrette

Gertie operates a laundrette.

Quentin's

Quentin's is a popular restaurant visited by the important people in Dublin.



Themes

Tara Road

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Friendship

Friendship is one of the main themes of Tara Road by Maeve Binchy. Ria Johnson Lynch starts out as a quiet and unassuming woman. After Ria marries and starts a family, she is determined to be surrounded by friends and family. The house on Tara Road becomes a gathering place for Saturday get togethers as well as parties. Danny is not entirely happy about this situation.

Ria is a loyal friend who often helps others including Colm Barry and Gertie. Ria is the one everyone calls when in need. When Ria goes to America, she takes the trait with her. People who had not become close to Marilyn soon become close to Ria and doors are opened to new friendships and loyalties.

While Marilyn is in Dublin, she begins to experience a little of what Ria's life must be like regarding friendships. While no one is intrusive, Ria's friends make themselves available and eventually win over the previously isolated woman.



The experience of switching houses is invaluable to Ria and Marilyn and soon they develop a lasting friendship.

Betrayal

Betrayal is one of the main themes of *Tara Road* by Maeve Binchy. There are several major betrayals on behalf of some of the characters. The first is the betrayal by Danny Lynch of his company when he undercuts them to sell Barney McCarthy's house.

Although it is not learned until much later in the book, the reader learns that Rosemary Ryan has been betraying Ria for years by having a lasting affair with Danny. It is likely that Ria will never realize this betrayal since Marilyn certainly will not tell. In addition, the relationship ends badly.

Danny also betrays Ria. First he has an affair with Orla King. It is not stated how many other women there are in Danny's life. It is clear that Barney's betrayal of his wife, Mona, has had an impact on Danny. Ria learns of the betrayal when Danny announces that he is going to be with Bernadette, a 22 year old woman who has become pregnant. Ria seems as if she will never recover from this particular betrayal.

Some of the betrayals have been predicted - first by Hilary and Nora who distrust Danny and by Mrs. Connor, the psychic, who says that Rosemary is not a good friend.

Karma seems to wreak havoc on those who have betrayed others and those who are loyal thrive.

Style

Point of View

The point of view used in *Tara Road* by Maeve Binchy is third person omniscient. This point of view works well throughout the book since there are several components and underlying factors that would not be revealed otherwise, particularly when it comes to the relationships between the characters. The story itself is rather complex and only third person omniscient would allow the reader to follow and understand the activities of all of the characters plus the state of affairs in Ireland at the time. It also allows for the reader to follow and understand actions and thoughts of other characters in the book as well as those events of which one single character has no knowledge.

While the first person point of view might have been interesting when coming from the characters in their time of confusion, third person conveys the entire story and not just the subjective opinions of the characters. It also permits the reader to take part in the journey and development of each character in the story.

Setting

Tara Road is the neighborhood where Ria and Danny Lynch live. The first time Ria sees Tara Road is when Danny takes her by to show her the house that his friend Sean had inherited from an uncle. The house is beautiful but in need of major repair. Ria likes Tara Road immediately.

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Language and Meaning

The language and meaning used throughout *Tara Road* by Maeve Binchy reflects on the times in a number of ways. It is clear that the people in the stories live in Ireland as they speak of particular events and fashions of the time. Binchy does not use a great deal of slang or any language that would date the work in a negative way or confuse the reader who might not be familiar with certain Irish terms.

Binchy is a master of language and is not afraid to exercise her vocabulary. There is a marked absence of sex, violence, and vulgarity throughout the stories and it is rare to see any use of profanity despite circumstances where it might be appropriate given the nature of betrayal and animosity between the characters. In the places where Irish terms and references are made, it tends to add an air of authenticity to the story and some old world charm. Since Binchy is Irish, this language rings true and is effective.

It is easy to see the progression of the work, both in structure and language. The language is more formal in the beginning of the collection and becomes more personal as the characters develop toward the middle and to the end.

Structure

The work is chronological in nature. It is comprised of 476 pages, broken into nine chapters. The shortest chapter is 31 pages in length; the longest chapter is 78 pages in length; the average number of pages per chapter is 66 pages.

The story begins with the author describing the teenage lives of Ria and Hilary Johnson. Ria is 16; Hilary is the elder sister. The girls talk about fellows. Hilary is much more experienced with dating and is a bit promiscuous. Ria is curious. Hilary tells Ria to keep her voice down because their mam (mother) will hear them and then no one will be allowed out of the house. Hilary tells Ria that her time will come. The girls also talk about their future plans. Ria wants to travel the world.

The girls' work history is also examined. Ria gets a job at a real estate firm. She does not know the business but is willing to learn and likes the job as well as her co-workers. One of Ria's co-workers, Rosemary Ryan, becomes a fast friend. Ria is envious of Rosemary's flair and style. All the men want to be with Rosemary but Rosemary is not an easy woman.

Ria learns that a new member of the team will be arriving at their office. The man, Danny Lynch, is attractive and charismatic. Ria falls for him immediately. To Ria's surprise, Danny falls for her instead of the vivacious Rosemary.

Ria and Danny marry and begin their life at Tara Road. There are many tumultuous moments while they raise their family. Danny becomes very successful and also begins to cheat which ends the marriage. Ria and an American woman named Marilyn decide

to exchange places, each experiencing a new life. During that time, both woman learn about themselves and step onto the path of becoming their true selves.



Quotes

"Ria's mother had always been fond of film stars. It was a matter of sadness to her that Clark Gable had died on the day Ria was born." Chap. 1, p. 1

"Ria was prepared to change the dream, not Danny. He didn't fret or complain. He just wouldn't let go on the idea." Chap. 1, p. 20

"Hilary Moran never fully forgave Danny Lynch for not being with his wife that night." Chap. 1, p. 53

"Danny looked at her in amazement. His own face crumpled as he realized the extent of her loneliness and how much she had felt excluded." Chap. 2, p. 87

"Sheila Maine wrote from America to say that the papers were full of great opportunities in Ireland, and the numbers of people who were relocating there." Chap. 2, p. 119

"Ria was annoyed. She had hoped that tonight she and Danny could have a drink together in the kitchen and they might talk about another baby." Chap. 3, p. 155

"Apparently it is going to happen but I wanted to tell you it's not quite as sad and awful as it seemed last night." Chap. 3, p. 195

"Ria lost all sense of time. Sometimes when she went to bed she awoke thinking it was morning and realizing that she had only been asleep for half an hour." Chap. 4, p. 204

"She had coped by pushing these things out of her mind." Chap. 4, p. 232

"Gertie had arranged to be in Tara Road when Marilyn arrived." Chap. 4, p. 266

"It had always been impossible to resist him." Chap. 7, p. 403

"Ria forced herself to think about things like this rather than about the man who was sleeping in the room next door." Chap. 8, p. 426

Topics for Discussion

What is your opinion on Ria's early relationship with Danny? Do you think they moved too fast? What were the opinions of Nora, Hilary, and Rosemary?

Do you think buying Tara Road was a wise or foolish investment?

Describe Danny Lynch. What are his strengths and his weaknesses?

Compare and contrast Ria and Rosemary.

Why is it so important for the women to be married and to have families? Is it a cultural ideal, generational requirement or something else?

Discuss the relationships between Polly, Barney and Mona. What is Ria's opinion on the situation? What is Danny's opinion?

Discuss Gertie's situation. Why won't Gertie leave Jack? Do you feel Ria is helping or enabling the situation? What is Rosemary's opinion?

Describe Marilyn Vine and her situation.