

# Gone Girl



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GILLIAN FLYNN

Gillian Flynn was born and raised in Kansas City, Missouri. The child of professor parents, Flynn was shy as a young girl and retreated into the world of books and writing. After receiving degrees from the University of Kansas and the prestigious Northwestern University, Flynn worked for years as a journalist and television critic, all the while writing her own stories in her spare time. With the publication of her critically acclaimed debut novel *Sharp Objects* in 2006, Flynn established herself as a major voice in the literary world. The themes and ideas she explored in her first book—violence, abuse, secrets and lies, and the false idea of the “innately good” woman—would go on to make her third novel, *Gone Girl*, a riotous bestseller and a veritable literary phenomenon. The novel sold two million copies in its first year and went on to be translated into 40 languages, adapted into a major motion picture, and hailed as one of the most shocking novels in contemporary literature. Flynn lives in Chicago with her husband and two children. She has also written a number of screenplays, including for *Gone Girl*.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The driving force behind the fictitious events of *Gone Girl* is the Great Recession of the late 2000s. Flynn herself was working as an entertainment journalist in New York when she was laid off—Nick and several of his coworkers suffer the same fate, and soon Amy is jettisoned from her magazine job as well. The Elliott-Dunnes are plunged into financial ruin, as are Amy’s spendthrift parents, Rand and Marybeth. Flynn has also stated that she wrote *Gone Girl* largely in response to the 2002 murder of the pregnant Laci Peterson, a gruesome act of violence perpetrated by her husband, Scott. The trial became national news, and after news of Scott’s many affairs became public and Laci’s decomposed body was found—along with that of her strangled fetus—Scott was arrested on a golf course with \$15,000 cash, Viagra, and camping paraphernalia hidden in his Mercedes. As of 2018, Scott is on death row at San Quentin State Prison in California.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Gillian Flynn’s crime thriller *Gone Girl* became a worldwide success in large part because of its deliberate interweaving of true-crime tropes and red herrings with darker, more literary sensibilities—sensibilities which Flynn gleaned from her readings and viewings of novels, plays, and films which plunged

the depths of humanity’s darkness not for cheap thrills, but for legitimately chilling portraits of marriages, affairs, and plots gone wrong. Flynn has cited Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and Ira Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* as direct influences on both the plot and style of *Gone Girl*. Albee’s play unfolds over the course of one raucous, unsettling night as an older couple, George and Martha, invite their young colleagues Nick and Honey over for a dinner party. Though George and Martha, for all appearances, are the quintessential all-American couple, as they drink and fight over the course of the long evening, it becomes clear that their marriage is full of secret games, poisonous resentments, and vicious hatred. In *Rosemary’s Baby*, a desperate, out-of-work actor makes a literal deal with the devil by offering up his wife’s womb in exchange for personal success in his own faltering career. As Rosemary gestates and gives birth to the Antichrist, her husband tries to convince her that everything is normal and okay—even as Rosemary craves raw meat, grows sick and weak, and realizes that something in her own body and in her marriage is very wrong. The simmering sense of dread, intense patterns of distrust and resentment, and lack of resolution found in both works directly mirrors the elevated game of cat-and-mouse Nick and Amy play as they entrap one another in different ways over the years, both consciously and unconsciously.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Gone Girl*
- **When Written:** 2007-2011
- **Where Written:** Chicago
- **When Published:** 2012
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Literary thriller, mystery, suspense
- **Setting:** North Carthage, Missouri
- **Climax:** Amy returns to Carthage, revealing that she has not been killed or kidnapped and in fact faked her own disappearance.
- **Antagonist:** Nick Dunne and Amy Elliott-Dunne
- **Point of View:** First person, alternating between Nick and Amy’s points of view from chapter to chapter.

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Insider Knowledge.** After graduating from the prestigious Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism, Flynn worked for several years as a police reporter—a profession which she has stated she had “no aptitude” for, but which would come to inform her work as a novelist writing mostly in the genres of mystery, crime, and suspense.



## PLOT SUMMARY

On the hot July morning of his fifth wedding anniversary Nick Dunne arrives at the bar he co-owns with his twin sister, Go, in their hometown of Carthage, Missouri. After being laid off two years ago from their magazine jobs in the midst of the Great Recession, Nick and his wife, Amy Elliott Dunne, moved from Brooklyn to Carthage to help care for Nick's ailing mother, Maureen, who has since passed away. From Nick and Go's conversation at the bar, it becomes clear that Nick and Amy's marriage is stale and uninteresting. When Nick receives a call telling him that his cat has gotten out, Nick drives to his and Amy's large home in the suburb of North Carthage to find the front door standing wide open, and his wife "gone."

As the investigation begins, Nick's present alternates with **diary** entries written by Amy over the course of the last seven years. As Nick cooperates with investigators, including lead detectives Rhonda Boney and Jim Gilpin, answering their questions about his marriage with self-admitted lies, Amy recounts the heady early days of her and Nick's whirlwind romance. In the present, Nick attempts to solve a treasure hunt Amy has left behind for him—their yearly tradition—while in the past, Amy recounts falling in love with Nick and marrying him, promising that she'd never be a traditional nagging wife and would never treat him like a "dancing monkey."

As Nick solves more and more of Amy's clues, he remains stoically unconcerned about his wife's well-being, suggesting his guilt to the skeptical police; it's eventually revealed that he has a twenty-three-year-old mistress named Andie, one of his students at the local community college, and has been seeing her for over a year. As Nick halfheartedly tries to fend off Andie's desperate attempts to contact him, he struggles with the police's increasing skepticism. They present him with credit card statements indicating over two hundred thousand dollars' worth of debt, explain that blood was found all over the Dunnes' kitchen, discovered that on Valentine's Day of this year Amy went to a local abandoned mall known for housing junkies and homeless to try to buy a gun—and what's worse, the Dunnes' neighbor Noelle Hawthorne reveals publicly that Amy was pregnant, something that shocks Nick, as she always seemed uninterested in children. Amy's diary entries reflect all of this, stating that she began feeling unsafe around Nick after he started "us[ing]" her for sex, and yet shoved her when she came to him expressing her desire to have a child. Amy's diary entries end on a somber note—"this man might kill me"—as Nick, in the face of mounting evidence against him, contacts Tanner Bolt, a famous defense lawyer known for acquitting guilty husbands. After briefly flying to New York to secure Tanner's aid, Nick figures out the last of Amy's confusing, rhyming treasure hunt clues on the plane home. Horrified, he runs over to Go's house to visit the **woodshed** at the back of her property referenced in Amy's clue—he swings open the doors to find

expensive luxury merchandise such as electronics, golf clubs, and clothing, plus a cache of violent porn. On top of all the credit-card purchases sits a shining present wrapped in silver paper.

Amy takes over the narration—she says she is "so much happier" now that she's "dead." Amy has spent nearly an entire year familiarizing herself with police procedure and laying the groundwork for her own "disappearance." She has orchestrated the entire thing top to bottom in hopes of framing Nick for her murder and sending him to prison as revenge for his affair with Andie. Amy feels that Nick has, over the course of their marriage, slowly "killed [her] soul," and that this is a crime worthy of extreme punishment. Amy reveals that the allegations of abuse and rape she made against Nick within the pages of her falsely constructed, hurriedly written diary were false—what's more, she was never pregnant, but used the pregnant Noelle's urine sample to fake a pregnancy on her own medical record. Amy is satisfied that she has left enough incriminating evidence to indict Nick—but as she makes her way into the Ozarks to go into hiding, she's prepared to call and leave anonymous tips to push the investigation along in the right direction if need be. She plans to kill herself on the Mississippi in a few months' time and make sure her body washes up as the final piece of evidence to secure the death penalty for Nick—the state of Missouri doles out capital punishment.

Back in Carthage, Nick tells Go that Amy is framing him, and shows her the contents of the woodshed as proof. Together, they bring the present inside and open it—it contains a pair of antique **Punch and Judy puppets**. The Judy puppet is missing her handle and has a baby puppet on a string tied to her belly. As Go researches the significance of Punch and Judy puppets, she learns that the violent puppet routine often features Punch killing Judy and their baby. Meanwhile, Nick breaks things off with Andie, but she is angry, and Nick is worried the news of their affair will soon get out. Amy, meanwhile, sets up shop at an extended-stay motel in the Ozarks. She meets her neighbors, a shady fisherman named Jeff and a young woman with a split lip named Greta. Amy spends all her free time watching coverage of her own disappearance on the news, delighting as newscasters cast doubt on Nick's innocence and revere Amy as a beautiful, brilliant, devoted wife. In Carthage, Nick, Tanner, and Go figure out that at each stop on the "treasure hunt," Amy has left an incriminating piece of evidence. The one place that hasn't turned up any evidence is Nick's father's house, which stands unoccupied—Bill is in a nearby nursing home, suffering with Alzheimer's.

Nick begins calling up people from Amy's past—people she'd told him had wronged her in various ways—and attempts to get to the truth. A girl named Hilary Handy, accused of stalking Amy in high school, tells Nick that Amy orchestrated the entire thing after Hilary started flirting with a boy Amy liked; a man

named Tommy O'Hara, charged with raping Amy, reveals that after Amy found out he was seeing someone on the side, she visited his apartment, tied restraints to his bed, ordered him to have rough sex with her, and later presented the police with evidence that she'd been raped. Nick begins to truly feel scared for his own life. He goes to a bar downtown to drink, and a cute female reporter sidles up to him and asks if she can tape some questions. Nick agrees to the interview—and, knowing that Amy is out there listening, decides to use the opportunity to tell his wife exactly what she wants to hear.

In the Ozarks, Amy accidentally provides Jeff and Greta with a glimpse of the money pouch she keeps around her waist under her clothes at all times. She begins to get paranoid, and considers leaving. Before checking out of the motel, she goes to the library to check up on the latest news—she sees an interview with Nick has gone viral. In the interview, Nick admits to having let Amy down—he speaks about his wife in fawning, adoring terms, and begs for Amy's safe return. Amy is charmed, and unsure of whether she should carry out her original plan. Amy returns to her cabin to clear out—Jeff and Greta storm in, beat her up, and rob her, taking eight thousand dollars and leaving her with just a few quarters. Back in Carthage, Nick rides the high of his skyrocketing public image and prepares to do an even bigger TV interview with the famous Sharon Schieber. Meanwhile, Amy decides to call up Desi Collings, a former boyfriend who lives in St. Louis. Amy and Desi dated in boarding school—and Amy spread false rumors that after their breakup Desi began stalking her and even tried to kill himself in her dorm room. Amy meets up with Desi at a casino on the Mississippi—he has pined for her all these years, and offers to hide her away at his luxurious lake house. As she and Desi walk out of the casino together, Amy passes by a TV—and sees Andie giving a press conference, revealing the truth of her affair with Nick.

Reeling from the fact that the press has gotten to Andie, Nick gives another simpering interview in which he desperately begs for his wife's safe return. The team returns to Carthage feeling triumphant, excited for the interview to air the following evening—but when they get back to Go's house they're confronted with Boney, who has obtained a warrant to search Go's woodshed thanks to an anonymous tip. After searching the woodshed, Boney and Gilpin take Nick and Tanner down to the station for questioning—they set Amy's fake diary down on the table in front of Nick, and point out that the Judy puppet is missing her handle. The detectives posit that the handle is big enough to have been used as a murder weapon. Nick knows he is in deep trouble.

