

The Widow Study Guide

The Widow by Fiona Barton

(c)2017 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Widow Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-10.....	5
Chapters 11-21.....	10
Chapters 22-31.....	15
Chapters 32-42.....	20
Chapters 43-54.....	25
Characters.....	31
Symbols and Symbolism.....	34
Settings.....	36
Themes and Motifs.....	37
Styles.....	41
Quotes.....	43

Plot Summary

The following version of the book was used to create this guide: Barton, Fiona. *The Widow*. New American Library, February 2016.

The Widow is a nonlinear psychological thriller that takes place in various neighborhoods of London spanning the years 2006-2010. The novel begins with first-person, present-tense narration from Jean Taylor as she describes answering the door to a reporter from the Daily Post named Kate Waters. It is June 9, 2010, and Kate has come to speak with Jean about the recent death of her husband Glen, and Glen's involvement in a kidnapping that took place on October 2, 2006.

Chapters in the novel alternate between the perspectives of different characters and different timelines. Each chapter heading indicates who is the focus of the chapter and the date of the events described.

In 2006, Jean and Glen Taylor were a married couple in their late thirties living a seemingly normal existence. On October 2, a little girl named Bella Elliott vanished from her front yard in a nearby neighborhood. Her mother, Dawn Elliott, last saw Bella alive when she was playing in the front yard of her house. No witnesses observed the kidnapping.

After a series of false leads, detectives were tipped off that a blue delivery van, driven by Glen Taylor, was seen in the area at the time of Bella's disappearance. Glen Taylor became the prime suspect in the investigation, led by Detective Bob Sparkes.

Evidence was collected and charges were brought against Glen, but the prosecution failed in its efforts to attain a conviction. Following his acquittal, Glen sued the court and was awarded a settlement based on his experiences in jail and during the trial. Even after the failed trial, Glen and Jean were relentlessly pursued by reporters seeking a story about the couple and their involvement in Bella's kidnapping.

Kate Waters is a reporter for The Daily Post who has followed the story of Bella's disappearance since it happened. After Glen Taylor is killed by a bus in June of 2010, Kate comes to interview Jean. Through the course of Kate's interviews, she comes to learn a great deal about the lives of Glen and Jean Taylor and the events surrounding the kidnapping, the trial, and the aftermath.

Jean is revealed to be an unreliable narrator, and the reader is forced to determine what Jean's truth is. The narrative is further complicated due to the fact that chapters are revealed in a non-chronological format, leading the reader through a winding story told by many different characters involved in the investigation. In addition to Jean's first-person narrative, chapters alternate to follow the perspectives of Kate Waters, Detective Bob Sparkes, Bella's mother Dawn Elliot, and Glen Taylor himself. Through these different perspectives, the reader is able to see the evolution of the characters and to determine the events surrounding the kidnapping, rape, and murder of Bella Elliot.

Author Fiona Barton relates *The Widow* with a unique narrative style filled with twists and turns, questionable motives, red herrings, and characters filled with secrets. The novel explores themes of obsession, manipulation, mental illness, and family.



Chapters 1-10

Summary

In Chapter 1, the author denotes that it is June 9, 2010. The first-person limited narration comes from the perspective of Jean Taylor and is related in the present tense. As the chapter opens, Daily Post reporter Kate Waters comes to the door of Jean Taylor in an attempt to have an interview with her regarding the recent death of Jean's husband, Glen Taylor. Jean relates that one week prior, her husband was hit by a bus and killed instantly. Jean describes the experience of being visited by reporters as something that has happened over and over, and usually ends with the reporter leaving after failing to speak with her. To Jean's own surprise, she finds herself allowing Kate inside. Jean says that if Glen had been there, he would have never let her inside the house.

In Chapter 2, Jean gives Kate some background information about her history with Glen. She says they met at a bus stop and fell in love. Glen was very protective of her and critical of how much Jean's mom relied on her. She tells Kate about how lovey-dovey and romantic Glen was, always bringing her flowers and gifts. While Jean is telling these stories, she narrates to the reader that she can feel the hysteria rising. She feels like laughing but it comes out like a sob, and Kate consoles her. Glen worked at a bank, and ended up leaving in order to start his own business. The reader learns that over the years, dozens of reporters have come to the door, but Kate is the first one who has ever been let in, since Glen would see to it that they would leave.

In Chapter 3, the narrative shifts perspective to focus on Kate. The third-person narrator centered on Kate's perspective describes her becoming nervous that Jean will not give her the information she needs. She worries that by taking a brief break to use the restroom, she might miss out on important information that Jean might spill. Kate receives a phone call, asking her how far along she is on the story and pressing her for details.

In Chapter 4, the narrative returns to Jean's first-person perspective. Jean speaks to the reader about her suspicions involving Kate, and her indecisive feelings towards her. She mentions that Kate seems like someone she could like, but it might just be an act. After all, Kate is a journalist trying to get details on a hot story, so she may just be saying anything in order to get what she needs. Jean tells Kate about her career as a hairstylist. She thought it would be more glamorous than it was, and all the women at the salon just loved Glen.

Kate tells Jean that the only way to get rid of the press is to give her the whole story, and then they will all go away forever. Jean keeps mentioning certain things that Glen would have flipped out about, had he still been alive. After Kate screams and swears at a reporter outside, Jean says that Glen would have never allowed a woman to speak like that inside his house.



Jean talks again to the reader about Glen and his computer. She says that he would disappear on it for hours, talking on the camera and acting in a very secretive manner. When she would ask what he would do on there for so long, he would deflect, saying that he was just talking to friends. She talks about lying for him a couple times, vouching for him at his job by saying he was too sick to go in, or telling the credit card company he had lost his card so that they would write off some of his withdrawals.

In Chapter 5, the narrative steps back in time to October 2nd, 2006, and focuses on the point of view of detective Bob Sparkes. Bob Sparkes received the call from Dawn Elliott, telling him that her little girl, Bella Elliott had been taken. She was in the yard playing with her cat just after her nap, and had now vanished. She gave her address of 44A Manor Road, Westland. Sparkes asked Dawn questions regarding Bella's disappearance, and she described her appearance. She said that she was only out of her sight for a few minutes before she went missing. The father of the child was a man that Dawn had a brief affair with and had not been seen since before Bella was born. Dawn claimed to have been making tea for Bella, while watching her from the kitchen, which looks out over the backyard. The next thing she knew, Bella was gone.

Chapter 6 returns to Jean's first-person perspective on June 9, 2010. Kate lets her photographer into Jean's home, assuring her not to worry. She says that Mick has come to take them to a hotel, somewhere quiet to escape from all the other reporters and chaos. Jean tells the reader about all the times Glen would be coming and going from their house and he would be harassed constantly by hecklers and reporters. Jean, Kate, and Mick sneak out the back door to avoid any confrontation. Jean talks about how their neighbors had told the police that Jean and Glen were the types of people who kept to themselves.

In Chapter 7, the story goes back to follow detective Bob Sparkes' point of view on October 5, 2006. There had been sightings about Bella all over the world during the first 48 hours. All of them proved to be false leads. The last person to see her other than her mother Dawn was at the news agents shop down the road. The visit was recorded on a cheap, grainy security camera. Dawn's mom had spoken to her mother on the phone at 2:17, when she heard her granddaughter singing along to "Bob the Builder." She asked to speak to Bella, and Dawn told her that Bella had just run off to fetch a toy. The next 68 minutes was all going off of Dawn's word. The next-door neighbor, Margaret Emerson, went to her car at 3:25 p.m. and was certain that the front garden was uninhabited. The editor decided to advertise a reward of \$20,000 in the newspaper for finding Bella.

Chapter 8, takes reader back to October 11th, 2006, and focuses on the perspective of Kate Waters. Kate entered the house of Dawn Elliott to interview her about Bella just after her disappearance. Dawn appeared disoriented and would not speak up until Kate mentioned things about her own children. Kate focused on getting Dawn to talk about Bella personally and to touch on certain subjects that she was interested in, such as bath-time games and animals. Later, she left Dawn her card and told her to call her anytime she needed to talk. Dawn Elliott began ringing her the next day, telling her about the leads she had heard and Kate was thrilled by the attention.



The narrative in Chapter 9 returns to Jean's first-person perspective on June 9, 2010. Mick and Kate take Jean off to a big, expensive hotel so that no one will be able to find her. Kate talks about how her honeymoon hotel was not even as nice as the posh place that they are staying. Kate books Jean a massage to help her relax, and has bought her all kinds of expensive clothing. She does this to try and warm Jean up to talking more about Glen.

Jean starts talking about how much of a shock it was to have Glen get hit by a bus right in front of her. She said that everyone was extremely kind to her until realizing who it was. Since Glen had been suspected of taking the missing girl Bella, it was all anybody spoke about around town. Jean talks to herself, saying that if it were her child, she would never have let her play out in the yard by herself, calling her mother careless. She talks about the police accusing Glen, and his face going blank. Jean was told that Glen was in the area making a delivery around the same time and place where Bella was taken, but she told herself that did not mean anything. Jean talks about going driving at Glen's job with him only once.

Jean describes being back in the hospital after Glen was killed. She says that Detective Bob Sparkes came in and was clearly disappointed that Glen had died without the case having been solved and without his having gotten a confession from him. Bob Sparkes sat next to Jean and told her to please talk about everything she knew involving the Bella case now that Glen was gone. Jean reiterated to Sparkes that she knew nothing about Bella and neither did Glen.

Chapter 10 steps back in time to October 12, 2006, with the narrative focus on Bob Sparkes's perspective. Sparkes was trying to figure out exactly how Bella was taken. There were Skittles candies found on the road, and the saliva on the candy matched Bella's DNA. Dawn told the police that Bella never had Skittles before. They were creating a television reconstruction of the event, hiring local actors to play Bella and her mother. Lee Chambers, a middle-aged, divorced mini cab driver was arrested for flashing in a local playground. He continued to tell people that he was just peeing, and they caught a glimpse of him at the last moment. When they asked what he was doing on October the 2nd, he panicked when he realized what they were asking him. He was horrified and told them that he had absolutely nothing to do with Bella's disappearance. The detectives interviewed Chambers' ex-wife, and she told them that he could not keep it in his pants, but she did not think he would hurt a child. They continued to interview Lee Chambers and in the end they all he agreed that he was a horrible person, but not necessarily a child abductor.

Analysis

The first notable aspects of the narrative in *The Widow* include the constantly-changing perspectives and the nonlinear structure of the story. Both of these stylistic choices help to develop the tone of a mystery thriller and call into question the reliability of Jean as the novel's only first-person narrator. While the chapters that focus on Jean's perspective are related from her first-person narration, the chapters focusing on Kate



and on Detective Sparkes are related from a third-person limited-perspective narrator. The author clearly indicates the date of each chapter in its opening, and this helps the reader to understand the jumps forward and backward through time as Jean and Glen's story is revealed.