Desi and Amy arrive at the lake house, and as Desi gives Amy the grand tour, she gets the sense that he has been decorating and grooming the place for years to her liking, anticipating her return. That evening they watch the Sharon Schieber interview together, and Amy is completely taken in by Nick's heartfelt

answers. She decides that she needs to find a way home to him. Back in Carthage, Nick waits around in his and Amy's house for days, knowing that the cops will come to arrest him in a matter of time. He begins thinking horrible thoughts about killing Amy. After several days, the cops turn up the handle—which has trace amounts of Amy's blood on it—and officially arrest Nick. Amy, meanwhile, realizes that she is trapped at Desi's—he is restricting her food intake to make her lose weight, and reminds her often that if she ever flees the house he'll go to the police out of "concern." Amy begins concocting a plan to escape. One evening, she allows Desi to finally have sex with her, and asks him to make it rough. After their lovemaking, she fixes him a spiked martini—as he falls asleep, she gets to work.

Nick is out on bond awaiting trial forty days after Amy's disappearance. One afternoon, the doorbell rings—a disheveled Amy, covered in blood, is on the doorstep. She throws herself into Nick's arms as the cameras flash, and Nick embraces her—but whispers in her ear the words "you fucking bitch" before pulling her inside. In the privacy of their home, Amy puts on a crazed smile and tells Nick the elaborate story of how, forty days ago, Desi showed up at the house, clubbed her with the Punch and Judy handle she'd been trying to fix in time for the anniversary, and kidnapped her. She claims she has been living as Desi's prisoner for over a month. Nick doesn't buy Amy's lies.

The medical examiners confirm that Amy has been raped, and she tells them she slit Desi's throat to escape him. The police head for St. Louis to find Desi's body, and Boney and Gilpin question Amy about the details of her kidnapping. Boney tries to poke some holes in Amy's account, but Amy has prepared every detail perfectly. Back at home, Amy strips Nick to make sure he isn't wearing a wire, then drags him into the shower, where she tells him the whole truth and asks him to admit how "brilliant" she is. Nick tells her that he doesn't want to stay under the same roof under her anymore—but Amy assures Nick she can still make "very bad things" happen to him if he leaves her. That night, Nick calls Tanner to tell him what's happening—but Amy listens in, and comes downstairs to interrupt the call. As Nick begs Amy to let him go, the two get into a horrible physical fight. Nick nearly chokes Amy to death before he realizes that without her, he doesn't know who he would be anymore—Nick releases her, sobbing.

As the days go by, Amy realizes she needs to put another "precaution" in place to keep Nick under her thumb. As Amy secures a book deal of her own, she is grateful for the chance to at last tell her own story the way she wants to. Amy is unaware, though, that behind her back, Nick is surreptitiously meeting with Go and Boney to try and come up with a case against Amy. Boney's hands are tied, but she believes it is only a matter of time before Amy cracks and gives them something they can use. Nick's father dies that autumn, and he finds himself, to his great surprise, turning to his wife for support—as he realizes

that he's playing Amy's game and falling into her trap, he becomes desperate to pull himself out, and begins writing a memoir of his own. Amy knows what Nick's doing, but is unable to get into his laptop to read his work. Five months after Amy's return, Nick has at last finished the manuscript. He packs a bag, presents Amy with the book, and tells her he's leaving. Amy presents Nick, in return, with a positive pregnancy test. Nick realizes that Amy has used a sperm sample of his that was kept at a local fertility clinic for years after their failed attempts to have a child long ago to impregnate herself. Spurred by the trauma of losing his father and determined to be a good father to his own child, Nick at last relents and admits he has been "outplayed." Nick destroys the manuscript and accepts that he and Amy are one another's perfect match—without Amy, his "forever antagonist," he would not be the man he is.

Amy, determined to have the last word, writes one final missive. She has been home for nearly a year, and her baby is due tomorrow—the same day as her and Nick's sixth wedding anniversary. Amy writes that earlier this morning, Nick was stroking her hair. She asked him why he was always so good to her, and he replied that he feels sorry for her—because every morning, she has to wake up and be herself. Amy is upset and confused, and cannot stop thinking about Nick's words.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Nick Dunne** – Nick Dunne is the handsome, charismatic, and duplicitous dual protagonist and antagonist of the novel. For the first half of the book, it seems as if Nick Dunne has perhaps murdered his wife Amy—she has disappeared under mysterious circumstances, and Nick admits through his narration to lying to the police, surreptitiously visiting and making love with his much-younger mistress, Andie, and secretly loathing his wife. Eventually, it becomes clear that while Nick Dunne is not the all-American "good guy" he pretends to be, he's no murderer—instead, he's being framed by his psychotic wife in an attempt to get revenge upon Nick for altering the course of her life, dragging her from her hometown of New York to his hometown of Carthage, and then abandoning her for a younger, more attractive partner. Nick's low-level cruelty, apathy, and self-centeredness make him an unlikeable protagonist, but even as his mistakes and missteps mount, Gillian Flynn creates a narrative question worthy of her epic tale: in a marriage built on lies, is there ever only one truly wronged party? As Nick and Amy are forced to confront that they've manufactured versions of themselves meant to appeal to the other, it becomes clear that their marriage is built on a foundation that is shaky at best, and actively destabilizing at worst. Nick is neither a "good guy" nor a murderer, and in those shades of gray, Gillian Flynn poses major inquiries into what it means to love, fail, and attempt to control someone. As Amy's

manipulations escalate, Nick becomes a kind of **puppet** on a string, and must reckon with the deep-seated misogyny he harbors—while also reckoning with the fact that his wife is, perhaps, even more monstrous and twisted than he is. Nick and Amy's toxic relationship—which neither of them seem to know how to leave, so desperate are they both to fulfill the impossibly perfect blueprint the early stages of their relationship seemed to foretell—anchors the novel's madcap, frenetic energy in a very real examination of what it means to be a partner.

**Amy Elliott Dunne** – Amy Elliott Dunne is the diabolical dual protagonist and antagonist of *Gone Girl*. Amy is wealthy, beautiful, and born and bred in New York. When readers first meet Amy through her diary entries, she is a successful quiz-writer for a women's magazine and living in Manhattan off the trust fund that her parents—writers of the insanely popular *Amazing Amy* series of children's books, cribbed from Amy's real-life successes and challenges alike—have set aside for her. Nick Dunne sweeps her off her feet, and Amy and Nick live out a fairytale existence as they shirk gender norms, commit radically to their love for one another, and weather layoffs, family illnesses, and even financial setbacks with iron resolve. The story Amy tells in her diaries, though, grows dark and twisted as she begins recounting the physical, psychological, and emotional abuse she suffers at Nick's hands once they move to his hometown of Carthage, Missouri, to care for his ailing parents. Amy goes missing at the start of the novel, and her diary entries are interspersed with her selfish husband Nick's half-hearted involvement in the investigation. At the midpoint of the novel, it's revealed that Amy has masterminded her own disappearance—and orchestrated the evidence left behind to frame Nick for her murder as a way of getting revenge for all the ways in which their marriage has gone wrong. Amy feels that because Nick has taken her time, money, heart, and altered forever the course of her life—only to begin an affair with his much-younger student, Andie—his punishment should fit the crime of murder. Amy ultimately lies, cheats, steals, and kills to get back to Carthage, deciding that she wants to recommit to the lie she and Nick have been living and pretend to be representatives of the perfect American marriage. Selfish, conniving, contemptuous, spoiled, deceitful, and wickedly funny, Amy's narration offers damning truths about several of the novel's major themes: marriage, vengeance, misogyny and misandry, and the way people—especially couples—seek to control the narratives of their lives.

**Margo "Go" Dunne** – Nick's twin sister, Go, is the co-owner of The Bar in downtown Carthage, and Nick's first and best friend. Go is unconventionally attractive and marches to the beat of her own drum—a little bit of a punk, she loves making lewd and shocking jokes. Go is fiercely independent and has few romantic entanglements—Nick speculates that she, like him, bears the scars of their misogynistic and cruel father's years of

emotional abuse. Because of how close Nick and Go are, they have long endured rumors and taunts of “twincest,” and they are as a result often hyperconscious of the ways in which they both construct and dismantle the boundaries between them. When Amy disappears, Go is, like Nick, not sufficiently distressed—she and Amy never took a liking to one another. Go feels some sympathy for Amy, and even begins to believe that her brother may have killed her—but once Nick solves Amy’s treasure hunt and reveals that Amy has orchestrated the disappearance, and all the strange inconsistencies and pointed clues discovered in its wake, Go is squarely on her brother’s side. She discourages from engaging in stupid behavior like contacting his mistress, Andie, throughout the investigation, but is only able to control her brother so much—unlike Amy, she is not an efficient manipulator, and truly wants her brother to be happy. In the end, when Nick finds himself trapped in Amy’s web, Go experiences a breakdown of sorts, overcome with pain and sadness on behalf of her brother in a fit of despair that not even the numb Nick can see to muster.

**Desi Collings** – Amy’s ex-boyfriend from boarding school. A prim and proper “dandy” of a man who appreciates the finer things in life, Desi was accused of having a fatal attraction to Amy and attempting suicide in her dorm room when she tried to end things with him in their youth. It is eventually revealed that this never happened—but that Desi has remained obsessed with Amy over the years, and she has stoked his attention by writing him clandestine letters. When Amy loses all of her money while in hiding after being robbed by Greta and Jeff, she calls upon Desi, whom she knows will relish the prospect of finally being her “savior.” Desi brings Amy to live at his lake house, where he can care for her and shelter her—but Desi’s romantic obsession with Amy is actually just as dangerous as in the stories she invented about him, and she soon realizes that she is Desi’s prisoner. Amy concocts a plan to free herself from Desi, carefully constructing things to make it look as if Desi was the one who kidnapped her to begin with, and like she seized her first opportunity to kill the brutal captor who had kept her tied up in bed for months on end.

**Andie** – Nick’s very young mistress and one of his twenty-three-year-old journalism students. They begin an affair which lasts over a year, and Nick relishes Andie’s normalcy, her impressionable nature, and the way she regards him as someone worthy of love and respect. However, Nick has a hard time keeping Andie happy once Amy disappears, and makes himself appear even guiltier by using a disposable phone to contact her and continuing to meet up with her for clandestine conversations and sex in the days just after Amy goes missing. Eventually, on the advice of his lawyer Tanner Bolt, Nick breaks things off with Andie—who retaliates by holding a press conference in which she reveals the truth of her affair with Nick, dealing a significant blow to his all-important public image.

**Tanner Bolt** – Nick’s lawyer. Tanner Bolt is a cheesy but well-known criminal lawyer who has made a career of getting guilty men—often men who have killed their wives—acquitted of their crimes. Tanner has a healthy sense of humor about how strange and psychotic Nick’s case is, and yet wields his expertise almost like a weapon as he helps his new client wade through the endless gauntlet of media appearances, public opinion, police investigations, and—in the midst of it all—finding evidence to support Nick’s argument that Amy has “kidnapped” herself and is framing Nick for her murder as vengeance for his affair with Andie.