In Chapter 1, the reader is introduced to the protagonist and first-person narrator of some chapters of *The Widow*, Jean Taylor. After describing her husband being run over by a bus, Jean simply says, "No more of his nonsense" (3). The reader is introduced to the notion that Jean is secretly happy her husband was killed, and there is a heavy back-story to elaborate on this circumstance forthcoming in the narrative. Jean's husband, Glen, is the story's antagonist.

During Chapter 2, this bubble of hysteria that Jean feels tells the reader that there is something else, other than sadness and mourning, happening in this situation. The reader is given the impression that Glen was a very controlling husband. Jean describes their early days together, and of how she once brushed crumbs off the table and onto the floor with her hand and caught Glen with his eyes going narrow while clenching his teeth. This example indicates that Glen had some control issues. In another instance, Jean says, "He would go quiet if I went against him. I hated that. Felt I'd disappointed him" (7).

In Chapter 3, with the narrative shifting to focus on Kate, the reader is given a glimpse into Kate's inner thoughts and her central objective in the novel: she desperately wants to get this story. Kate is one of the four main characters of the story. The reader follows her viewpoint of the story in several chapters. The reader learns in a later chapter that Kate has been following and reporting on the story of Bella Elliott's disappearance since it occurred.

Chapter 4 returns to Jean's first-person narration and reveals more of her thoughts on Kate and more of her back-story with Glen. The reader learns that Jean is not dumb, and she knows exactly what Kate is up to. Jean says "Glen would never allow a woman to speak like that inside his house" (10), furthering the idea that Glen may have been a controlling and sexist husband to Jean. Glen's secrecy involving his computer is revealed in this chapter, which gives the impression that he very much had something to hide. Add in his occasional lying and it is easy to see that this would continue to escalate.

Chapter 5 describes the call to police by Dawn Elliott, who is the mother of the missing little girl, Bella Elliott. Bob Sparkes, the detective, is another main character whose viewpoint is portrayed in several chapters. Here, the reader also learns based on the date of the call that Bella went missing on October 2nd, 2006, approximately four years before Glen is killed by the bus and before the main timeline with Jean and Kate's interview.

In Chapter 8, the reader follows the perspective of Kate Waters on October 11th, 2006. This flashback from the main timeline (with Kate interviewing Jean) indicates to the reader that Kate has been involved in the missing child case for several years. Likewise,



Dawn Elliot's state of shock is illustrated through her disillusionment. She is clearly devastated over Bella's whereabouts and cannot think straight to answer questions.

In Chapter 9, Jean gives the reader a glimpse into what her life was like with Glen, and how it has changed after his recent death. The reader gets the idea that Glen must have been a very bad person if everyone at the accident site suddenly stopped being nice to her when they realized who had been hit. Kate and Mick taking Jean to the fancy hotel and booking her massages and other pampering demonstrate the tactics they are willing to go to in order to make Jean as comfortable and open as possible. The setting of the hotel itself is symbolic of Kate's willingness to do anything she can do in order to obtain the story.

In Chapter 10, the author introduces a red herring with the character of Lee Chambers. Chambers is a widely-known pervert who has been arrested on more than one occasion for dropping his pants on playgrounds. Lee comes off as a twisted man with no regard towards others, but the police are not sure he would be capable of kidnapping a child.

Discussion Question 1

What is your initial opinion on Glen's personality? What clues indicate this from the text?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Jean is so reluctant to speak with Kate after Glen's passing?

Discussion Question 3

There have been many reporters who have tried and failed to get an interview with Jean. What personal qualities about Kate give her the edge to getting inside Jean's head?

Vocabulary

interrogation, prickled, mooned, posh, dailies, unruly, frayed, immaculate, mock, tethered, scrounger, meticulous, diversifying, stasis, ostentatious, wellies, relinquishing, groveling, bollocking, tweedy



Chapters 11-21

Summary

In Chapter 11, the narrative steps back to November 2, 2006, with a focus on Detective Sparkes's point of view. The reader is introduced to Stan Spencer, a man who is described as unusually excited and involved with the Bella case. Stan was an avid member of neighborhood watch, and tended to thoroughly watch the neighborhood and write down his observations each day. On the day Bella went missing, he claimed to have seen a long-haired man in the neighborhood. The detectives realized that there were pages missing from Stan's notebook, and on this particular day was where a page was torn out. Stan was very embarrassed, and they asked him again if he actually saw this long-haired man. Stan finally admitted that he just wanted to help the case and did not actually see anyone. Due to his input, they had wasted a whole month chasing this fictitious person.

Chapter 12 continues to focus on Detective Sparkes and is dated April 7, 2007. The third-person narrator indicates that it took another five months for the detectives to get another break in Bella's disappearance. The detectives got a call from a delivery firm in South London saying that one of their blue vans had been making deliveries on the south coast the day Bella disappeared. The manager, Alan Johnstone, told the story of how his wife was following the Bella case and could not believe it when he told her the old vans were blue. He said the driver's name was Mike Doonan, who had now left the company. He had a terrible back problem and could not walk. Doonan had deliveries in these areas on October 2nd. He dropped the first off at 2:05 and did not record the second. They did not see him come back; he just left the van out on the forecourt. The policemen visited Mike Doonan to hear his side of the story. He answered every question flawlessly, but in a manner that was overly friendly and creepy. When they mentioned child pornography, Mike said that he did not even own a computer. Just as they were about to leave, Mike Doonan asked if they were off to see Glen Taylor now since he did a delivery in the same area that day. Mike Doonan claimed that Glen Taylor offered to do the second drop that day since Mike had a doctor's appointment. After the police left, Doonan went into his neighbors' garage and pulled out pornographic pictures of children he had been keeping ever since he was unable to go to his local internet cafe.

In Chapter 13, the narrative continues to follow Detective Sparkes on April 7, 2007. The police arrived at Glen Taylor's house. When they told him why they were there, the color drained from his face and he took a step back. They told him his friend Doonan told them he was in the area for a delivery. He told them he was not in South Hampton but was instead in Winchester, and that Jean would tell them he was home by 4:00 p.m. Jean was left crying while police searched the house looking for Bella.

In Chapter 14, the narrative returns to Thursday June 10, 2010, and is related from Jean's first-person point of view. Jean is in the hotel room with Kate and Mick. Kate and



Mick order room service along with wine, and try to coax Jean into being extremely comfortable and telling everything. Instead, Jean stands up, says she is tired, and goes to her room. She thinks about the day and goes over what happened to her and Glen in the past. She thinks back to telling the police that Glen was home at 4:00, even though he was home later. He told Jean he did a little private job while he was out and if the boss found out he would get fired. Jean talks about how they stopped answering the door, as there were so many reporters constantly knocking. Jean thinks about how she was let go from her job at the hair salon so they would not be associated with the incident. She constantly reassures herself that she knows it was not Glen's fault, and that it was all a terrible mistake.

In Chapter 15, it is back on April 7, 2007 and the narrative follows the point of view of Detective Sparkes. The detective was interviewing Glen Taylor. Glen was answering questions when Bob Sparkes asked if his mileage was recorded. Glen Taylor said yes, but began making up excuses as to why he might have been in traffic that day and it took him longer to get back. He gave several excuses for returning home to Jean for a cup of tea, to tell her about supper, and about his phone dying. The detective asked if Glen liked children in a sexual way, and Glen retorted that that was disgusting. Sparkes asked why he chose his job of driving when he had a great job at the bank. Glen Taylor started to lie but the Bob Sparkes told him that he already spoke to his previous boss who said he was fired for inappropriate use of computers. Glen said it was a setup, and anyone could have had access to those computers.

Chapter 16 returns to June 10, 2010, narrated by Jean. Jean is thinking back to good memories she has, and how perfect her house and life was in general. She thinks about how Glen and his father George never really got along, although he and Glen's mom would come for Sunday get-togethers every week. Glen's mom Mary would always question Jean about having children, but eventually stopped when she suspected Glen had a problem that would not allow them to have children. George once made a cruel joke about Glen's infertility at the dinner table. Jean reveals that she had always desperately wanted a baby. Sooner or later, the family lunches gradually changed to only on holidays.

Chapter 17 takes the reader back to April 8, 2007 and follows the point of view of Detective Sparkes. Bob Sparkes came to Jean Taylor's house and told her they needed to talk. He told her that there were pornographic images featuring children on both Glen's personal computer and his office computer at the bank. Jean recounted to him the events on the day Bella went missing. She said that she saw the 4 o'clock news with Glen and that he said he hoped the police find her. Glen suspected it was a couple who could not have children and probably took her overseas. Jean also told him about their fertility problems. Bob Sparkes asked Jean whether or not she ever went in the van with Glen. She said only once, last Christmas to Canterbury.

In Chapter 18, Bob Sparkes's narrative continues on Sunday, April 8, 2007. Sparkes was back talking with Glen. Sparkes handed Glen a book that he found in the Taylor household that was filled with clippings of babies and small children. Glen denied any association with the book. He told Bob that it must belong to the previous owners. Bob



suspected it might belong to Jean. Glen realized that it did belong to Jean, and that she had been going on about this fantasy life and an obsession with babies for ages. Glen lost his job later in the week.

Chapter 19 is set on Saturday, April 21, 2007, and is narrated in the past-tense from Jean's first-person point of view. Jean discusses Glen's parents, who came by the weekend after he was fired. His mother was crying non-stop while his father was outraged that Glen got himself involved with the police. Jean's parents came over next. Jean's mom was a very anxious lady who had trouble coping with ordinary things. Her father would help soothe her. Glen found Jean looking at a magazine with babies and exploded with anger at her. She talks about how she had three scrapbooks filled with pictures, and she wrote "My Babies" on each of them. She talks about which ones were her favorite babies, and how angry Glen would get.

Jean talks about her next-door neighbor Lisa who she had become friends with. Lisa was pregnant when she moved in with Andy a couple months after the Taylors. Jean and Lisa would always talk about babies, nurseries, local schools, etc. Eventually, Andy left Lisa and she was alone with two babies at home. Jean discusses going to the doctor and finding out that Glen almost had a zero sperm count. At first, he was devastated but later, he wanted to move on from the discussion. Lisa and Jean became very close, and Lisa told her that she could be her kid's "other mother." Jean persuaded Glen to build a gate between their houses so the children could run in and out. Jean talks about watching them fall asleep and obsessing over their every move, and Glen telling her that she was being creepy. Jean details her growing obsession with babies, and how the truth was that Glen was not enough for her. She needed a child. Glen told Jean that he drove her to look for porn. He told her it is a medical condition to be addicted to porn.

In Chapter 20, the narrative returns to the present-tense related from Jean's point of view on June 11, 2010. Jean talks about Glen's trial. He continued to tell Jean that it was no big deal, and that the case would be thrown out before he went to trial. However, that never happened.

In Chapter 21, is the narrative steps back to June 11, 2007, with a focus on Detective Sparkes. Bob Sparkes was continuing to investigate other possible suspects involved in the disappearance of Bella: Mike Doonan and Lee Chambers. He discovered that Doonan never showed up for his scheduled doctor's appointment. Bob Sparkes's wife Eileen told him that he was obsessed with this case. Bob started taking notice of children Bella's age everywhere he went, and it began taking over his life. He discussed the thought that Jean might be a suspect. He said that women who kidnap and kill children almost exclusively do it to their own children. He started to think that maybe Jean put Glen up to it. Detective Fry proposed the idea of catching Glen in the act by cat-fishing in internet chat rooms. They would pretend to be a woman in a chat room, knowing that Glen would not be able to stay away from it, and they would try to corner him into answering questions. They visited a psychologist, Dr. Jones, to discuss their plans.



Analysis

A second red herring is introduced through Stan Spencer when he comes into the picture as a neighborhood watch fellow who is overly excited about helping with the kidnapping case. Because of his desire to interfere, he fabricates a story about a man with long hair that he saw on the day Bella was kidnapped. After the police call him out on this fabrication, he is extremely embarrassed and the cops are disappointed in having wasted the entire month on this story brought about by Stan.

Tensions continue to mount with the new lead introduced by the delivery company manager in Chapter 12. The manager of the delivery company does not have the slightest inkling into how much this information might help detectives, but his revelation that it may have been his company's blue delivery van seen in the area of the kidnapping ultimately ends up leading investigators to Glen Taylor. The reader is introduced to Mike Doonan, another red herring, who comes off as a creepy and eclectic man. The descriptions used by the author in this chapter give the impression that if Mike is not guilty of kidnapping Bella, he is probably guilty of something sinister. Mike Doonan casually mentions to detectives that they should visit Glen Taylor next. He does this purposely to get back at Glen for getting him fired. The child pornography that Doonan takes out from the garage serves as a symbol reinforcing the themes of obsession and mental illness, as well as implicating this character and suggesting that he may, in fact, be guilty of kidnapping Bella.

In Chapter 13, the author explores the theme of guilt with the description of Glen's face when he realizes why the officers are there. The color completely drains from his face, meaning he may feel terrified, guilty, and/or shocked. Through this description, the reader sees that Glen likely never thought he would be caught. Jean's sincere sense of shock and her tears suggest to the reader that she does not have any idea what has happened.

Chapter 14 examines some of the sacrifices that Jean has made for Glen. After the trial, Jean lost her job at the hair salon because of Glen, something she clearly resents him for. Another revelation in this chapter is the fact that Jean lied when she gave a false alibi for her husband on the day of the kidnapping. This information indicates to the reader that Jean has not been completely honest and places her reliability as a narrator in question. At this point, Jean appears to be telling herself that Glen was not responsible for the kidnapping—showing the reader that she is somehow robotically repeating this to herself as a way of convincing herself that it is true.

Chapter 15 illustrates how Glen has begun slipping up on his story. The fact that he panics when the detective asks about his mileage shows that it is one piece of the puzzle that he did not think about covering for. The rest of the questions bring about canned answers, but this one stumps him.

In Chapter 16, the reader learns about Glen's sensitivity to the subject of his infertility. This evokes the recurring motif of children that appears throughout the narrative, and also illuminates the themes of obsession, mental illness, family, and manipulation. Glen



makes it a forbidden topic to ever discuss with Jean because she gets so upset, and the one time his father jokes about Glen being seedless, it causes the weekly dinners to come to an end and creates distance within the family.

In Chapter 17, the reader first sees Detective Sparkes and Jean interacting in the narrative. In this chapter, which follows Bob Sparkes's point of view, Jean is informed of the child porn on Glen's computer and is asked if she ever uses it. She says no, and is obviously thrown off about the topic. She informs Bob of everything she knows about the day of the kidnapping, only lying about the time when Glen came home.

In Chapter 18, the author expands her exploration of the theme of obsession through several circumstances: Glen's obsession with pornography and Jean's obsession with children. Bob is talking with Glen about the child porn and shows him the book of babies that was found in the house. This is the first moment that the reader realizes Jean might be mentally unstable and it further calls into question her reliability as a narrator. If the book belongs to her, there is something very odd about that sort of behavior.

In Chapter 21, the author further explores this theme through the character of Bob Sparkes. The reader observes Bob Sparkes's obsession with the Bella case causing trouble in his personal life. He throws around the idea the Jean might be a suspect, which is entirely believable after seeing her scrapbook full of babies.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Stan Spencer lie to the police? What are the repercussions of his lies?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Mike Doonan's reasoning for not being involved in the Bella case. What does he tell the police as his alibi?

Discussion Question 3

At this point in the story, who do you believe took Bella? Discuss the possible suspects and your reasoning.

Vocabulary

contemporaneous, quell, dismantled, magnolia, embellish, quarry, pantomime, scaffolder, nappies, paddling, insemination, wafting, warders, unshakable, dissertation, utilitarian, explicit, blokes, practicalities, entrapment



Chapters 22-31

Summary

Chapter 22 is related from Jean's first-person perspective on June 12, 2007, and the chapter is related in the present tense. It is Jean's 37th birthday. She talks about how she hates birthdays, since she will not get what she wants, which is a baby. Glen sings to her, kisses her and gives her a gift that she does not really care about. She talks about how back in April she went to the store to buy a card for Bella, as it would soon be her 3rd birthday, the first one since she's been missing. She mails it to Bella's house. Bella's mother says she receives about a dozen of these a day. Jean also got her a present—a doll with golden hair. She has photos of Bella cut out from newspapers and she talks about how special Bella is and how she hopes to meet her someday. Jean describes a delusional fantasy about how she and Bella will meet in a park and Bella will know it is her and come running over and she will swing Bella around. Jean starts accusing (in her head) Bella's mom of talking about the same old things on television and speculates that she must be getting paid to do all this promotion. Jean starts spending her time phoning into radio stations, changing her name each week, and commenting on the Bella case. She talks of how her friendship with Lisa had deteriorated. One day, she noticed that she had nailed the gate shut.

In Chapter 23, the narrative is set on June 18, 2007, and follows the point of view of Detective Sparkes in the past tense. Detectives Dan Fry and Fleur Jones and the others were putting together the perfect account to try and catfish Glen. They scrolled through Glen's hard drive to see which sites were his favorites, what time he was on most often, and the length of stay. They decided to use the name "Goldilocks" to lure Glen in. Glen was using the name "Bigbear," and sure enough, he started flirting with their user.

Chapter 24 is a continuation of the instant messaging conversation between the detectives and Glen. The detectives tried to ask Glen if he had ever been with a baby girl before in real life. He hesitated, but said he found a real baby girl once. He said her name began with a B. Before he could say any more, he told "her" that he had to go. The detectives panicked for a minute, but figured that they had enough evidence to show during the trial.

Chapter 25 is dated July 12, 2007 and is related from Jean's first-person perspective in the present tense. The chapter starts with the police informing Jean about her husband having cyber sex and the police catching him. When Jean confronts Glen, he tells her that it was just written-down words and that it does not mean anything—it is just a fantasy and he has been under a lot of stress. Jean talks about the press continuing to go crazy watching her house and writing all about her and Glen.

Chapter 26 takes the narrative to February 11, 2008, following the perspective of Detective Sparkes. The police told Glen that they spoke to Goldilocks and repeatedly started asking him about Bella and what he had done to her. After he talked privately



with his lawyer, Glen kept repeating, "It was a private fantasy between two consenting adults" (162). They charged him, and he told them they were making a terrible mistake. He was to be locked up until his trial on February 11, 2008.

The narrator next describes the trial. Bob Sparkes noted that the defense was helped by the fact that Glen looked nothing like the perverts and pedophiles that normally appeared in court. The defense interviewed Dawn Elliott about the events of the day Bella disappeared. When it was the prosecutors' time to present their case, they started going over the instant messaging and reading aloud the conversation between "Goldilocks" and "Big Bear." When the detective told the jury that Glen admitted to finding and taking a baby girl whose name began with a "B," the defense asked if he ever said the name "Bella" in the conversation. Sparkes said he did not, but he asked how many baby girls named Bella had been taken recently. It looked as if the prosecution's case was falling apart. The defense accused the police of coercing Glen into saying those things in order to make a damning statement. Due to the case not holding up, Glen was about to be freed.

In Chapter 27, it is still February 11, 2008, but the chapter is related from Jean's point of view in the present tense. She realizes, going home with Glen after learning all these new things about him, that it will never be the same again. She feels numb and notes that her place is now that of the "wonderful" wife who stood by her husband. The reporters and photographers are waiting for them like a swarm of bees as they arrive home. She says that getting even with the police becomes Glen's new addiction.

In Chapter 28, the narrative shifts to April 2, 2008, and is still related from Jean's first-person point of view in the present tense but looking back to the past. There is a sudden change, as she reveals that she has a secret and wonders what would happen if she told people about it. She says that she knows Glen saw Bella on the day she was taken. The reader is given the announcement that Jean has been lying through the entirety of the novel thus far. She says that she had also planned to leave Glen after the trial. She says that overall, it was the pictures of the children that made her pack her bags. She told him it was sick that he liked looking at pictures of women dressed as little kids in sexual ways. Glen started crying when she was leaving, and told her that he had "done something for her" (178). He knew she wanted a child so badly that when he saw Bella, he believed he could make Jean happy if he brought her home to her. He saw her in the garden gate and she was all alone, and she put her hands up to him so he could pick her up. He says he got out of the van and started driving home to Jean, and he did not remember anything else. He said it did not feel real as he were sobbing.

Jean was telling herself that he just could not have taken her. She says that he must have only seen her and that was it. They went back to having an ordinary life, and Glen was doting on her more than usual. They never mentioned Bella again, but she was in their thoughts all the time. Jean thinks that Glen was drawn to Bella because of her and because of her obsession with having a baby. Jean wonders what she would have done if Glen brought Bella home to her. She says that she would have loved her. They tried to look to the future and find new jobs. Jean's mom could not believe that Jean was staying with Glen after all the internet escapades were revealed. Jean started a job at a



new hair salon and Glen started working online, buying and selling packages on eBay. Jean continued to fantasize about what life would be like if Glen had brought Bella home to her. Glen continued thinking about how to get even with the cops. Tom Payne, Glen's lawyer, came over to write up a plan to get compensation for what Glen had gone through. They ended up getting a quarter of a million dollars.