**Rhonda Boney** – The lead detective assigned to Amy’s disappearance case. With her partner, Gilpin, Boney establishes a careful rapport with Nick over the course of the investigation. She knows he’s essential to uncovering the truth, but pins him as a suspect from the start and treats him with increasing suspicion as the evidence against him mounts—or seems to. Through it all, Boney seems unable to completely convince herself that Nick is guilty—and after Amy’s return, she devotes herself to helping Nick find a way to share the truth about who Amy is and what she did.

**Rand Elliott** – Amy’s father, a gregarious man who, along with his wife, has constructed an empire and accumulated a massive deal of wealth by plagiarizing Amy’s childhood as fodder for a series of educational children’s books titled *Amazing Amy*. Rand and his wife, Marybeth, clearly cherish their only daughter, but put enormous pressure on her to succeed—and sniped at her failures through their fictive book series whenever Amy struggled or failed in life. Rand and Marybeth squander their fortunes by living beyond their means for years while *Amy* sales suffer, and ultimately have to borrow back the bulk of the trust fund they’d set aside for their daughter—plunging Amy and Nick into financial ruin, as well. Both Rand and Marybeth are warm and kind, but there is something selfish and cold running just underneath the surface of both their personas.

**Marybeth Elliott** – Amy’s mother, a slightly shrill and prim woman who has always demanded perfection of her daughter. After suffering upwards of five miscarriages and stillbirths, Marybeth finally gave birth to Amy—and Amy feels the pressure of being her mother’s long-awaited only daughter created a set of unrealistic expectations Amy could never live up to. Marybeth is generous and kind to Nick—but revokes her warmth and support when she discovers his affair with Andie. Like her daughter, Marybeth seems to be slightly hungry for the limelight, as she often gives press conferences and speeches throughout the investigation into Amy’s disappearance.

**Tommy O’Hara** – A man accused of raping Amy in New York. Once Nick realizes that Amy is trying to frame him for murder (as revenge for his affair with Andie), Nick gets in touch with Tommy. Tommy explains that he and Amy dated for a while until she got angry with him for seeing another woman and decided

to frame him for a brutal, violent rape to teach him a lesson.

**Hilary Handy** – A woman accused of stalking Amy in high school and threatening to kill her. Like Tommy, Hilary reveals Amy’s penchant for framing people when they wrong her in the smallest of ways. Hilary eventually reveals that she and Amy were truly friends—until Amy became jealous of her, and began setting her up to look like a stalker.

**Greta** – A resident at the extended-stay motel in the Ozarks where Amy hides out after running away from Carthage. Greta has a split lip and claims to have fled an abusive relationship with a no-good man. She befriends Amy—whom she does not recognize and believes is named Nancy—but turns against her and robs her with Jeff after finding out that Amy has a large amount of cash on her at all times.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Jeff** – A fisherman who lives at the extended-stay motel in the Ozarks where Amy is hiding out. There is something sinister about him, and he eventually teams up with Greta to rob Amy and take her savings.

**Jim Gilpin** – The second detective assigned to the case of Amy’s mysterious disappearance. Gilpin is affable but occasionally tough, and seems to be less attuned than Boney is to picking up the disconnect created by the odder details of the case.

**Ellen Abbott** – A hack reporter with a large following—mostly Southern white women—who has a reputation for airing sensationalized and factually questionable news reports.

**Rebecca** – A kind, young reporter who films an interview with Nick in a bar—an interview in which he speaks tenderly about missing his wife. The interview goes viral, and Nick credits Rebecca with rehabilitating his reputation in the public eye.

**Sharon Schieber** – A respected veteran newswoman who sits down with Nick for an exclusive interview as he and Tanner scramble to fix Nick’s public image and get ahead of the evidence Amy has left behind to incriminate her husband.

**Bill Dunne** – Nick’s father, an Alzheimer’s-riddled raging misogynist who abused Nick’s mother, Maureen, for years.

**Maureen Dunne** – Nick’s mother and Bill Dunne’s late wife. She dies of cancer prior to the events of the novel.

**Dorothy** – The woman who runs the front desk at the extended-stay motel complex in the Ozarks where Amy, in disguise, seeks refuge.

**Shawna Kelly** – A Carthage native who alternately wants to cozy up to Nick and lambast him in public when he refuses her advances.

**Lonnie** – A junkie living in the abandoned Carthage mall. On Valentine’s Day, he says, Amy came to him to try and buy a gun.

**Stucks** – One of Nick’s high school friends who joins the effort

to search for Amy.

**Officer Riordan** – A police officer in Carthage who is one of the first people on the scene after Amy’s disappearance.

**Officer Velasquez** – A police officer in Carthage who is one of the first people on the scene after Amy’s disappearance.

**The Hillsam Brothers** – A pair of Carthage natives who accompany Nick, Rand, and Stucks to the abandoned mall to hunt for clues to Amy’s whereabouts.

**Betsy Bolt** – Tanner Bolt’s wife, a tall and imposing optics expert who helps Nick prep for his high-stakes Shannon Schieber interview.

**Jacqueline Collings** – Desi’s mother. A moneyed woman who has a strangely close relationship with her son.

**Noelle Hawthorne** – Nick and Amy’s pregnant neighbor, who is dim-witted and extremely loyal to Amy. Noelle is instrumental in Amy’s plan to fake her own pregnancy.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### SECRETS AND LIES

Midway through the plot of *Gone Girl* comes the revelation that Amy Elliott Dunne has not been killed or kidnapped, but rather has orchestrated her own disappearance in an attempt to frame her husband, Nick Dunne, for murder as vengeance for the emotional damage he’s done to her life and their marriage. This shocking twist overturns everything that Gillian Flynn’s audience has come to believe up until that point. As the second half of the novel unpacks, categorizes, and seeks to explain the mountain of secrets and lies which have built up over the years of Nick and Amy’s marriage, Flynn uses the extreme example set by her dual narrators to argue that the secrets and lies that form the bedrock of a marriage, a partnership, a sense of self, or even a murder investigation can eventually become more relevant than the truth.

Nick and Amy’s very marriage is built on a series of half-truths. At separate points in the narrative, both admit to having pretended to be very different versions of themselves for one another early on in their relationship, and concede trying to impress, bait, and hook one another by behaving the way they believe the other wanted them to. Amy made herself into a “Cool Girl” who gave herself over to all of Nick’s desires—Nick buried his midwestern roots and small-town sensibility, adopting the upper-crust, cosmopolitan lifestyle his wife had

lived all her life. The ways in which Nick and Amy's marriage is a destabilizing force in both their lives is a theme in and of itself—but the secrets and lies they told one another in the formative years of their relationship both foreshadowed and dictated the necessity of other, more elaborate lies as they moved from courtship to marriage.

Dishonesty and secretiveness is also woven into the very structure of the novel itself. The entire foundation of the book—just like Nick and Amy's marriage—is built on a series of mistruths and half-truths both small and large. On a metatextual level, the information doled out to the audience through Amy's **diary entries** is all lies. The story she crafts about the emotional, physical, and psychological abuse Nick subjected her to after they moved to his hometown of Carthage, Missouri, is patently false—but to Amy, it might as well be true. She sees Nick as a cruel, boring, apathetic man who drained her of her vitality, her youth, her money, and her time, moved her to the middle of the country, and abandoned her for a younger woman. Though Nick never shoved Amy or raped her, as she alleges in her diary, she feels that she has been violated on a deeper level—and so the lies about Nick's concrete actions become more important to both her and to the authorities than the complicated, muddy truth of how their marriage slowly fell apart. Thus, Gillian Flynn suffuses not just the plot of the novel but additionally its very form with an obsession with what happens when a pattern of secrets and lies destabilize and even render pointless the truth.

The investigation which begins to unfold in the wake of Amy's disappearance is, like her marriage to Nick and the structure of the novel, built on a foundation of secrets and lies. Every clue, every inconsistency, and every strange new lead has been orchestrated by Amy. After studying crime novels and using the psychological know-how gleaned from her psychologist parents and her background writing personality quizzes for a magazine, Amy engineered her disappearance and its aftershocks on both an evidentiary level and a psychological one. She created a strange-looking crime scene and lazily cleaned it up; she used what she knew about her husband, her parents, and the ever-changing tide of public opinion to ensure that Nick would fall into each and every one of her traps. Detectives Boney and Gilpin fall for Amy's masterpiece completely—they believe Nick is guilty and pursue no other suspects, botching the investigation so that when Amy returns (and when Boney realizes that Nick was right about his wife having attempted to frame him), the police have no inroad to a second investigation into Amy's actions. The foundation of lies upon which the investigation is built makes the truth of what happened not only irrelevant, but undiscoverable—the authorities and the public are for the most part not only unable to poke holes in Amy's outlandish story of kidnap, rape, and torture, but uninterested in even considering that the facts they've taken as truth are in fact nothing but lies. After Nick

and Amy are reunited, their reunion, too, becomes entirely dependent on both parties' willingness to bury the truth of what has transpired between them in order to create a strained façade of normalcy, which will allow them to profit off book deals and a small slice of national celebrity—while further destabilizing what little solidarity they still share.

All of these ingredients add up to the much larger question of what it means to suffuse a relationship, an investigation, or even a novel with so many outright lies, baffling half-truths, and slowly festering secrets. Ultimately, Nick and Amy find themselves buried under the lies they've told themselves, one another, and the authorities. Any attempt to excavate some semblance of truth falls short, because they've so mired themselves in falsehoods that it's almost as if no objective truth even exists anymore. Still, Flynn chooses to end the novel on a slightly dissonant note: in a rare moment of honesty, Nick tells Amy that he's sorry for her because "every morning [she has] to wake up and be [herself.]" This startling admission rattles something deep within Amy—and seems to foretell that though for now both Nick and Amy are comfortable (if not happy) living a lie in which they're a happy, normal, American couple, the dam they've made for themselves will soon break.



## MARRIAGE

Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* is, at its heart, a novel about marriage. Though Nick and Amy's marriage is a supremely twisted example, Flynn uses their extreme circumstances to make a larger narrative comment on what it means to be in a partnership, make a commitment, and weather the unforeseeable, uncontrollable aspects of a life lived entwined with another person. In any romantic partnership or marriage, people bind themselves to one another for better or for worse—but through Nick and Amy's story, Flynn ultimately argues that the bonds of marriage have the power to destabilize a pair of lives just as equally as they have the potential to strengthen them.