In Chapter 29, the narrative is set on July 21, 2008, and follows the perspective of Detective Sparkes. Sparkes was still sorely disappointed in having screwed up the trial. At work, they ordered him to be on a different case, and told him to leave the Glen Taylor trial alone. But Bob Sparkes could never do that. They assigned a new detective, Jude Downing, to Bella's case. Downing spoke with DS Zara Salmond, who transferred there to make Bob's life easier. She and Bob went back over the events of the day Bella disappeared and tried to discover what was missed the first time around. They decided to track down Bella's birth father, something they had not done before since he had no part in her life and had not even known she existed. Dawn Elliott had told them his name was Matt White, he lived around Birmingham and he worked for a pharmaceutical company. After DI Downing overheard this conversation between Bob and Zara, he was told the next day in a meeting by Chief Superintendent Parker that he needed to take some time off and to get some counseling. He warned him not to go near the case again.

In Chapter 30, the narrative shifts to September 16, 2008, and Dawn Elliott is the focus of the third-person limited point of view. She was going on TV to accuse Glen of the crime of taking Bella and to get justice from him. The Herald put the story on the first nine pages of the newspaper, pledging to bring Glen Taylor to justice and demanding a retrial.

In Chapter 31, is the third-person narrator's perspective focuses on Kate's point of view on September 17, 2008. Kate was furious that the Herald published this article and felt that their newspaper was now the "Official Bella Elliott Newspaper." Bob Sparkes came in and told Kate about Mike Doonan, the other person that was an original suspect of the Bella case. Kate wrote down his name.

Analysis

The narrative shift that takes place in Chapter 22 is important for several reasons. In this chapter, the author indicates the date as June 12, 2007, with the focus on Jean. However, unlike the other chapters that are set in the past, Jean's narration in Chapter 22 is related in the present tense. This shift is an indication of Jean's deteriorating sense of reality and gives the chapter a sense of immediacy.

Jean's obsession with longing for a child is also highlighted in this chapter along with her growing obsession with the kidnapped baby Bella. The birthday card and the baby doll that Jean sends to Bella's home are both symbols of this obsession, as are Jean's fantasies about Bella and her compulsive calls to radio stations regarding the case. Jean's obsessions and deteriorating mental health culminate with the end of her



friendship with Lisa. It seems clear that Lisa has observed Jean's instability and no longer trusts her around her own children.

The tactic that the detectives take in creating a fake online identity to try and trick Glen into confessing his guilt is a successful one. Here, the author's literary allusion to the fairy tale "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" paints Glen as a predator—and his response to "Goldilocks" in the chat room implicates his guilt in the kidnapping of Bella. His further statement about a baby girl with a name beginning with "B" implicates him further, but the reader gets the sense here that the detectives may be overly celebratory in their success. Their concerns that Glen has not stated Bella's full name serve as foreshadowing for the failure of the prosecution to adequately attain a conviction against Glen in court.

Chapter 25 highlights the theme of manipulation as a means of control when Jean learns about Glen's secret life on the internet. Glen shows his true character by giving Jean a number of excuses for why this has happened. He has been exposed as a liar and cheater, but his way with words convinces Jean that it meant nothing.

During Glen's interrogations by the police about the chat room conversations, Glen freezes up and his lawyer gives him the robotic phrase to repeat over and over. The reader can tell that Glen is lying about something because he needed help from his lawyer to find something to say. His initial lies serve as foreshadowing of the premise that Glen is going to be lying about bigger and bigger things.

When Glen is let out after the trial in Chapter 27, Jean is left to go back home with him after learning that Glen is practically a stranger to her. Before the trial, Jean did not have any idea about Glen chatting with other women online, let alone him chatting with people who dressed up as little kids. Understandably, Jean does not want to deal with this Glen anymore and has no idea what it will be like to go back home with him.

In Chapter 28, there is an important climax in story as Jean reveals that she has a secret. This revelation fully establishes Jean as an unreliable narrator and further heightens the suspense of the developing narrative, leaving the reader unsure of where the truth lies. Jean tells the reader that she knows that Glen saw Bella on the day she went missing. What is confusing about this is that she continues to lie to the rest of the characters any time she is questioned. It is safe to assume that if she is hiding this, she could very well be hiding other things too.

The theme of obsession again is illustrated through Detective Bob Sparkes's response after Glen is acquitted in the trial. Sparkes cannot stop obsessing over the trial and his inability to get a confession or a conviction. This obsession leads to Sparkes being reassigned to a different case but it is clear that he will not let the Bella kidnapping case go.

In Chapter 31, the reader sees Kate's utter disappointment with the Herald publishing these stories about the Bella case when she has been working so hard to get the articles published in the newspaper she works for, the Daily Post. Kate's frustration



symbolizes her commitment to her job and also indicates her desires for fame and prestige for having attained the story on her own.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Jean's obsession with babies and how this ties into the Bella case. Do you think it is likely that she could have kidnapped Bella? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

After sitting through the trial and finding out new information about her husband, Jean decides to leave Glen. Why does Jean end up staying with Glen?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Jean unsatisfied on her birthday?

Vocabulary

entrapment, edifying, innocuous, tristesse, sinister, meticulously, postcoital, stewed, churned, vindication, sanitized, anecdotes, maudlin, reminiscences, ebbed, periphery, comradely, quid, tirade, becalmed

Chapters 32-42

Summary

In Chapter 32, the narrative is set on September 17, 2008, and it is related from Jean's first-person, present tense point of view. As the story gets out about Glen in the papers, he and Jean decide to take a trip somewhere to get away from all the chaos until it dies down. Glen picks a cottage in France that is miles away from anything. Jean says that being in France is very strange for them without their usual routines because they do not know what to say to each other, so they say nothing. After being there for four days, someone from the Herald finds them. When they get home, the reporters swarm them again. The lawyer tells them they must sue the Herald for libel.

Chapter 33 is related from a third-person narrator focused on Dawn Elliot's point of view on September 26, 2008. Dawn was irate over the pictures of the Taylors in France. She came up with the idea that she would run up to Glen in public and somehow force a confession out of him. She had the idea that she would make him fall to the ground crying and begging for forgiveness. She called Mark Perry of the Herald and told him her plan. He told her that she would need to do it in a public place so he could not escape. They planned for her to jump out of a black cab and ambush Glen while they waited with cameras. When they saw her coming, Glen told Jean not to say anything no matter what. Dawn came out and screamed, "Where is my daughter? What did you do with her, Glen?" (217). He said nothing. Dawn narrows in on Jean and asks her what he husband did with Bella. Jean screams back that nobody knows, and asks why she left her daughter outside alone to be taken. The paper is thrilled with the whole encounter.

In Chapter 34, the narrative returns to Jean's first-person point of view on October 2, 2008. The chapter is related in the present tense. Jean describes a meeting with the lawyer to figure out a plan to use against the Herald for smearing Glen's name. Jean talks as if she firmly believes that someone else took Bella, and persuaded everyone around them that she belongs to them so she will never be found. She again has fantasies about Bella laughing and calling Jean's name to come and get her. Jean suggests to Glen that they move to get away from everything and start fresh. He insists that they stay and are not driven away from their home. Thus, they stay and are forced to be inside like a prison. They do crosswords and act like an old couple, and continue to be occasionally harassed by neighbors putting dog poop on their doorstep and graffiti on their walls.

Chapter 35 is set on Friday, December 18, 2009, and is related from a third-person narrator focused on Kate's perspective. Kate went to meet up with Mike Doonan at his house. Mike's neighbor was around before he was, and she mentioned to Kate that he used to frequent an internet cafe. After Mike arrived home, he talked about how he met Glen before their job together, and that it was at a forum of some sort. When Kate asked if it was the internet cafe, Mike panicked and told her she needed to leave. Kate left and headed over to this internet cafe. When she got outside, she was notified that it was a



porn place meant for dirty old men and managed by a guy named Lenny. Lenny told Kate that Glen used to frequent the place, and even came recently. They did not monitor the sites so they never knew what he was looking at; Lenny never called the police because he would have been shut down, and they had already arrested Glen so he did not feel like he needed to.

In Chapter 36, the story is related with a focus on Detective Sparkes's perspective in the past tense on December 18, 2009. Kate told Bob Sparkes the information about the internet cafe, and they agreed to talk about it later. Salmond did her own investigating and found out the name of Bella's birth father was really Matthew Evans, a married man living with his wife, Shan, in Walsall.

In Chapter 37, set on January 16, 2010, the narrative follows the point of view of Bob Sparkes in the past tense. The detectives went to Matthews Evans's home. Matthew told the detectives that he changed his number after the affair, as he did not want his wife to find out, so he never knew Dawn was pregnant. But after seeing her and Bella on the news, he knew she was his. He told the detectives that he once saw Dawn in a chat room under the name "LittleMissSunshine," using her own picture. The detectives were thrilled, thinking this might be the link between Dawn Elliott and Glen Taylor.

Chapter 38 is related in the past tense, on July 13, 2006, with a focus on Dawn Elliott's point of view. This chapter discusses how Dawn loved to get dressed up and go out, and when she met Matt, she really liked him because he was "forbidden." After she got pregnant, she was unable to go out for several years until Bella was a bit older. When she read about the new dating scene online, she was taken in. She met lots of men in these chat-rooms who were nice to her and were not weirded out by the fact that she was a mother. They wanted to see pictures of her and some even wanted to see pictures of Bella.

Chapter 39 goes back to the detective's point of view on January 21, 2010. Bob Sparkes went to Dawn Elliott's house to tell her that he met with Matt, and he told her that he saw her in a chat room. She told him that she did go in chat rooms but only to chat about television shows or other random topics out of loneliness. She said that she never met anyone from online in real life so she did not think it was worth mentioning. He asked her if she talked about Bella while in the chat rooms. She said yes, but only to other women. She asked the detective if that was how "he" found her. The detective said he would need to go through her laptop to find out. They looked through various aliases and found one TDS, "Tall Dark Stranger," that Dawn had emailed with a few times. They searched her Facebook page and found that Jean was a friend of the Find Bella Campaign, and even wrote a few messages on the page.

Chapter 40 is told from Jean's perspective in the past tense and dated January 22, 2010. Bob Sparkes came to Jean's house to ask about her becoming friends with Dawn on Facebook. Jean played dumb and said she did not know what he was talking about. As soon as Glen returned home, he talked to Bob Sparkes and made him leave. After he left, Jean asked Glen where he had been earlier. He told her to stop checking up on him and acted weird. Jean was suspicious that his "nonsense" was starting again.



Chapter 41 is still in Jean's perspective, but is now June 11, 2010 and Kate is interviewing her in the present timeline. Jean rehashes the entire story starting from the day of Bella's disappearance. Jean is on a roll of saying all sorts of negative things about Glen, something she has never done before. When Kate asks her if Glen took Bella, she says, "Yes, I think he did" (257). Before she can say anything else, Mick is knocking at the door, looking to get some pictures of Jean for the paper. He starts taking pictures of Jean and has her change outfits a couple of times. She obeys but afterwards decides she wants to leave. Without telling Kate or Mick, she calls a cab and takes it back home before they can finish the interview.

In Chapter 42, the date is established as Friday, June 11, 2010 again, and the third-person narrator focuses on Kate's perspective in the past tense. Kate was putting the finishing touches on her story, and Mick was unhappy with how his photos turned out. They went to Jean's room and there was no answer. They ran to the front desk attendant, who told them that Jean had left three hours prior.

Analysis

Again in Chapter 32, the narrative is set in the past tense, on September 17, 2008, but is related from the present-tense first-person perspective of Jean. This chapter focuses on Jean's disillusionment in her marriage following the trial and her and Glen's failed attempt at connection during their trip to France. The trip is ultimately a failure; Glen and Jean no longer communicate with one another and the continued harassment by the press only serves to isolate each character more.

This theme of obsession is explored again through the character of Dawn Elliott, who comes up with the idea to run up to Glen herself and ask her what he did with Bella. Dawn thinks of this because she is so overwhelmed with the desire to know what happened to her daughter that she thinks she will be able to startle and guilt Glen into a confession. Unfortunately, this tactic does not succeed as Dawn planned and she is stunned by Jean's backlash as she yells at her.

Dawn is incredibly upset at the pictures of the Taylors on vacation in Chapter 33. These pictures symbolize, especially for Dawn, the failure of the police and prosecution in convicting Glen. Dawn Elliott's temperament is highly emotional. This obviously makes sense because of her situation—she is definitely the most publicly impassioned character in *The Widow*. Dawn's public confrontation with the Taylors may be unsuccessful, but it does serve to keep the story alive in the newspapers.

In Chapter 34, the author reveals that Jean has highly delusional fantasies about Bella, which leads the reader to question her mental stability. The way in which Jean describes Bella laughing and running towards her is beyond what any sane person would do. Jean blames this on her inability to have her own child, but it may be caused by the stress of the situation has been in, and how she is forced to be isolated inside all day, every day with Glen.



Kate's interview with Mike Doonan leads her to the Internet Cafe in Chapter 35, and she tracks down the place and the owner. Kate is surprised to discover that Glen frequented this place quite often, and she struggles to get more information about his search history. It is interesting to note that this establishment did not monitor any of their sites, so there is no way for Kate to find out exactly what Glen was looking at while there.

The revelation in Chapter 36 that Bella's birth father is a married man named Matthew Evans gives the reader a bit of insight into Dawn's character and what her life was like before she gave birth to Bella. The introduction of Matthew Evans's character in Chapter 37 reinforces the theme of secrets in the novel. Matthew tells the police that he had not kept in touch with Dawn, and even got a new phone number to lose contact with her. Afterwards, he saw her in a chat room. This little piece of information helps the police greatly. They believe this might be a breaking point in the case, where they can link two people together who both frequent chat rooms.

In Chapter 39, the detectives tell Dawn that they met with Matt and that he saw her in a chat room. Dawn is horrified. She now realizes with this revelation that being in a chat room is what allowed Bella to be taken. As her emotions are already running very high, Dawn is now completely stunned and in disbelief that this was even a possibility. This conversation really shows how naive, innocent, and gullible Dawn can be. When she was talking to strangers online and sharing all of her personal information, she did not stop for a second to think that it might not be the best idea to do that. It took until this conversation with the detectives for her to even consider that Glen might have spotted Bella during her time spent online. Thus, the symbolism of computers and online chat rooms emerges in this section of the novel as representative of deceit, illicit activity, and a means for the manifestation of predatory behavior.

In Chapter 41, Jean's character continues to transform and emerges as she comes out of her shell during an interview with Kate and finally talks about Glen in a negative light. This is surprising to Kate, as she has never heard Jean speak this way, and it also comes as a surprise to Jean, too. It is this unexpected openness that leads Jean to abandon the hotel and the interview in the following chapter, further surprising Kate and Mick.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Dawn's idea for getting Glen to confess to her. Do you think this could be an effective method in this type of situation? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

It is reported that Jean had become Facebook friends with Dawn Elliott. Why do you think she did this?



Discussion Question 3

At the end of this section, Jean starts to open up more and more about what life with Glen was really like. Why do you think it took her so long to do this?

Vocabulary

sensationalism, mesmerized, convened, crassness, looming, simpering, hawked, shrieking, tantamount, degenerative, minced, proffered, talisman, transfixed, cowering, wane, impetus, aghast, permutations, engrossed



Chapters 43-54

Summary

In Chapter 43, Jean is the narrator in the present tense on June 11, 2010. She makes it back to her house after ditching Kate and Mick at the hotel. She thinks about how she is going to sell the house as quickly as she can to get away from all the memories of Glen. Kate calls her and asks her where she went. Jean casually tells her she went home, and Kate tells her she will be right over. When Jean hears a knock at the door, she answers, but instead of Kate there is a different reporter from another newspaper. Just then, she sees Kate running up her driveway and Kate pushes her way into Jean's house and closes the door. Kate starts yelling at Jean about sneaking off and how she cannot talk to other reporters since she had signed a contract with them. Jean fires back at her, telling her she has done absolutely everything they have asked of her and tells her not to talk to her that way. Kate is stunned by her reaction. Kate apologizes and tells Jean she will just stay the night with her at Jean's place. Jean tells her about how Glen never went shopping with her, but the day he was killed he had insisted upon going shopping with her. Jean tells her that things were really tense the week before he died. Glen told Jean that he was so tired, but he could not sleep because every time he closed his eyes, he would see Bella.

Chapter 44 is related from the detective's point of view on February 1, 2010, in the past tense. The detectives got a notification that both Lee Chambers and Mike Doonan had been arrested for dealing in child pornography. They were surprised by Mike Doonan's arrest since he was believed to be too disabled to even leave his house. For a moment, Sparkes thought that Doonan might have been the one to take Bella after all. But it turned out that he was actually buying child pornography from Lee Chambers at that time in the same area. The detectives discovered a video of the van in question waiting outside Bella's nursery school. They were able to determine that this person had planned the kidnapping of Bella.

In Chapter 45, the story is related from a third-person narrator with a focus on Glen's point of view for the first time in the novel. The chapter is dated August 18, 2006, and begins with a description of the first day that Glen Taylor had caught sight of Bella Elliott on Facebook through her mother Dawn's photos. There is a bit of a back-story in this chapter to what happened leading up to Bella's abduction. Glen Taylor indeed first saw Bella on Dawn's Facebook after meeting her in a chat room over the summer. Glen had been eavesdropping in Dawn's conversations with others when she put the link for her Facebook onto the page. Over time, he found himself thinking about her constantly and it was the first of his fantasies that transitioned from the screen and into real life. He would go to the Internet Cafe to ensure there was no trail between him and Bella. Once Dawn let the name of Bella's nursery slip, Glen started waiting outside the school and following Bella and Dawn around. After following them home to see where they lived, Glen drove around the corner and masturbated. Afterwards it scared him, and he told himself he would be done with porn and stop going online. But that did not happen. On



October 2nd, he had a delivery down by Bella's house. He told himself he would just drive by to see if they were home, but he ended up stopping at the store to buy a sleeping bag. He pulled up to Manor Road, which Glen describes as moments like a dream where time slowed down. He went around the block from Dawn's house once after getting spooked that someone would see him. He did not remember the moments of picking Bella up and strapping her into the passenger seat.

Chapter 46 is related from Jean's point of view on June 11, 2010. Jean talks about how Dawn has remarried, has another little girl, and always tells people in the press that Bella is alive somewhere. Jean thinks that it is not fair and that there is no justice in her current situation. Kate and Mick are both staying the night at Jean's house when the news comes on. Jean's interview with Kate and photos with Mick are plastered all over the television. It cuts to a video of Dawn crying, saying that Jean must have known the whole time, and calling her a monster. Jean becomes livid and demands to know what Kate has written. Kate and Mick try to tell her that it was all a lie. Jean forces them out her door and threatens to call the police if they do not leave immediately. She calls a film crew to her house in order to express herself accurately.

Chapter 47 is told from the detective's perspective on May 14, 2010, in the past tense. When Bob Sparkes first heard that Glen was dead, he was extremely upset because he felt he was so close to proving Glen was guilty. He knew it would be impossible to get any sort of direct confession, which is what he really wanted. Suddenly, he thought about Jean, and how without Glen, she might finally confess if she knew anything. He and Zara Salmond rushed to the hospital to meet with Jean. He sat next to her and questioned her about Bella. Jean told Bob that she did not know anything about Bella, and got up and left. The detectives decided to go to her house tomorrow once she had a bit more time to process what has happened. They questioned her but she replied with the same, repetitive answers.

Chapter 48 is told from Jean's point of view on May 27, 2010, and describes the day of Glen's funeral. Glen's mom was crying and his dad was commenting on the gloominess of the weather. Jean's mom and dad, and some of some of Glen's other relatives attended the funeral; Bob Sparkes even showed up. Afterwards, Jean went home with some family to have a bit of tea. Then, she found herself home alone in her house without Glen for the first time.

Chapter 49 is related from a third-person narrator with focus on the detective's perspective on June 12, 2010, in the past tense. Bob Sparkes and his wife Eileen decided spontaneously to take a week-long vacation in Devon, leaving right away. Bob thought about how the Bella case was the first time he took a case personally before. He let it get in the way of his career, his personal life, and his emotions. But now he was on vacation and trying not to think about it. As they were at the pub planning their adventures for the following day, he turned on the television to see Jean Taylor saying that Glen took Bella. He immediately said that they had to go back home so he could find out what happened to Bella. Eileen could not believe what she was hearing, but she packed her things up and they headed home.



Chapter 50 is related in the past tense from a third-person narrator with focus on Kate's point of view on the following day, June 13, 2010. The reporters at Kate's work asked her to describe Jean Taylor and what she was all about. She told them that Glen did kidnap Bella and that Jean knew about it, but was embarrassed of how little information she actually had. Bob Sparkes called Kate and invited her to coffee. He told her congratulations and said that she gotten Jean to say more than he ever did. They speculated about whether Jean may have been involved with the crime, which would explain why she would not confess. They decided that if Jean knew anything about the crime, she might go back to Bella, wherever she might be.