Gillian Flynn makes sure that her readers know from the start that Nick and Amy's marriage is less than stable. The novel opens on the morning of their fifth anniversary—traditionally known as the "wood" anniversary—to symbolize the woodenness and staleness that has overtaken the Dunnes' once vibrant and passionate relationship. As the story of Nick and Amy's courtship expands, however, the secrets, lies, and narrative tricks employed by Nick, Amy, and Flynn herself make it clear that things in the Dunne household are even worse than they seem. Coming together in matrimony has forever derailed both Nick and Amy's lives—in binding themselves to one another five years ago, they sealed their fate and began a downhill slide into an endless spiral of cruelty, anger, and resentment. As Amy—bound for the Ozarks after spending nearly a year plotting to escape Carthage and frame Nick for her murder—recounts the true history of her relationship with

Nick, she enumerates all the ways in which their partnership, which she hoped would nourish and validate her, has actually been a destructive and destabilizing force in her life. Amy recalls acting like the stereotype of the “Cool Girl”—a laid-back, sexually open, perennially hot woman designed to make men swoon—in the early days of her relationship with Nick. She wanted to “win” him, and could tell he wanted a “Cool Girl” in his life. Amy committed so hard, however, to the role of “Cool Girl,” that she ended up destabilizing the core of who she was—and when it came time to upend her life for the sake of her husband’s happiness, she had no choice but to continue going with the flow. In Missouri, Amy gave up all her time and energy to care for Nick’s parents, and even loaned Nick an enormous sum of money to start a bar downtown with his twin sister, Go. Amy tired of the charade and began behaving like her normal self around Nick—only to find that he rejected her and became repulsed by the truth of who she was. Now, Amy hates Nick and wants to frame him for murder because she does, in a way, feel he has killed her—through his ambivalence and apathy he annihilated the woman she was and encouraged her to twist herself into a Frankenstein-esque monster, a cobbled-together woman made of shiny but unstable parts.

Nick, too, considers the ways in which being with Amy has changed and destabilized him over the years. He has worn himself thin pretending he is the man she wants him to be, and the pressure has proven too much for him. Instead of rising to meet Amy’s expectations, as he knows she hoped he would, he has fallen far in the other direction, becoming a caricature of the things he always loathed and feared about himself. Nick has never quite felt like Amy’s match—she spent her youth bouncing between prestigious boarding schools and her parents’ Manhattan brownstone while the down-home, midwestern Nick spent his summers as a child dressing up like Huck Finn for tourists on the Mississippi river. In the early days of their relationship, Nick felt that Amy bettered him and educated him—but as their relationship has progressed, Nick has begun to buckle under the pressure of trying to be the man Amy wants him to be. Once a successful journalist, he now teaches writing at a Podunk community college; once a lonely man with dreams of fatherhood, he has accepted Amy’s indifference to family life with a dreary resignation. Nick and Amy’s relationship has become the very picture of disappointment and resentment, and the rocky foundation of their marriage has given way. Nick and Amy spend ninety percent of the novel apart—they only reunite for its final forty-four pages, each of which is suffused entirely with an overwhelming sense of dread. As the novel speeds towards its end, Nick and Amy both come to realize that they have no choice but to resume their marriage and continue the façade they’ve been keeping up with for so many years. They have destabilized one another to a point where codependence is the only option—neither knows who they are without the other, and neither is willing to split apart and find out.

Amy and Nick’s toxic marriage causes Nick’s lawyer, Tanner Bolt, to remark that they are the most “fucked-up people” he’s ever met—to be sure, Gillian Flynn has designed the couple at the heart of *Gone Girl* to be larger than life and have gigantic problems that reflect their fatal attraction to one another. However, in picking apart the years of slowly accruing resentments, secrets, lies, and power struggles which define the Dunnes’ marriage, Flynn creates an unsettling argument: the Dunnes, for all their craziness, are not all that different from the average American couple. Any partnership forever alters the flow of both parties’ lives, if only in that they find themselves marking their course and steering their ship together. In the Dunnes’ toxic and codependent marriage, or any marriage like it, however, both individuals are plunging straight for the depths, unable to understand or begin to reckon with what they have “done to each other”—or what they have yet to do.



## MISOGYNY

A deep, dark thread of misogyny—dislike of, contempt for, or prejudice against women—runs through the pages of *Gone Girl* the way the

Mississippi river winds through Nick’s hometown of Carthage, Missouri. It is inseparable from the thoughts and actions of many of the characters, and it defines the relationships—romantic, familial, platonic—throughout the novel. However, it is not only the men in the story who are guilty of being biased against or even outright hateful of womankind—Gillian Flynn’s female characters, too, often engage in self-hating or self-defeating thoughts and actions. As Flynn unfolds the twisting plot of her novel, she ultimately argues that misogyny is so deeply ingrained in American society that its casual cruelty and poisonous rhetoric are inescapable parts of daily life—for women as well as for men.

A simpler, less interesting book might try to position its female characters as powerless victims of misogyny as a way of pointing out the pain of a life lived in a society which alternately infantilizes and demonizes women. However, Gillian Flynn chooses to use the psychotic but brilliant villainess at the heart of the novel, Amy Elliott Dunne, to show how the misogyny that is sutured into the bones of American society seeps into the women living within it—and the effects of such psychological confusion can be disastrous. Amy Elliott Dunne is a paradox of a character. A wealthy, beautiful Manhattanite, she is acutely aware of her charms and wiles, but insists that she hasn’t fallen into the trap of femininity. In her falsified **diary** entries, she writes about promising her new husband, Nick, that she’ll never nag him for spending a night out with his guy friends or spending too much money; she laughs behind closed doors and on the page at women with husbands who act like “dancing monkeys” and bend to their wives’ every request. Amy seems to want to hold herself apart from other women, or declare that



she's better than them—her self-hatred and the internalized misogyny she feels, it seems, make the traditional hallmarks of womanhood and the roles women often wind up playing odious to her. Even once Amy is revealed to have invented her “diary-self” as a work of fiction, the true Amy is no less of a misogynist—she picks out women she believes are dull or stupid and plays them like fiddles, worming her way into their lives and manipulating them for her own gain. She callously lambasts the “Cool Girl” image she constructed for herself while calling out all the other women who play into such roles and allow men to dictate who they’ll become, how they’ll act, and what they’ll like. She also plays into gender stereotypes. While hiding out in the Ozarks, she refuses to believe that her neighbor Greta was the one to come up with the plan to rob her, instead pinning the crime on a man—even though Amy herself is an accomplished criminal mastermind, which should be proof enough for her that women are capable of such things. Amy is ultimately a mess of contradictions: a woman who loathes other women, a narcissist who hates herself on a level she can’t comprehend, and an individual who seeks to play into the tropes of femininity for her own gain while remaining blind to the possibility that other women all around her—just as affected or disaffected by misogyny as she is—are doing exactly the same thing.

Nick Dunne, too, is a misogynist deep in his heart. Having been raised by a cruel, callous father who emotionally and, it’s suggested, physically abused his wife, Nick has seen firsthand the painful fruits of misogyny in action. Nick’s father, Bill, an Alzheimer’s patient trapped inside a nursing home, frequently escapes the facility and roams around town muttering one word over and over again: “bitch.” Nick has vowed all his life never to allow himself to become of his father, and in adulthood outright loathes the man—but as the novel progresses, Nick is forced to admit that he has, in spite of his best efforts, been seduced by how easy it is to blame all of the problems of his life on the women within it. As Nick falls apart under the pressure of the investigation into Amy’s disappearance—a crime he’s heavily suspected of perpetrating, despite his insistence upon his innocence—he rails, always in the privacy of his own mind, against the women he feels are persecuting him. He detests Detective Boney, Amy, his mistress Andie, female news anchors such as Ellen Abbott who decimate his public image, and even lashes out verbally at all kinds of women at varying levels of closeness and intimacy, from call-center representatives to his twin sister and confidante, Go. Nick may not be a murderer—but just because he’s not a criminal doesn’t mean he doesn’t harbor many of the misogynist fantasies and cruel, looping thoughts that drive many men to acts of outrageous violence against women.

*Gone Girl* offers no easy answers—Nick hates Amy with a passion, but the novel posits that this hatred is justified. Indeed, Amy is hateable—she is pompous, vain, and cruel, and her inner

monologue is a steady stream of vitriol directed not only at the “dancing monkey” men surrounding her at every turn but also the dull, idiotic, needy women she fears becoming. Flynn implicitly asks her readers whether Nick’s hatred of his wife is justified—if hating a woman because she’s hateable or fearing her because she’s dangerous is prejudice or plain common sense. In a society ruled by a ubiquitous undercurrent of deep-seated misogyny, she argues, it’s difficult—sometimes even impossible—to distinguish between an ingrained, learned hatred of women and a personal vendetta.



## WRITING, STORYTELLING, AND NARRATIVE

Nick and Amy are—or were—both writers by trade. Laid off from high-profile magazine jobs before the

events of the novel began, both of them struggle with repressed creativity, a desire to organize the things that happen to them into stories, and to wrest control of their life’s narratives from the forces that have derailed them both. As Nick and Amy become increasingly obsessed with taking back the reins of their own stories, they employ various methods in a series of escalating attempts to control, once and for all, the narratives of their lives and their marriage. Throughout *Gone Girl*, Flynn shows how deeply Nick and Amy both hold the belief that power over narrative is power over circumstance, and ultimately argues that this slightly sinister belief is, nonetheless, true.

The struggle between Nick and Amy to gain control over the narrative of their lives—together and separately—as well as that of their marriage is written into the very DNA of the novel. As the perspective alternates back and forth, gaining momentum and then careening to a rapid-fire conclusion, it becomes clear that Amy and Nick have been struggling for ownership of their own stories for the entirety of their relationship—and will continue doing so until the bitter end.

Amy is more well-versed than Nick in what it means to lose control over one’s narrative—and to try to gain it back at any cost. Her entire childhood was cannibalized by her parents, Rand and Marybeth, as fodder for their *Amazing Amy* series of children’s books, in which they cribbed important events from Amy’s youth and turned them into stories meant to educate other children in how to be “amazing.” In reality, Amy was never the perfect child her parents marketed her as to the masses—and yet the narrative that she had to be in order to keep up with her fictive alter-ego transformed Amy into a power-hungry perfectionist determined to live the kind of storybook life her warped childhood led her to believe she should. Amy’s backstory sets up the idea that she is desperate for a sense not just over the story she tells herself about her identity and her circumstances, but over what happens to her in her real life. Because the fictional “Amazing Amy” always showed her up no matter what regular Amy did in the real

world, Amy knows that in order to regain control over herself, she will have to do something truly spectacular and unforgettable—which leads to the creation of her plot to get “gone.”

The **diary** that Amy keeps as a piece of evidence in her mysterious disappearance is a catalog of seven years of false entries which weave a mostly false story of suffering escalating abuse in her marriage with Nick. The diary is Amy’s last-ditch effort to reclaim power over the many slights and cruelties she sees Nick as having thrust upon her. Nick, in Amy’s view, has sucked up all her money, dragged her to the Midwest, and emotionally abandoned her for a younger woman. The story Amy had been telling herself about her relationship with Nick when they were happy and in love in New York—that they are two whip-smart, laid-back, bonkers-in-love equals—has fallen apart, and as she sets out to start her diary, Amy begins constructing a new story which she feels emotionally matches up with the way she feels: cast out, ignored, and used up.

Towards the end of the novel, when Amy makes her triumphant return to Carthage after “escaping” from her former high school boyfriend (and alleged stalker) Desi Collings’s lake house, she again begins spinning a narrative which suits her, once more showing that the ability to shape a narrative is essentially the ability to shape the circumstances of a situation. She alleges that Desi kidnapped her, tied her to a bed for weeks, and raped her repeatedly—but because Desi’s dead, and because of the “narrative” Amy put in place by framing herself as the victim, no one questions her story. She’s even offered a score of lucrative book deals from competing publishers—all she has to do is pick the vessel for her story and write it. Amy believes herself firmly in charge of her own story once and for all—until she realizes that Nick is staying up writing all night every night, working on a tell-all of his own. When Amy discovers what Nick’s doing, she threatens to hurt their unborn child—or implicate Nick in having done so. Nick realizes he has been “outplayed” by his “forever antagonist,” and that going forward, his and Amy’s lives together will be “one long frightening climax.” At that point in the novel, the story seems to be over—but the narration switches back over to Amy for one last, brief chapter in which she states that she just wanted to be able to have the last word.

As Amy and Nick wrestle for control both on the page and off, the two of them—both talented writers—demonstrate the knowledge that to finally gain control of their “story” is to gain control of their actual circumstances and shared future. In the end, Amy appears to have won—she is able to successfully wrangle the “last word” for herself, and has forced Nick into the realization that he has lost control not just over the narrative of his own life but of the blueprint for his future. Nick’s final words, however—that his and Amy’s story is just one long and harrowing “climax”—suggests that the struggle to continually claim and reshape their narrative will repeat itself for years to

come with no end in sight.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### AMY'S DIARY

Amy’s diary is the most potent symbol of Amy and Nick’s alternating attempts to control the narrative of their lives, their marriage, and indeed their entire selves. The structure of *Gone Girl* establishes itself early on as a kind of ballet between Nick and Amy’s points of views in the wake of Amy’s sudden and mysterious disappearance from their home in North Carthage, Missouri. Nick relays the events following Amy’s disappearance in real-time, while readers imbibe snippets of Amy’s diary, the entries stretching back several years and telling the story of their whirlwind romance, their difficult layoffs from magazine jobs in New York and their emotional move to Nick’s Missouri hometown, and at last their descent into a spiral of pain, cruelty, and violence.

At the midpoint of the novel, however, it becomes clear that Amy has orchestrated her own disappearance—and left behind a trove of incriminating clues in order to frame Nick for her murder—in order to get revenge against Nick after she finds out he’s having an affair with one of his students. Amy’s diary is revealed to be a construct—a piece of imaginative writing she expresses pride over having created. Most things contained within it are false, and Amy has constructed an entire persona for herself which readers of the novel have, in all likelihood, fallen for hook line and sinker. Thus, Amy’s diary comes to symbolize her desperate need to control the way other people see her, and to come off as unimpeachably perfect and “amazing” no matter the cost.



### THE WOODSHED

The woodshed at the back of Go Dunne’s property in Carthage, Missouri, comes to symbolize how secrets and lies build up over the course of any marriage or profound romantic relationship until they come to a head and burst. At first, the woodshed appears to be in a state of disuse and disrepair, and is thus ignored by Nick, Amy, and Go alike. Over the course of the novel, however, the woodshed emerges as a very crucial site. As Nick completes the treasure hunt left behind for him by Amy—in celebration of their fifth anniversary, ostensibly, but in reality a tour of all the sites of his infidelity with his mistress Andie—Nick is forced to admit to his sister (and his readers) that he has used to woodshed as an escape and a place to have sex with his mistress without being discovered. Nick is worried when he realizes that the last stop

on Amy's treasure hunt is the woodshed itself—but as he swings open its doors for the first time in months, he is horrified to see that Amy has filled it with expensive, ridiculous, and incriminating credit card purchases ranging from luxury golf clubs to violent, misogynistic pornography.

Amy has manipulated the contents of the woodshed and stuffed it full of things meant to incriminate Nick and make him look guilty so that he can be indicted for her murder (her months-long plot to take revenge on Nick for his affair), but as Nick confronts the items inside, he's forced to realize once and for all how the secrets, lies, and half-truths he's kept from his wife—and the ones she's kept from him—have destabilized their marriage to the point of hatred and utter lunacy. Though Nick doesn't play golf or watch violent porn, he does harbor secret misogynistic beliefs and often fantasizes about killing Amy for attempting to destroy him—and his aimlessness and directionless in the wake of his layoff from his magazine job is so odious to Amy that she is perhaps trying to get Nick to draw a connection between the idle, slow pursuit of golf and the stagnancy they've both faced since losing their jobs and moving to Missouri. The woodshed contains all the dark parts of Nick and Amy's quiet resentments of one another, and symbolizes the "home" they've made for their worst thoughts, darkest fantasies, and cruelest suspicions about one another.



### THE PUNCH AND JUDY PUPPETS

Amy's five-year-anniversary gift to Nick is a pair of wooden puppets made to look like Punch and Judy, stock characters from puppet theater. As the novel unfolds, the puppets come to symbolize the violence and decay in Nick and Amy's marriage as well as the nature of their relationship itself from the very beginning. The five-year anniversary is traditionally the "wood" anniversary, and though as Nick has been solving Amy's labyrinth, traditional treasure hunt with the expectation that he'll find an antique wooden cradle at the end (since, in the wake of Amy's disappearance, evidence has emerged to suggest that she was or is pregnant), the present Amy has selected for him is far more sinister. The Punch and Judy show is a notoriously violent puppet routine passed down through oral tradition—in one popular iteration of the action, Punch kills Judy and her baby. The Punch and Judy puppets Amy selects for Nick's gift are antique and grotesque—the Judy puppet has a tiny baby puppet attached to her belly on a string and is suspiciously missing the large wooden handle which animates the puppet.

As Nick and Go inspect the puppets together after finding them in Go's **woodshed**—along with a mountain of expensive and ridiculous purchases Amy has been making on credit cards in Nick's name—she wonders whether Judy's lack of a handle is symbolic of Judy's femaleness. She suggests that Amy has left the present to show Nick that he is nothing more than a puppet

on a string—Amy is behind the scenes, manipulating everything from afar, while Nick helplessly watches the evidence of his "murder" of his wife mount around him. Nick and Amy have been acting according to scripts, playing roles they believe the other will like—Amy has been masquerading as a hip, laid-back "Cool Girl" while Nick has tried to smother his average, Midwestern roots and his family's history of violence and misogyny. Nick and Amy have turned themselves and one another into puppets—and the gift of Punch and Judy shows that Amy is ready at last to reckon with the full measure of what she and Nick have done to one another over the years, and make him pay for the ways in which he's altered the course of her life and her very being.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Crown Publishers edition of *Gone Girl* published in 2012.

### 1. Nick Dunne, *The Day Of (1) Quotes*

☝ When I think of my wife, I always think of her head. [...] And what's inside it. I think of that too: her mind. Her brain, all those coils, and her thoughts shuttling through those coils like fast, frantic centipedes. Like a child, I picture opening her skull, unspooling her brain and sifting through it, trying to catch and pin down her thoughts. *What are you thinking, Amy?* The question I've asked most often during our marriage, if not out loud, if not to the person who could answer. I suppose these questions stormcloud over every marriage: *What are you thinking? How are you feeling? Who are you? What have we done to each other? What will we do?*

**Related Characters:** Nick Dunne (speaker), Amy Elliott Dunne

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 3

#### Explanation and Analysis


The opening lines of *Gone Girl* introduce readers to Nick and Amy Dunne. The tension, fear, and almost deadly fascination within these sentences is evident, but "unspools" slowly as Nick reflects on the chasm that exists, and has always existed, between himself and his wife. Nick is desperate to know what's going on in his wife's head, and not only on a theoretical or emotional level—he literally cannot imagine the contents of what's inside her mind. The secrets, lies, and half-truths which have defined the entirety of Nick and Amy's relationship will be laid bare in excruciatingly slow motion over the course of the novel, but

all the regret, empathy, fascination, and simmering fear Nick feels towards the women he's married are here in this short paragraph. The familiar feeling of wondering what one's friend, partner, or spouse is thinking is transfigured into a series of impossible-to-answer existential questions as Nick reveals that not only does he not truly know who his wife is—but this lack leads him to wonder what they are each truly capable of doing to one another.

### 3. Nick Dunne, *The Day Of* (2) Quotes

☝️ “Don’t let [Amy] worry you.” Go lit a cigarette. She smoked exactly one a day. “Women are crazy.” Go didn’t consider herself part of the general category of *women*, a word she used derisively.

**Related Characters:** Nick Dunne, Margo “Go” Dunne (speaker), Amy Elliott Dunne

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 18

#### Explanation and Analysis


In this quotation from early on in the book, Flynn broadcasts to her readers that the type of misogyny she’s tackling in her novel is not as simple as men disliking or doing bad things to women: she wants to show how internalized misogyny runs rampant through society and affects even women, too, on a very deep level. As Nick gripes to his twin sister Go about what he should do for his wife, Amy, for their anniversary—he feels that each year of their marriage he has failed to do enough for her—Go dismisses Amy’s high standards by implying that she’s “crazy” for wanting certain things from Nick. When Flynn writes that Go doesn’t “consider herself part of the general category of *women*,” she shows how her female characters have been trained by society to express the hatred and contempt for womankind they’ve come to internalize. Go deploys the word “women” in this passage like a slur or a curse—she is a woman but considers herself removed from or better than other women. This attitude will be seen again later in the novel as Flynn explores Amy’s feelings and motivations—she, too, has fallen victim to her own internalized hatred of her own womanhood and other women’s expressions of femininity.

### 4. Amy, *Diary Entry, Sep 18th, 2005* Quotes

☝️ My parents have always worried that I’d take Amy too personally—they always tell me not to read too much into her. And yet I can’t fail to notice that whenever I screw something up, Amy does it right... [...] This used to drive me mad... [...] That my parents, two child psychologists, chose this particular public form of passive-aggressiveness toward their child was not just fucked up but also stupid and weird and kind of hilarious. So be it.

**Related Characters:** Amy Elliott Dunne (speaker), Marybeth Elliott, Rand Elliott

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 26-27

#### Explanation and Analysis


In this passage—one of the rare moments of truth within Amy’s falsified decoy diary entries—she discusses the fact that her parents have become millionaires based on the success of their popular series of children’s books, which are titled *Amazing Amy* and are based on Amy’s real life. The books, however, transfigure Amy’s real-life experiences—playing sports, learning instruments, making good and bad choices in social situations—into lessons for other children. “Amazing Amy” succeeds where the real Amy fails—she is up for any challenge, always has a sunny attitude, and embodies the perfect ideas of childhood. The real Amy grew up always feeling she fell short of her literary alter ego as a result. She writes in this passage that she developed a “so be it” attitude towards her parents’ habit of plagiarizing her childhood—but as the book progresses, readers will come to learn that Amy has not been able to shake off the feelings of inadequacy, anger, and resentment that her parents have given her over the years quite as easily as she’d like everyone else to think. The *Amazing Amy* books are their own kinds of lies, which serve to destabilize the real Amy’s concept of herself.

### 6. Amy, *Diary Entry, July 5th, 2008* Quotes

☝️ I am fat with love! Husky with ardor! Morbidly obese with devotion! A happy, busy bumblebee of marital enthusiasm. I positively hum around him, fussing and fixing. I have become a strange thing. I have become a wife. I find myself steering the ship of conversations—bulkily, unnaturally—just so I can say his name aloud. I have become a wife, I have become a bore, I have been asked to forfeit my Independent Young Feminist card. I don’t care. I balance his checkbook, I trim his hair.