Chapter 51 is related in the present tense on June 11, 2010 from Jean's first-person perspective. Jean reads a newspaper that says "Widow Confesses Bella Killer's Guilt." Everyone is incessantly calling her and she has to explain that the paper twisted her words. Jean feels that Glen is haunting her and following her around everywhere she goes. She talks about how when she had left the grocery store with Glen the past Saturday, she noticed him glance at a little girl who was sitting inside a supermarket cart. She said she saw something in his eyes, so she pushed him away from the child and right in front of the van. Jean admits that she was glad to be done with his nonsense. She talks about selling the house and moving out of London. She says she is still deciding where to go "to be near my baby girl" (304).

Chapter 52 is dated July 1st, 2010, and the narrative is focused on Kate's perspective and related in the past tense. Kate was at the trial of Glen's death with her lawyer, Tom Payne, and listening to the details of the autopsy, the bus driver's experience, and others. She went up on the stand to talk about what happened the day Glen died. Kate was very suspicious of Jean's authenticity. The coroner was also asking her some questions about how exactly Glen fell and if they were holding hands with each other and if Glen was distracted that day. While being questioned, Jean almost fainted. The coroner continued to ask about Glen's mood that day. Finally, Jean told him that Glen had not been sleeping properly and had been getting bad headaches as a result of constantly dreaming of Bella Elliott.

Chapter 53 is related on the same day (July 1, 2010) and focuses on the detective's perspective. At 4:00 a.m., the lights in Jean's home went on. She came out of the front door and got in her car. Zara Salmond and Bob Sparkes followed her. They watched as she went into a store and bought flowers and a package of skittles. Bob and Zara looked at each other and both were aware that she was going to the grave. Bob got there first and saw Jean sitting down in the forest. She asked, "Is that you, Bob?" (318). He said yes and asked her what she was doing. She told him that she had come to see her baby girl, Bella, where Glen had put her.

Chapter 54 is related from Jean's point of view on July 3, 2010 in the past tense. Jean talks about how she just could not prevent herself from going to see Bella. She says that Glen had taken her to see Bella's grave once on the Monday before he died. He told Jean the story of kidnapping her and laying her down in a sleeping bag in the woods. Jean demanded that they go see her. Glen took her to the spot and told Jean what happened. He gave her sweets and she was happy at first and he kissed her



cheek, and then she fell asleep. Jean told him she did NOT fall asleep; she died. Glen began sobbing and said that he covered her up and tried to keep her safe. Jean said to herself that now she could care for Bella and love her, and that is why she decided to head back to the forest that night. Bob Sparkes told Jean that it was not her fault—that Glen had hunted Bella down and did this all for himself. Jean said there was a funeral but she was not allowed to go. In the end, she said she was there anyway, that Bella knew she was there, and that was what mattered to her.

Analysis

Jean's confrontation with Kate after Kate chases off the reporters in Chapter 43 is the first major conflict between these characters and indicates how high the stakes are for Kate to obtain her story before she is outwitted. Fortunately for Kate, the conflict is resolved and she proceeds to gain more information from Jean regarding the week before Glen's death.

The arrests of Lee Chambers and Mike Doonan for dealing in child pornography present yet another red herring in the narrative. With these arrests, Detective Sparkes is thrown off of Glen's trail and comes to question whether these earlier suspects might have in fact committed the kidnapping. It will soon be revealed that they were not involved, but the new information serves to throw off not only the detectives, but the reader as well.

Chapter 45 is focused on Glen's perspective for the first and only time in the book. Fiona Barton makes this choice so that the reader may see the story from Glen's perspective and understand his thought processes as he committed the crime. Through Glen's actions, the reader can see that Bella's kidnapping was not an impulsive crime, but was premeditated. Glen's actions of stalking Bella through her mother's online social media presence reiterates the symbolism of computers and the internet as means to criminal and predatory ends. The fact that the details of what happened to Bella after Glen abducted her are not revealed here serves to maintain the ominous mood of the narrative and to lead the reader further to the novel's climax.

In Chapter 46, the reader hears Jean's opinion on Dawn, and how she believes that Dawn was a negligent mother and that is why her daughter is missing. The reader starts to see Jean's disturbing thoughts arise again. Jean may be saying these things because she knows deep down that Glen had something to do with it and perhaps she feels guilty—so she is assigning the guilt to someone else.

In Chapter 47, the reader comes across the reactions of each character following the death of Glen. Bob Sparkes feels like he will never be able to solve the crime without Glen, so he is initially upset. Jean seems to be in shock and does not talk much so it is reasonable to suspect at this point that Jean is relieved that Glen is gone. In the first chapter of the novel, Jean describes her thoughts after Glen died as having been, "No more of his nonsense" (3). Bob later comes to the conclusion that Jean may finally open up to him about Bella's death now that Glen is gone.



The description of Glen's funeral illustrates the progression of his relationships with his family and his wife. Glen's mom cries, as expected, and his dad changes the subject to anything but Glen. The one surprise is that Bob Sparkes shows up in the back of the funeral. It is hard to imagine why Detective Sparkes would come to the ceremony, but after all his investigating about Glen's life, he likely feels like he should not miss the funeral where something catastrophic might happen.

Chapters 49 and 50 highlight the theme of obsession in the characters of Bob Sparkes and Kate Waters. Strain is brought to Bob's marriage when he cannot commit to a vacation because news of the Bella kidnapping has emerged. Likewise, Kate continues to obsess over the case and the information she can glean from Jean. Kate is ultimately successful in her objective and manages to discern that Glen was responsible for the kidnapping of Bella. This revelation marks a climax for both Bob and Kate as they achieve the objectives they set out for in the beginning of the novel.

Another important revelation comes in Chapter 51, with Jean confessing her motivation for essentially murdering Glen by pushing him in front of a bus. The fact that Glen's "accident" occurred immediately after Jean saw Glen looking at a little girl with a strange look in his eye implies that Jean knew exactly what he was thinking. A few days before this happened, Glen took her to the place where he left Bella's body, and understandably this event was still fresh on her mind. Jean made a bold move, knowing that if she had not, she would likely be in the same situation over and over again. This action is also an abrupt change in Jean's character. Prior to this, she has been willing to lie for Glen and to cover up his actions in the kidnapping and murder. Her decision to end Glen's life gives her freedom from his manipulation and also freedom from her own guilt.

In the final chapters of the novel, the narrative reaches its climax with the discovery of Bella's body in the woods and Jean's revelations of having been brought to this setting just before Glen's death. In the falling action of the plot, Jean describes the visit with Glen, and in the story's denouement, Detective Bob Sparkes attempts to placate Jean by assuring her that Glen was responsible for the crime—not Jean.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Jean's action of running away from the hotel. What do you think her reasons were for doing this and ditching Kate and Mick?

Discussion Question 2

The reader hears Glen talking himself through different inappropriate actions, like watching Bella at home. Why do you think Glen keeps downplaying (to himself) what he is doing?



Discussion Question 3

Why do you think it took so long for Jean to come to terms with what Glen did?

Vocabulary

dingy, tedious, eavesdropped, fretting, slippage, nubbled, derision, colander, vicar, brim, crass, sidled, inquest, curt, desultory, contusions, lacerations, ostentatiously, convoy, injunction



Characters

Jean Taylor

Jean "Jeanie" Taylor is the main character and a first-person narrator in several chapters of *The Widow*. She is a woman in her late 30's who was married to an accused kidnapper, Glen Taylor. As the novel begins, Jean's husband has been killed a week prior due to being hit by a bus on a city street. Due to his absence, Jean gives in to pressure from the press and begins undergoing interviews with Daily Post reporter Kate Waters.

As the novel progresses, the reader begins to see signs of Jean's mental instability and her reliability as a narrator is called into question. Her personality changes quite a bit, and she has a lot of secrets that are slowly revealed throughout the novel.

Jean expresses relief over her husband's death and in the course of her interviews with Kate, the reader comes to piece together a vision of Glen as having been a controlling husband with serious mental issues, including an addiction to pornography. However, despite Glen's issues, Jean did not choose to leave her husband, even after his trial revealed his obsession with child pornography and his participation in pornographic chat rooms online. Jean maintained loyalty to Glen, acting as his alibi on the day of the kidnapping by claiming that Glen arrived home at 4:00 p.m. In reality, Glen did not return home until later.

Glen Taylor

Glen Taylor is the leading antagonist in *The Widow*. Glen was suspected of kidnapping the missing toddler, Bella Elliott, when she disappeared on October 2, 2006. Glen was charged with the kidnapping and went to trial but the prosecution did not build a solid enough case to reach a conviction.

The main timeline of the novel begins on June 9, 2010, and it has been one week since Glen's death. Glen was out shopping with his wife Jean when he was suddenly hit by a bus and killed. Throughout the course of the main timeline, reporter Kate Waters is interviewing Jean in order to piece together the truth about Glen and his involvement with Bella's kidnapping.

It is obvious by the end of the novel that Glen did, in fact, kidnap Bella, killed her, and buried her in the woods. Jean expresses relief throughout her first-person narrative over Glen's death and the end of her marriage with him.



Kate Waters

Kate Waters is a journalist working for the Daily Post. She manages to be the sole journalist that Jean Taylor lets in for an interview. She uses various tactics to get Jean to open up, and is praised by her colleagues for having a knack for these types of situations.

Bob Sparkes

Bob Sparkes is the detective who answered the call from Dawn Elliott, saying that her baby girl had gone missing. The chapters that focus on Sparkes's point of view are related in the past tense, describing the detective's obsession with the case and with getting a confession from Glen Taylor.

Dawn Elliott

Dawn Elliott is the mother of the missing toddler, Bella Elliott. She eventually learns that her participation in online chatting and occasionally revealing true information about herself and her daughter is what led Glen to stalking, and eventually kidnapping and murdering, Dawn's daughter.

Bella Elliott

Bella Elliott is the child who has gone missing in the story. Nearly the entire novel is focused on her disappearance, which took place on October 2, 2006.

Lee Chambers

Lee Chambers is one of the suspects in Bella's disappearance. He is a known flasher in kid's local playgrounds, and he is described as a very creepy and disgusting man.

Mick

Mick is the photographer who works with Kate at the Daily Post. He takes pictures of Jean to go along with Kate's interview of her about Glen's death.

Mike Doonan

Mike Doonan is one of the suspects in the Bella disappearance case. It is Doonan who originally points the investigators in the direction of Glen Taylor.

Lisa

Lisa is the next-door neighbor and friend of Jean Taylor. After Jean begins unraveling mentally, her friendship with Lisa deteriorates.



Symbols and Symbolism

Computers

In *The Widow*, computers symbolize deceit, illicit activity, danger, cruelty, and loneliness. The way that Glen had access to Bella was through the use of the computer. The Internet Cafe represents a place full of secrets and lies. Glen knows it is the only way he will not leave a trail, so he uses these computers when no one is around.

Forest

The forest represents an isolated place of faux security in *The Widow*. This setting is where Bella's body is eventually revealed to have been buried. Glen placed her in a sleeping bag and put branches and leaves around her to keep her "safe," although she was already dead at this time.

Children

Children symbolize obsession in the novel. They are a focal point between the two main characters of this story, Jean and Glen Taylor. Jean has an endless obsession with having children of her own, and non-stop thinking about other people's children that she wishes were her own. Glen is also preoccupied with children, in an inappropriate and atrocious manner.

Internet Chat Rooms

In *The Widow*, the internet chat rooms symbolize a place where people can go to be anonymous. The entire reason that Glen found out about Bella initially was because Dawn was using these chat rooms to talk to others about her child. She posted pictures and linked to her completely public Facebook page, giving off dozens of clues as to exactly where she went each day and details about Bella's life.

Pornography

Pornography is a major symbol that represents forbidden desires in *The Widow*. Almost all of the characters who come to be suspects in the Bella kidnapping are discovered to be in possession of pornography or child pornography.



Journalists

Journalists symbolize a source of information and truth in the novel. The journalists are important to *The Widow* as they attempt to tell the stories of both the victims and the suspects surrounding the Bella case.

Newspapers

Newspapers represent rivalries, information, and scandals in *The Widow*. The competing newspapers in the novel are a source for all the town's information about the Bella kidnapping case.

Abduction

The abducting of a person symbolizes the holding of power over them, and this is seen through Bella's abduction in *The Widow*. Although the reader is never given the exact details of Bella's murder, it appears that she was sexually abused before Glen buried her in the forest.

Detectives

The detectives are an important symbol of hope and truth in this story, as they are involved every step of the way during the investigation of the Bella kidnapping case.

Family

In *The Widow*, family symbolizes a sense of security. Jean and Glen Taylor initially try to keep their family unit together. They host dinners with their families each week and seem to be very happy with each other. When they find out they are unable to conceive, their family falls apart a little. As the story goes on, Glen and Jean's marriage falls apart completely, as do their relationships with their extended families. Once the families fall apart, the characters completely lose their sense of security.



Settings

The Taylor House

Glen and Jean Taylor have lived in this home since they were first married. In the beginning, it was bliss. Jean talks about how they had both sets of parents over for dinner as a weekly get-together to catch up and spend time together. After Glen was accused, their home became a place that Jean could not wait to escape from.

Investigator's Offices/Reporter's Offices

The story frequently involves the detectives and the reporters being at their offices while working to figure out the Bella kidnapping case. Whenever the chapters are focused on the reporter, Kate is often at her office with her co-workers trying to write up the perfect story. The same thing goes for the detectives. Although both are visiting with suspects and interviewing those involved, they are often at their own place of work.

House of Bella and Dawn Elliott

Bella and Dawn Elliott's home is located in Southhampton. After Bella was kidnapped, the front of Dawn's house became the "Find Bella" office. Bella was taken by Glen while playing out front in the yard of her house. The detectives and journalists frequently meet with Dawn here.

London, various places in town

There are many instances in *The Widow* where the characters are out and about on walks or in various parts of town that aren't specifically identified. They meet up with each other at coffee shops, restaurants, and miscellaneous areas of London.

The Woods

At the very end of the novel, it is revealed that the body of Bella was left here by Glen. Glen brought Jean here after she demanded they go and see Bella. Before they left, Jean set the GPS in the car so she would remember the location. Glen died a few days later, and after his funeral, Jean snuck back here to be with Bella. The detectives follow her and are finally able to locate Bella's body as the novel comes to a close.



Themes and Motifs

The Effects of Unchecked Mental Illness

The effects of unchecked mental illness can progressively develop into violent behavior and disillusionment, Fiona Barton warns in *The Widow*. This theme is illustrated primarily through the characters of Glen and Jean Taylor, although other characters in the novel also contribute to the exploration of mental illness, such as Lee Chambers and Mike Doonan.

Clearly, with Glen's addiction to pornography, and more specifically his obsession with child pornography, the reader becomes increasingly aware that Glen suffers from mental illness. Beyond this obsession, it becomes apparent at the end of the story that Glen was cold and calculating with his stalking of Bella. He had planned it out by initially creeping on chat rooms with Dawn Elliott, stalking her Facebook page and finding out every little detail about her life, following her and Bella around different places in town. Glen's preoccupation with Bella became compulsive and Glen could no longer control what he set out to do. With the eventual rape and murder of a two-year-old, it is safe to declare that Glen is mentally ill, as these acts are not for the sound of mind. Glen's consistent lying throughout the novel is another strong indication of mental illness.

Jean Taylor, without a doubt, also suffers from mental illness. While less destructive to others than Glen, she frequently has delusional fantasies about babies, often dreaming about them. From the reader's point of view as well as the investigators', it would not be surprising if Jean were to kidnap a child based on all the comments she makes of desperately wanting a baby and even about how much she wishes she had Bella. While it would be for very different reasons than Glen, there is little-to-no doubt that Jean would steal someone's baby in order to raise it as her own. The three scrapbooks that she keeps of "her babies" which she habitually looks through are a strong symbol of her mental instability.

Lee Chambers and Mike Doonan have their own set of mental problems as well. As they have both frequented the Internet Cafe for years and are notorious for being "dirty old men," they are both later arrested on child pornography charges and are likely to be unbalanced and disturbed individuals.

The Dangers of Obsession

Author Fiona Barton explores the dangers of obsession through each of the four main characters in *The Widow*, sending a message to readers that obsession is not always recognized right away by others, but that does not change the fact that it often is dangerous. Each character's obsession leads to blocks in communication, the harboring of secrets, and ultimately, mental deterioration. While obsession is most clearly



illustrated through Glen's character, the author extends this theme through Jean, Detective Sparkes, and Kate Waters.

Glen Taylor is obsessed with child pornography. The reader learns that his obsession began to manifest when he started frequenting the Internet Cafe, but it may have actually started way before that. Glen's obsession with children appears to have first emerged when he discovered that he was incapable of producing children of his own. Glen sneaks off to go to the Internet Cafe at every free moment he has, and hides his behavior from Jean and the rest of world as he takes notice of little girls around town.

Jean Taylor is obsessed with having a baby and with babies in general. She keeps scrapbooks full of photographs of babies that she has cut out of magazines, and she routinely stares at them, referring to them as "her babies." Throughout the story, Jean appears to get progressively more unstable, making comments about how Bella should be at home with her and other private obsessions with Bella. As Jean is the only first-person narrator in the novel, the reader can clearly see the inner turmoil and breaking down of logic through Jean's perspective as the story unfolds.

Detective Bob Sparkes is obsessed with solving the Bella kidnapping case. He is initially taken off the case for being too involved and moved to a different position. When he is caught still trying to find out what happened to Bella, he is given a leave of absence completely from his job. Even then, he's still involved and sees Bella everywhere he looks. He cannot even enjoy a week away with his wife. As soon as they arrive at their vacation destination, there is a new lead with the case, so he cancels the entire trip and turns around to go home.

Kate is obsessed with having a great story. She wants everything to be perfect and to have dramatic, compelling headlines that will help her career and her newspaper be ahead of the others. Nothing can stop her from getting the story. Kate has proven over and over again that she will do whatever it takes to get all the juicy details out of a report.

While some incidents of obsession are far worse (morally), the theme of obsession never dies inside *The Widow*.

Darkness versus Light

Everything in life is about overcoming darkness and being in the light, and Fiona Barton explores this theme in *The Widow* through the development of Jean's character and through her use of shifting narrative perspectives. Just as the investigators and reporters seek to unveil the truth of Bella's disappearance, the reader seeks to discern what is true and what is false in Jean's unreliable narrative. The theme of darkness versus light applies to ignorance versus knowledge and good versus evil.

Glen makes many comments about how he has an illness and he needs help. He tells Jean that watching pornography and interacting with these "women" on the internet is a result of his sickness and that he is in desperate need of help. Glen appears to know



that he has a problem, and wishes he could overcome it. When he is driving by Bella's house, he tells himself there is no harm in him just looking. However, it is clear that in this case, darkness reigns over light and Glen kidnaps and kills Bella, knowing full-well that it is wrong.

Jean is somewhere in between darkness and light. While she does not do anything that is particularly "evil," she does make some questionable comments and decisions. Jean comments that Glen should have brought Bella to her so they could be together forever; she provides a false alibi for Glen when she suspects he is guilty; and she makes other puzzling statements in the course of the story.

Bob Sparkes is the biggest source of light in the story, as he purely wants to solve this case for the well-being of everyone involved and to have justice for Bella. He does not pursue the case for the recognition or for the sake of his job, but because he feels unsettled without knowing the truth. Out of the goodness of his character, he wants Bella's life to be justified.

Kate Waters is also a source of light, because she wants to find the truth in the story. Although all of her motivations seem to be geared towards furthering her career and gaining recognition within her industry, she ultimately seeks truth and justice.

Manipulation as a Means to Control

Throughout *The Widow*, the reader sees manipulation emerge in many forms as a means to control others and to maintain presumed innocence. In most of the situations, various characters are trying to manipulate Jean Taylor.

Glen has been manipulating Jean since the very beginning of their lives together. He is always somehow looking down on her, even if his comments come across in the most subtle of fashions. After the trial, Jean wants to leave Glen but he manipulates her to stay by eliciting guilt through indicating that his actions of kidnapping Bella were for Jean's benefit. Glen also manipulates Bella with candy, in order to kidnap her.

Kate manipulates Jean by buttering her up and saying all the right things in order to get her to sign a contract with them and create a feature in her newspaper. The first time Kate meets Jean, she is able to weasel her way inside her house, even though all of the other reporters have been blatantly rejected. Kate later tries to manipulate Jean by taking her to a fancy hotel and ordering loads of room service and wine so that she will be as open as possible when Kate tries to get her story.

Even Bob Sparkes manipulates Jean by trying to coerce her into a confession throughout the entirety of the novel. He tries to visit her at the right times and say all the right things that would help make her comfortable enough to openly share her story. Bob Sparkes is by far the least hurtful of the characters, and is mostly just employing manipulation to try and solve the Bella case.



Guilt

The author explores the theme of guilt in *The Widow* primarily through the character arcs of Glen and Jean Taylor. Because Jean is an unreliable narrator, this theme emerges gradually through flashbacks and through the transitions in Jean's commentary regarding her husband and his involvement in the Bella kidnapping case. Guilt is used by Glen as a control mechanism in preventing Jean from leaving him after the trial and guilt plays a role in Jean's decision to protect Glen by lying for him and providing an alibi on the day of Bella's disappearance.