**Related Characters:** Amy Elliott Dunne (speaker), Nick Dunne

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 38

### Explanation and Analysis

More of Gillian Flynn's exploration of her characters' internalized misogyny is on display in this paragraph, as Amy describes being deeply in love with her new husband, Nick. Later in the book, when the diary is revealed to be a work of fiction designed to craft an alternate narrative about Nick and Amy's marriage—one which frames Nick as an abusive and cruel partner—this passage, full of love and ardor, can be seen in a whole new light. Through this paragraph, Amy is making fun of women who “forfeit [their] Independent Young Feminist card[s]” without a care, and transform themselves into agreeable little wives who think of nothing but their husbands. Amy has such contempt for women who surrender to the traditional trappings of femininity—and, it seems, a good deal of resentment towards herself for either being unable to feel these feelings or for wanting to feel them but resisting.

## 13. Nick Dunne, Two Days Gone Quotes

☝☝ “People think they know [Amy] because they read the books growing up,” I said.

“I can see that,” Boney said, nodding. “People want to believe they know other people. Parents want to believe they know their kids. Wives want to believe they know their husbands.”

**Related Characters:** Rhonda Boney, Nick Dunne (speaker), Amy Elliott Dunne

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 91

### Explanation and Analysis

In this exchange, Nick and Detective Boney discuss the veritable litany of stalkers and harassers Amy has had over the years. Nick suggests that Amy has been the victim of so much unwanted attention because “people think they know her”—something Boney solemnly agrees with. When she says that “people want to believe they know other people,” she’s calling into question a sentiment which reverberates throughout many of the novel’s major themes. The


unknowability of another human being haunts the themes of marriage, secrets and lies, and what it means to control or create a narrative. In just a couple of brief, straightforward lines, Boney encapsulates the emotion which drives many of the characters’ most desperate and despicable actions: the desire to know one another, and to be (or at least feel) known in return.

## 14. Amy, Diary Entry, Sep 15th, 2010 Quotes

☝☝ [Nick] promised to take care of me, and yet I feel afraid. I feel like something is going wrong, very wrong, and that it will get even worse. I don’t feel like Nick’s wife. I don’t feel like a person at all: I am something to be loaded and unloaded, like a sofa or a cuckoo clock. I am something to be tossed into a junkyard, thrown into the river, if necessary. I don’t feel real anymore. I feel like I could disappear.

**Related Characters:** Amy Elliott Dunne (speaker), Nick Dunne

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 102



### Explanation and Analysis

This quotation represents yet another rare instance where “Diary Amy” expresses a truth that the actual Amy no doubt felt in a very real way. As Nick and Amy packed up their beautiful Brooklyn brownstone and made their way to Missouri five years ago to care for Nick’s ailing mother, Amy may have indeed felt like she “could disappear”—like Nick had cast her aside. However, while Diary Amy seems hurt, frightened, and detached, information that comes to light later on in the novel allows readers to intuit that the real Amy was simply peeved to no longer be the center of Nick’s universe. In this way, Amy uses the suggestion of emotions from her real life to create alternate emotions on the page. She is creating a narrative about herself based in a half-truth, which she knows will make her seem more empathetic and likable.

## 17. Nick Dunne, Four Days Gone (1) Quotes

☝☝ I felt a surge of angst. What a fucking day. Boney was out to get me, Noelle was insane, Shawna was pissed, Hilary was resentful, the woman at the security company was a bitch, and my wife had stumped me finally. It was time to end this goddamn day.

**Related Characters:** Nick Dunne (speaker), Amy Elliott Dunne, Hilary Handy, Shawna Kelly, Noelle Hawthorne, Rhonda Boney

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 135



### Explanation and Analysis

The theme of misogyny reverberates throughout the novel as Flynn examines the ways in which a culture of rampant misogyny within American society affects all of her major characters. Whereas Go and Amy experience an internalized sense of misogyny which leads them to despise, on some level, themselves or other women, Nick Dunne falls prey to the dismissive and righteous language of misogynists despite his best efforts to try to keep from becoming more and more like his cruel, woman-hating father. After a trying day, Nick blames his exhaustion and misery on all of the women he's interacted with over the last several hours—he refuses to accept blame for any of the mistakes he's made and focuses all of his frustration and anger on the women surrounding him, even the tangential ones.

## 27. Nick Dunne, Six Days Gone (2) Quotes

☝☝ “This is going to be a real test for you, Nick,” [Go] murmured, not looking at me. “You’ve always had trouble with the truth—you always do the little fib if you think it will avoid a real argument. You’ve always gone the easy way. [...] You’re still fibbing like a little boy. You’re still desperate to have everyone think you’re perfect. You never want to be the bad guy.”

**Related Characters:** Margo “Go” Dunne (speaker), Nick Dunne

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 200

### Explanation and Analysis

As Go, in this passage, warns Nick that he will soon need to stop focusing on his image and how other perceive him and commit to telling the truth, she touches on one of the novel's major themes: how secrets and lies add up over the course of a life and create a self that is not authentic. Go points out the childish nature of the impulse to seem “perfect,” and construct lies or “fibs” that allow that illusion to persist. Nick is not alone in this impulse—Amy shares it, too, and it is because of their shared compulsion to seem

infinitely likable that they have found themselves trapped in such a miserable, toxic marriage.

As Go foretells here, Nick has to allow himself “to be the bad guy” in order to lure Amy home—though he doesn't exactly stop with all the lies. As the novel unfolds, and the stoic, lying Nick looks guiltier by the day, Nick is eventually forced to play the role of the simpering, regretful husband who made major mistakes in his marriage but is willing to do anything to make it up to his beloved wife.

## 29. Nick Dunne, Seven Days Gone (1) Quotes

☝☝ Amy was blooming large in my mind. She was gone, and yet she was more present than anyone else. I'd fallen in love with Amy because I was the ultimate Nick with her. Loving her made me superhuman, it made me feel alive. [...] Amy made me believe I was exceptional, that I was up to her level if play. That was both our making and undoing. Because I couldn't handle the demands of greatness. [...] I turned her into the brittle, prickly thing she became. I had pretended to be one kind of man and revealed myself to be quite another.

**Related Characters:** Nick Dunne (speaker), Amy Elliott Dunne

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 214

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Nick reflects on the surprising ways in which he has found himself missing Amy. In spite of how terrible and toxic their marriage was, in the wake of her engineered disappearance, Nick has begun to wonder who he is without his wife. Though their marriage has been built upon a foundation of lies, secrets, half-truths, and exaggerations, Nick and Amy have nonetheless shaped one another, and in this passage it's clear that Nick regrets the ways in which he and Amy have harmed and poisoned one another. Without her, he feels less than “exceptional”—and is beginning to realize that perhaps the only way to get that feeling back is to get the missing Amy back. Still, Nick's misogyny is evident in this passage as he thinks about his “brittle, prickly” wife and thinks of Amy only in terms of what she can give him.

### 30. Amy Elliott Dunne, *The Day Of* (1) Quotes

☝☝ I'm so much happier now that I'm dead.

Technically, missing. Soon to be presumed dead. But as shorthand, we'll say dead. It's been only a matter of hours, but I feel better already: loose joints, wavy muscles. At one point this morning, I realized my face felt strange, different. I looked in the rearview mirror—dread Carthage forty-three miles behind me, my smug husband lounging around his sticky bar as mayhem dangled on a thin piano wire just above his shitty, oblivious head—and I realized I was smiling. Ha! That's new.

**Related Characters:** Amy Elliott Dunne (speaker), Nick Dunne

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 219

#### Explanation and Analysis

In this paragraph—the start of the novel's explosive second part—Amy Elliott Dunne reveals that she is *not* dead or missing; rather, she has orchestrated her disappearance in an attempt to make her “shitty, oblivious” husband pay for the un-prosecutable crimes she feels he's enacted against her. Amy is leaving behind all the trappings of her old life, and as she does, she is gleeful and elated. She's not just happy to be free—she's happy that she's about to take revenge against the man who she feels has ruined her life. Readers are about to encounter a very different version of Amy than the version they've heard about from Nick or read about in her falsified diary entries—the true Amy is vindictive and spiteful, with a poison tongue and total contempt for everyone but herself.

☝☝ That night at the Brooklyn party, I was playing the girl who was in style, the girl a man like Nick wants: the Cool Girl. Men always say that as the defining compliment, don't they? *She's a cool girl.* Being the Cool Girl means I am a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping, who plays video games, drinks cheap beer, loves threesomes and anal sex, and jams hot dogs and hamburgers into her mouth like she's hosting the world's biggest culinary gang bang while somehow maintaining a size 2, because Cool Girls are above all hot. Hot and understanding. Cool Girls never get angry; they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner and let their men do whatever they want. *Go ahead, shit on me, I don't mind, I'm the Cool Girl.*

Men actually think this girl exists.

**Related Characters:** Amy Elliott Dunne (speaker), Nick Dunne

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 222

#### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage from the novel—widely regarded by fans and critics as one of its most notorious moments—Amy delivers a scathing monologue indicting the ways in which women try to pass themselves off as the “Cool Girl[s]” men will like and want to be with. Amy admits that she has been playing the “Cool Girl” for a large part of her relationship with Nick—and seems to loathe herself especially for demeaning herself in such a way. In this passage, Amy is calling out the ways in which women, spurred on by their boyfriends' or partners' implicit if not outright misogyny—and yet showing her hand as she engages in a kind of misogyny of her own. Amy clearly reviles women who sideline their own wants and needs for the attentions of men and hates herself most of all for having joined the ranks of the dull, pliant women she detests.

### 31. Nick Dunne, *Seven Days Gone* (2) Quotes

☝☝ [Amy] knew she'd punish me good. Now at our final stop, Amy was ready for me to know how clever she was. Because the woodshed was packed with about every gizmo and gadget that I swore to Boney and Gilpin I hadn't bought with the credit cards I swore I didn't know anything about. The insanely expensive golf clubs were here, the watches and game consoles, the designer clothes, they were all sitting here, in wait, on my sister's property. Where it looked like I'd stored them until my wife was dead and I could have a little fun.

**Related Characters:** Nick Dunne (speaker), Amy Elliott Dunne

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 227

#### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Nick has just solved the last clue of Amy's treasure hunt—and arrived at the big prize. He realizes, upon opening the doors of Go's woodshed to find a cache of luxury goods and violent pornography, that Amy is framing

him for her murder—and wants him to know it. Nick and Amy’s marriage, up to this point, has been portrayed as alternately loveless and violent, depending on their respective points of view. With this revelation, it becomes clear that Nick has truly had no clue as to how much his wife has come to loathe him. This moment ties into the novel’s theme of marriage, as it presents how Nick and Amy, despite sharing a home, a bed, and a last name, hardly know one another at all.

●● I looked at the puppets. “So she’s giving me the narrative of my frame-up.”

“I can’t even wrap my brain around this. Fucking psycho.”

“Go?”

“Yeah, right: You didn’t want her to be pregnant, you got angry and killed her and the unborn baby.”


“Feels anticlimactic somehow,” I said.

“The climax is when you are taught the lesson that Punch never learns, and you are caught and charged with murder.”

“And Missouri has the death penalty,” I said. “Fun game.”