After Bella goes missing and Glen is named as a suspect, the color draining from his face is the first visual indication that he is guilty of the crime. Although he never formally confesses to the crime, the guilt begins eating at him and taking a serious toll on his health, sleep, and well-being. After winning the trial against kidnapping Bella and also winning a quarter-of-a-million dollars for what he had to endure in jail and with all of the harassment, justice is clearly coming out in the physical toll it takes on Glen. In the end of his life, Glen is unable to sleep because all he sees when he closes his eyes is Bella.

Jean feels guilty when she sits at Bella's grave in the very last scene as she tells Bob Sparkes that the reason Glen did this was for her. Bob Sparkes tells Jean over and over again that Glen kidnapped, raped, and murdered Bella for himself, not for anyone else. Jean feels guilty about staying with Glen after the trial and after all of the internet charades have been widely publicized. She actually plans to leave him, but Glen manipulates Jean with guilt trips by telling her that he saw Bella the day she went missing, and that he wanted to bring her home to Jean.

Bob Sparkes feels guilty during the novel when he is unable to solve the case. At times, he goes off looking for information in a different direction, which causes him to potentially lose out on leads that could have emerged elsewhere. Right after Bella goes missing, he is chasing after Lee Chambers and Mike Doonan, way before hearing anything about Glen Taylor. The only reason he is able to get these names is because of the man who called in to police after his wife nagged him about notifying them of painting their blue vans a different color.

Styles

Point of View

The distinct narrative styles employed in *The Widow* serve to develop suspense and to illuminate the tone of mystery in this psychological thriller.

The narrative points of view in *The Widow* shift rapidly to focus on a different character in nearly every chapter. The opening chapters are related in the present tense from the first-person perspective of Jean Taylor and describe Jean's initial meeting with reporter Kate Waters. In subsequent chapters, the narrative focus shifts to follow Kate's perspective, but these chapters, set on the same date, are related in the past tense from a third-person limited narrator.

Chapters that focus on the perspective of Detective Sparkes are likewise related in the past tense from a limited third-person narrator. It is notable that as Jean's first-person narrative progresses throughout the novel, there are fluctuations between present-tense and past-tense narration. These transitions serve to highlight the deterioration of Jean's grasp on reality. Likewise, as the reader comes to realize that Jean is not a reliable narrator, more questions begin to emerge about the kidnapping of Bella and Glen and Jean's involvement in the kidnapping.

At the beginning of each chapter, the author indicates which character is the central focus for the chapter as well as the date of the events described. The following names are rotated throughout the book: *The Widow* (Jean Taylor), the Detective (Bob Sparkes), the Reporter (Kate Waters), the Mother (Dawn Elliot), and the Husband (Glen Taylor). The chapters do not follow any specific order; instead, they randomly rotate between characters at any given time. The benefit of writing the chapters in this manner is that it gives the reader an idea of what each character is thinking and how they interpret the current situation as opposed to how the other characters might see it. The drawbacks to setting up the book this way are that, at times, it can be confusing. The reader must constantly refer to the name and date at the beginning of each chapter to determine when these events are occurring and who is the focus of the narrative. Not only do the characters change in each chapter, but the story is related in a nonlinear fashion which adds to even greater disorder.

Language and Meaning

The Widow is written by a British author and is set in England so the reader encounters many idioms and language styles that are relevant in London, England. Characters talk about the names of towns and regions in London, including many small suburbs of the city. Some examples are Westland, the location of Manor Road and home of the Elliott residence, and the South Circular, where the Taylor House is located. Manor Road is the name of the street where Dawn Elliott lives, and it is mentioned many times in the



story by the detectives, reporters, Glen, and the news. Some examples of UK English spelling differences include colour, programme, and centre. Although each character has their own voice and personality, they rarely speak in a manner that would differentiate themselves from the other characters.

What is notable about the language and dialogue of the characters is the author's choice to give Jean a first-person perspective while the other main characters are the focus of many chapters but their narratives are related from a limited, third-person narrator. This choice sets aside the inner thoughts of Jean and puts her in a place of central focus in the novel. This choice also gives the reader greater insight into Jean's thoughts, such as in the following example from Chapter 28: "I've always wondered what it would feel like if I let out the secret. Sometimes I daydream about it and I can hear myself saying: 'My husband saw Bella the day she was taken.' And I feel the physical release, like a rush to the head" (177). This confession from Jean directly to the reader is the first major indication that Jean is not telling the truth to the investigators or the reporters and establishes the unreliability of her narrative.

Structure

The narrative of *The Widow* is related in a non-chronological structure. The author employs flashbacks throughout the story and relates each chapter focused on a different character. For example, Chapter 4 is written in the perspective of The Widow on June 9, 2010; Chapter 5 is focused on the perspective of the Detective on October 2, 2006; Chapter 6 is related from the Widow's perspective on June 9, 2010; and Chapter 8 follows the Reporter's perspective on October 11, 2006.

The author's decision to relate the story in a nonlinear fashion develops suspense and creates a mood of mystery in this psychological thriller. The shifts from character to character further the tension in the novel as the reader attempts to discern which characters are telling the truth and which are not.

Despite the non-chronological structure of *The Widow*, the narrative plot develops in a straightforward fashion, with the exposition in the first chapters relating back-story for Jean and indicating why she is constantly pursued by news reporters. These early chapters also indicate that Jean's husband died a week before the novel begins and establish that Jean is relieved that Glen is gone. The rising action of the plot begins with Detective Sparkes's revelation of Bella's kidnapping, and this serves as the inciting event that drives the characters forward. Both Detective Sparkes and Kate Waters seek to understand what led up to Bella's kidnapping, what happened to Bella, and who is responsible. As more information is revealed through flashbacks and through commentary from Jean, the plot progresses toward the climax. The climax occurs with the revelation that Glen was in fact responsible for Bella's kidnapping, rape, and murder. The falling action and denouement come in Chapter 54, with Bob Sparkes's reassurances to Jean that she was not responsible for Glen's actions.



Quotes

Everyone was very kind and trying to stop me from seeing his body, but I couldn't tell them I was glad he was gone. No more of his nonsense."

-- Jean Taylor (chapter 1)

Importance: This line in the first chapter tells us that Jean Taylor has a big secret she is hiding from everyone. It also indicates the relief that Jean felt when her husband was killed.

Here you go, Jean, she says. 'Try these on to see if they fit.' Funny how she keeps using my name. Like a nurse. Or a con man."

-- Jean (chapter 9)

Importance: Jean is starting to suspect Kate of not being genuine during their interview at Jean's home.

When they filed back to the sitting room, Doonan smiled. 'All done? Sorry about the washing. Expect you'll be off to see Glen Taylor now?'

-- Mike Doonan (chapter 12)

Importance: Up until this point, the police had never even heard of Glen Taylor. Mike Doonan exposed him and brought his name to the police, which otherwise he would have never been involved at all. Mike Doonan was the only person that knew Glen Taylor was working, and he mentioned this to the police in a 'matter of fact' tone of voice.

We can weather this, Jeanie. We know the truth, and so will everyone else soon. Don't you worry," he said at least once a visit. I tried not to, but I felt like our life was slipping away.

-- Glen Taylor (chapter 20)

Importance: While in jail awaiting trial, Glen tells Jean that the truth will come out, based on what they know. It almost comes off as a delusional way of repeating something to try and convince himself that it is real.

I went to different supermarkets so they couldn't find me and started wearing hats that hid my face a bit so other people wouldn't recognize me. Like Madonna, Lisa wouldn't say if she were still my friend. But she wasn't. No one wanted to know us now. They just wanted to know about us."

-- Jean (chapter 25)

Importance: It is the height of the media and press about Glen and Jean's life. They have officially fallen out with everyone they have known, and no one wants to be near them. The accusations are gaining more evidence and now more than ever, it is really looking like Glen might have been the killer.



I've always wondered what it would feel like if I let out the secret. Sometimes I daydream about it and I can hear myself saying: "My husband saw Bella the day she was taken." And I feel the physical release, like a rush to the head."

-- Jean (chapter 28)

Importance: Seemingly out of the blue, Jean makes a statement that goes against everything the reader has heard in the story up until this point. She confesses (to the reader) that Glen saw Bella on the day she was taken. She has said countless times that Glen did not see her or have anything to do with her disappearance, so this represents a shift taking place in the story.

He said it was like a dream. He stopped to eat his lunch and look at his paper in a side street and saw her at the garden gate, looking at him. She was alone. He couldn't help himself. When he told me, he put his arms around me and I couldn't move."

-- Jean (chapter 28)

Importance: After all of the denying that Glen did throughout the entire novel, he finally confesses to someone that he did indeed take Bella. He also claims that he does not remember anything after that. This quote finally solves the crime and biggest focus of the book.

Funny, but being on our own in France is different from being on our own at home. Without a routine, we don't know what to say to each other. So we say nothing. The silence should be a rest from the constant noise and banging on our door at home, but it isn't. It's worse somehow."

-- Jean (chapter 32)

Importance: Jean basically says that she and Glen are two completely different people now. After everything that has happened, they hardly have anything in common now. They do not even have the words to fill the silence. The way she says it, one could guess that Jean has begun to resent Glen.

For a moment I could see her sitting on our stairs, bumping down on her bottom and laughing. Calling for me to come and watch her. She could've been here if Glen had brought her home to me."

-- Jean (chapter 34)

Importance: Jean has these on-and-off fantasies about playing and laughing with Bella, that seemingly come up out of nowhere. She appears to be of sound mind in many situations, but reverts back to these delusions of Bella coming "home to her," when Bella had never belonged to her in the first place. This quote gives us the assurance that Jean has some severe issues of her own that she completely hides from everyone.

He pretended to be a normal man, going to work, having a beer with his mates, and helping with the washing up, but he turned into a monster in our spare room each night. If he could do that, I believe he was capable of anything."

-- Jean (chapter 41)



Importance: This is the first time Jean admits out loud to someone that she thinks there was something wrong with Glen.

He didn't remember getting out of the van or walking over to her. He remembered picking her up and holding her and getting back in the van, strapping her into the passenger seat. It took less than a minute, and she didn't make any fuss. She took the sweetie and sat quietly as he took her away from Manor Road."

-- Glen (chapter 45)

Importance: The reader is finally getting the exact details of what happened when Bella was kidnapped from her home.

Why are you here, Jeanie?' 'I've come to see our baby girl.' Sparks crouched down beside her, then took off his coat and sat on it so he could be close to her. 'Who is your baby girl, Jeanie?' 'Bella, of course. She's here. Glen put her here.'"

-- Jean Taylor & Bob Sparks (chapter 53)

Importance: Jean finally identifies the location where Bella has been, solving the main focus of the entire book.