**Related Characters:** Margo “Go” Dunne, Nick Dunne (speaker), Amy Elliott Dunne

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 232

### Explanation and Analysis

The fifth anniversary gift Amy has given Nick—a pair of Punch and Judy puppets—is revealed in this passage to be an outright taunt meant to show Nick exactly what she’s trying to do. As Go and Nick realize, in horror, the “narrative” Amy has constructed, they come to understand that they are powerless to resist it. The gravity of what it means to construct a narrative of a life—for oneself, for another, or for both—is laid bare in this scene as Amy borrows a violent storyline and makes it her own in order to punish her husband. Nick knows now that his wife wants him dead—and is forced to consider whether his “crimes” against her are perhaps deserving of such wickedness. It’s easy to think of Amy as a psychopath or a madwoman out for revenge, but the strength of her conviction as to how wronged she’s been demonstrates that there are two sides to every story.

## 32. Amy Elliott Dunne, *The Day Of* (2) Quotes

●● I could hear the tale, how everyone would love telling it: how Amazing Amy, the girl who never did wrong, let herself be dragged, penniless, to the middle of the country, where her husband threw her over for a younger woman. How predictable, how perfectly average, how amusing. And her husband? He ended up happier than ever. No. I couldn’t allow that. [...]

I changed my *name* for that piece of shit. Historical records have been *altered*—Amy Elliott to Amy Dunne—like it’s nothing. No, he does not get to win.

So I began to think of a different story, a better story, that would destroy Nick for doing this to me. A story that would restore my perfection. It would make me the hero, flawless and adored.

Because everyone loves the Dead Girl.

**Related Characters:** Amy Elliott Dunne (speaker), Nick Dunne

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 234

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage further dissects Amy’s lifelong reliance on—and hatred of—constructed narratives, and the stories people tell one another about themselves and others. Amy, who has been subject to a prescribed narrative her entire life, loathes the idea of being neatly tucked into yet another narrative—the narrative of the put-upon, cheated-on wife. In an enraged yet considered inversion of this narrative, Amy chooses to take things into her own hands and play by the rules which have been stacked against her all her life. She considers what she knows about narrative, and what stories people like best, and comes up with a twisted tale that will trump any fiction her husband could spin. She wants control over her own circumstances so badly, and believes—as Flynn posits—that control over narrative is a way to gain access to control over actual, real-life events.

## 39. Nick Dunne, *Eight Days Gone* (3) Quotes

●● “My wife, she just happens to be the coolest girl I’ve ever met. How many guys can say that? *I married the coolest girl I ever met.*”

*Youfuckingbitchyoufuckingbitchyoufuckingbitch. Come home so I can kill you.*



**Related Characters:** Nick Dunne (speaker), Amy Elliott Dunne, Rebecca

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 300

### Explanation and Analysis

As Nick submits to an interview with a young journalist who has sought him out at a bar in downtown Carthage, he realizes that he has a unique opportunity to appeal directly to Amy's narcissism. As he lovingly tells the reporter about his admiration for his wife, he describes Amy as a "cool" girl—the exact trope of femininity she has recently excoriated in a private, seething monologue. Nick can't know that Amy is so contemptuous of "cool" girls—all he knows is that she is one. The coincidence shows that in spite of the flaws and chasms in their marriage, there are certain things that Nick and Amy are oddly on the same page about. Even as Nick shows his hand here, admitting that what he loves about Amy is her "cool" factor—the ways in which she always submitted to him and behaved as he wanted her to—readers know that Amy will relish Nick's love of her own illusion. There's another layer to this moment, though—as Nick speaks in fawning terms about Amy publicly, he privately thinks horrible thoughts about Amy and expresses a desire to kill her. Nick is slowly turning into the man Amy has tried to paint him as—he wants to lure her back so that he can punish her for the hell she's dragged him into.

## 49. Nick Dunne, Fourteen Days Gone Quotes

☝☝ I spent the rest of my day picturing how I'd kill Amy. It was all I could think of: finding a way to end her. Me smashing in Amy's busy, busy brain. I had to give Amy her due: I may have been dozing the past few years, but I was fucking wide awake now. I was electric again, like I had been in the early days of our marriage.

**Related Characters:** Nick Dunne (speaker), Amy Elliott Dunne

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 357

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage shows how the sparks of misogyny within Nick's heart have leaped into full-on flames over the course of Amy's disappearance. Though Nick has never been a "good guy," he's never been cruel or murderous, either—but

in this passage, he harbors wanton, cruel visions of killing Amy himself. This is yet another way in which Nick has unwittingly fallen into Amy's narrative—through her diary, she sold a vision of Nick who wanted nothing but harm and retribution for his wife's perceived missteps and slights. Now, Nick has become that man—he blames his transformation on Amy's maddening plot, and her stubborn refusal to come home and exonerate him, but the metamorphosis he's experiencing has come from within, as well. With Amy as his scapegoat, Nick has at last allowed his festering inner misogyny to break out.

## 53. Nick Dunne, Forty Days Gone Quotes

☝☝ I gestured to the twine, the hacked hair, the dried blood. "So, what's your story, wife?"

"I'm back," she whimpered. "I made it back to you." She moved to put her arms around me. I moved away.

"What is your story, Amy?"

"Desi," she whispered, her lower lip trembling. "Desi Collings took me. It was the morning. Of. Of our anniversary. And the doorbell rang, and I thought... I don't know, I thought maybe it was flowers from you."

I flinched. Of course she'd find a way to work in a gripe: that I hardly ever sent her flowers, when her dad had sent her mom flowers each week since they'd been married. That's 2,444 bouquets of flowers vs. 4.

**Related Characters:** Amy Elliott Dunne, Nick Dunne (speaker), Desi Collings

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 372

### Explanation and Analysis



Here, Amy returns home to Nick after having been held hostage at Desi Collings's lake house. The story Amy tells is both based in a kernel of truth—and one she has manufactured almost entirely. Amy put herself in Desi's care out of desperation, knowing that she could use his undying affection for her in order to secure lodging, secrecy, and solidarity—she didn't anticipate, though, how desperately he'd try to hang on to her and how isolated he'd keep her from the outside world. Amy *did* truly begin feeling like a prisoner, and used that shred of narrative truth to create a horrific, operatic story of torture and violation—just as she used the resentment festering within her and Nick's marriage as a jumping-off point in her diaries for a sordid tale of abuse and violence.

Amy's casual biting tone as she relays her story shows that she knows Nick knows she's lying—they are locked in an intricate ballet of wills and wits, in which they are entirely at one another's mercy. Amy uses her storytelling prowess here, perhaps, to show Nick that she can create a damning narrative on a dime—she could come up with a way to implicate him in what she's "suffered" just as simply as she has found a way to do so to the sinister but relatively innocent Desi.

## 57. Nick Dunne, *The Night of the Return* (2) Quotes

☝☝ *Who will I be then?* The question wasn't recriminatory. It wasn't like the answer was the pious: *Then you'll be a killer, Nick. You'll be as bad as Amy. You'll be what everyone thought you were.* No. The question was frighteningly soulful and literal: Who would I be without Amy to react to? Because she was right: As a man, I had been my most impressive when I loved her—and I was my next best self when I hated her. I had known Amy only seven years, but I couldn't go back to life without her.

**Related Characters:** Nick Dunne (speaker), Amy Elliott Dunne

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 396

### Explanation and Analysis

Here, just hours after Amy's triumphant return to Carthage, Nick—knowing his wife is lying to everyone about the "ordeal" she's been through as Desi Collings's "hostage"—feels his anger reach a fever pitch, and at the prospect of spending his life with Amy, lashes out in anger. As Nick wraps his hands around his wife's throat, he brings to fruition her worst fantasies and most twisted diary entries. Amy has molded Nick into the man he is in more ways than one; she has foretold his anger, cruelty, and violence even as she has made him into the best version of himself. Knowing that both these things are true, Nick finds himself at a crossroads. Amy has made him his best even at his worst—and without her, he no longer knows who he is. Nick begins to understand and accept that life without Amy simply won't be possible—not just because of her control over him, but because of his own weak-spiritedness. Flynn never dictates whether Nick has been weakened because of his dependence on Amy, or whether he feels strong with her and powerless without her. Instead, she leaves her readers to decide whether Nick and Amy's marriage is, at the end of the day, based on mutual respect or mutual destruction.


## 60. Amy, *Eight Weeks After the Return* Quotes

☝☝ I have a book deal: I am officially in control of our story. It feels wonderfully symbolic. Isn't that what every marriage is, anyway? Just a lengthy game of he-said, she-said? Well, *she* is saying, and the world will listen, and Nick will have to smile and agree. I will write him the way I want him to be: romantic and thoughtful and very very repentant—about the credit cards and the purchases and the woodshed. If I can't get him to say it out loud, he'll say it in my book. Then he'll come on tour with me and smile and smile.

I'm calling the book simply: *Amazing*.

**Related Characters:** Amy Elliott Dunne (speaker), Nick Dunne

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 406

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Amy—a national celebrity and beloved American icon in the wake of her return—reveals that she has secured a book deal. Because her entire childhood was co-opted by her parents for their *Amazing Amy* books, Amy has never felt truly in control of her own narrative, and has sought to take back control in strange and dangerous ways. First she presented herself as the "Cool Girl"; then she created seven years of fake diary entries meant to cast her and Nick's marriage in a new light; finally, she committed cold-blooded murder and spun it as self-defense. Though Amy has been able to warp the story of her life in myriad ways over the years, she feels that the book deal is the clincher, the jewel in her crown. She is now able to create an expanded, official record of the self that she's worked so hard to construct—and will be able to force her husband into verifying and supporting the new narrative they'll share. Amy delights in being able to control Nick, and in being able to drag him around the country on her book tour just as he dragged her to Missouri years ago.

## 63. Nick Dunne, *Twenty Weeks After the Return* Quotes

☛☛ Yes, I am finally a match for Amy. The other morning I woke up next to her, and I studied the back of her skull. I tried to read her thoughts. For once I didn't feel like I was staring into the sun. I'm rising to my wife's level of madness. Because I can feel her changing me again: I was a callow boy, and then a man, good and bad. Now at last I'm the hero. I am the one to root for in the never-ending war story of our marriage. It's a story I can live with. Hell, at this point, I can't imagine my story without Amy. She is my forever antagonist. We are one long frightening climax.

**Related Characters:** Nick Dunne (speaker), Amy Elliott Dunne

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 413

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Nick Dunne at last acquiesces to his wife's spell over him. She has coerced him into destroying his tell-all manuscript about her lies, forcing him to instead quietly go along with the plan she has concocted for their life together—a plan which includes the impending arrival of their first child. In this passage, he admits that the ways she has changed him are not all bad, as she has made him the “hero” in the “war story” that is their marriage. Though Nick knows that staying with Amy is outright dangerous, he has at last decided that he can “live with” their arrangement—even though everything about their life together now lies firmly atop a towering mound of secrets and lies. Nick is frightened of what his wife will do to him if he questions the story they've painstakingly written together, and is almost looking forward to continuing to endure the “long frightening climax” of their lives.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## 1. NICK DUNNE, THE DAY OF (1)

When Nick Dunne thinks of his wife, Amy, he writes, he “always think[s] of her head.” It is “finely shaped” and unique, but though Nick would “know [his wife’s] head anywhere,” he has no idea what’s inside it. He often wishes he could “unspool” her brain—throughout the years they’ve been married, he’s wondered countless times the following questions: “*What are you thinking? How are you feeling? Who are you? What have we done to each other? What will we do?*”

Nick’s eyes open at 6:00 a.m. on the dot. Nick is not usually an early riser, and hardly ever gets up before 9:00 a.m. His life is “alarmless” since he and Amy moved to Nick’s hometown of Carthage, Missouri, from New York City. Amy and Nick, both writers at print magazines, lost their jobs in the recession and moved back to Missouri two years ago to rent a tacky “Nouveau Riche” mini-mansion after Nick’s mother (Maureen) fell ill. Both Nick and Amy still mourn the loss of their jobs, and Amy especially, having never lived anywhere but New York, resents Nick for dragging her to the Midwest.

Nick, however, was happy to move home to the Midwest just to have something to do. When his twin sister, Margo—or “Go,” as he affectionately calls her—called to tell him that their mother (Maureen) had developed cancer and, absent the care of their detached and deteriorating father (Bill), would soon die, Nick “almost cried with relief” in spite of the fact that he knew Amy knew little and cared less about his mother and his hometown alike.

As Nick watches the sunrise, thinks about the day ahead of him. He hears Amy downstairs banging around in the kitchen, making breakfast. Today is their five-year wedding anniversary. Nick, barefoot and in pajamas, makes his way downstairs. As he stands in the doorway and watches her cook, oblivious to his presence, he notices her humming and thinks back to when they first started dating. Amy, a “botcher of lyrics,” always got the words to songs wrong—but always had a reasoning behind her misinterpretations. Looking back, Nick thinks “there’s something disturbing about recalling a warm memory and feeling utterly cold.” When Amy looks up and greets Nick with a charming “Hello, handsome,” he feels “bile and dread” rise in his throat.

*In the opening lines of the novel, Nick’s narration reveals that not only does he not know who his wife is—or what she’s thinking or feeling—but that he also harbors dark and slightly macabre ideas about how to find out. In the twisting whodunit tale that’s about to unfold, casting doubt on her characters’ motivations and displaying their darkest impulses allows Gillian Flynn to keep the mystery alive.*



*By providing some backstory about the state of Nick and Amy’s lives, Flynn shows that they have recently been humiliated and uprooted by the 2008 recession. The tension in their marriage the recent change has created will be important to note as the events of the novel begin to unfold.*



*This passage establishes Nick as someone who always needs something to do—and who would rather prioritize abating his own restlessness than making sure his wife, Amy, is happy.*



*The idyllic morning—a milestone anniversary, a quiet sunrise, a beautiful breakfast being prepared—doesn’t inspire in Nick the reaction one might expect. As he comes downstairs to see his wife cooking for him, he feels “cold” and full of “dread”—not to mention made physically ill by the simple sight of Amy. It’s clear that something deeper is going on beneath the placid surface of Nick and Amy’s marriage.*



Nick is late getting to work. Two years ago, he and Go opened a bar together—a dream they've shared since their teen years. They borrowed eighty thousand dollars from Amy to do so—a sum that was once “nothing” to her, but after the recession was “almost everything.” Nick promised Amy he'd pay her back, with interest, not wanting to be the kind of man who borrowed money from his wife. Nick saw the decision as a smart, businesslike one—one that would generate an income for them both while Amy thought about what she wanted to do next.

Go and Nick's bar is on a street corner, and the interior is made up of “haphazard, patchwork” details. The bar is called “The Bar,” a name Nick and Go think singles them out as “clever New Yorkers”—Margo had lost her job in Manhattan just a year before Nick lost his. The Bar, like the rest of Carthage, is directly on the Mississippi River; the town often floods, and as Nick arrives at work, he looks down at the “strong ropy currents” and sees a long, single-file line of men walking parallel to the water along the banks. The men make Nick feel “seen”—his stomach twists and he rushes inside, desperate for a drink.

## 2. AMY ELLIOTT, DIARY ENTRY, JANUARY 8TH, 2005

Amy writes in her **diary** that she is “embarrassed” by how happy she is—she has met a “boy.” Amy writes that she's going to “set the scene” and tell the story of how she's met her new “funny, cool-ass guy.” Amy was invited to a writers' party in Brooklyn by one of her friends. Amy, the “child of writers,” considers herself a writer, too, though she admits that all she really writes are personality quizzes for a women's magazine. Amy reveals that she is also “the inspiration for a beloved children's-book series” known throughout the country—*Amazing Amy*.

The party is raucous and decadent, everyone there “still gluttoned and sugar-pissed from the holidays,” and Amy gets separated from her friends. A man approaches Amy, and she finds him cocky and yet sexy. As she continues talking to him she is annoyed by how good-looking he is, like a “rich-boy villain in an '80s teen movie.” Amy learns that the guy's name is Nick. He is goofy and casual and speaks lovingly of his Missouri roots. They leave the party together and walk towards Amy's apartment; a few blocks from her door, they pass the local bakery as it's receiving a delivery of powdered sugar and are caught in the “storm.” Nick brushes flurries of sugar from Amy's lips before he kisses her.

*Flynn gets even deeper into the nooks and crannies of Nick and Amy's marriage by showing that Amy is Nick's benefactor in many ways—he needs her for her money, and she seems to willingly give it.*



*The end of the first chapter focuses on Nick's intense feelings of vulnerability as he steps out into the world on the morning of his anniversary. As the mystery begins to unfold, Nick's paranoia and guilt will keep the tension related to his true feelings about his wife steadily flowing and winding on, just like the Mississippi.*



*The introduction of Amy's diary entries—which date back to 2005 and chart the early days of Nick and Amy's courtship—offer an alternative point of view. Flynn is actively destabilizing the narrative in an attempt to mirror the forces which have destabilized her main characters' marriage over the years. The diary also functions, from quite early on, as Amy's bold attempt to reclaim the narrative of her life—which has largely been fodder for a series of books over which she had no control.*



*Nick and Amy's first meeting is the stuff of fairytales—he sweeps her off her feet at a party and kisses her in a sugar storm. The sugar storm represents the sweet, dreamlike haze of first love—but whether things were truly as saccharine and perfect as they appeared to be will later be reexamined.*



### 3. NICK DUNNE, THE DAY OF (2)

Nick takes his “first real deep breath of the day” as he enters The Bar. There is only one patron sitting there, and Go is behind the bar washing glasses. Nick is relieved at the sight of his twin sister, with whom he feels a “dash of twin telepathy”—she is the only person he feels he can truly be himself with, though he admits he doesn’t always tell her everything.

Go pours Nick a beer and remarks that he looks “twitchy.” Though it’s barely noon, Go is already drinking too, and Nick notices that her eyes appear droopy. Go, Nick reflects, has had a tough decade—she was a successful investment banker in New York before she lost her job in the 2008 recession, and she didn’t even call to tell Nick she’d left the city until she was already back in Missouri. The Bar has given Go something to do with her life, and she and Nick never talk about their old careers in New York—ever.

Nick tells Go it’s his anniversary with Amy, and Go asks if he’s going to be subjected to another one of Amy’s “treasure hunt[s].” Each year, Amy leaves Nick a series of elaborate, rhyming, singsong clues to lead him on a scavenger hunt around the city—but Nick always disappoints Amy by failing to solve her mysteries, which are often based on past conversations and milestones in their relationship. Nick also manages to mess up the themed gifts they get one another for their anniversaries: paper, cotton, and now wood. When Nick expresses frustration with having failed to find a “romantic” present for wood, Go makes a lewd joke and suggests that Nick, after sex, slap Amy with his “wood.” Go and Nick often make “raunchy” jokes with one another, and as a result, have endured “twincest” taunts all their lives.

Go, who “used to being the alpha girl” in Nick’s life, never took to Amy. The two women rarely spend any time together in spite of having known one another for years, and Nick has long been frustrated with the sniping, passive-aggressive way both Go and Amy talk about one another when alone with him.

The phone rings at The Bar. Go answers it and then passes it to Nick—it is one of his neighbors, who tells Nick that his cat has gotten out. Nick thanks his neighbor for the tip and heads for home. Fifteen minutes later, Nick arrives home to find his street feeling “disturbingly quiet.” Their neighborhood is relatively empty, full of empty foreclosed houses which are often occupied by drifters and homeless people.

*Here, Flynn establishes the incongruousness of Nick feeling dread and nausea when he looks at his wife, but relief and safety when he looks at his twin sister.*



*Go, too, is clearly living a strained existence in Carthage, trying to ignore her own past in order to make her present easier—she and Nick are the same in this regard. Go and Nick are both trying to ignore the unhappy narratives of their own lives.*



*In these early chapters, Gillian Flynn is laying the groundwork for a mystery that revolves around Amy’s disappearance and Nick’s possible guilt. She establishes as many oddities as she can in order to cast doubt on the truth of the situation and keep her audience in suspense. By pointing out Nick’s frustration with the once-cherished traditions he and Amy share, as well as his odd, seemingly suggestive relationship with Go, she tweaks the narrative against Nick in small ways—mirroring the actions of her secret villain, Amy. On another note, in discussing the “wood” theme for their fifth wedding anniversary, Nick references a longstanding tradition of getting one’s spouse a gift that goes along with whatever theme corresponds with the number of years the couple has been married. In cleaving to this tradition, Nick and Amy perform the part of a respectable, conventional married couple.*



*Flynn tosses in the fact that Go and Amy never quite took a liking to one another—an example, perhaps, of both women’s internalized misogyny, and yet another oddity that will cast a shadow of doubt over the truth about Amy’s disappearance.*



*The landscape of the Great Recession is alive even in Carthage—Flynn uses the economic downturn, swift and unfortold, as an allegory for the sudden collapse of Nick and Amy’s happiness.*



Nick finds the door wide open and becomes nervous. He goes inside and calls for Amy, but she doesn't answer. The living room has been wrecked—the coffee table is shattered, an ottoman is overturned, and in the middle of the mess there is a pair of “good sharp scissors.” Nick, genuinely scared, runs through the house and out into the yard shouting for Amy, but it is no use—she is “gone.”

*At the end of this pivotal chapter, Flynn chooses to have Nick use the word “gone,” which gestures to the novel's title. There is a sense of finality to the word, suggesting that perhaps Nick knows something the reader doesn't.*



#### 4. AMY ELLIOTT, DIARY ENTRY, SEPTEMBER 18TH, 2005

After their kiss in the sugar storm, Amy has not seen Nick Dunne for over eight months. Nick “resurfaces” in Amy's life when she runs into him on the street one day—he is full of excuses about having lost her cell phone number. Amy, who had been angry about not hearing from him, softens, and within days they are together as a couple. The timing of their reunion, Amy feels, is fortuitous—the twentieth installment in the *Amazing Amy* series, *Amazing Amy and the Big Day*, has just been released, and in the book *Amazing Amy* gets married. Amy feels shamed, as she has all her life, by her “literary alter ego.” Amy takes a bit of comfort in the fact that her parents' publishers have ordered a smaller run for this book than any other.

*Though Amy is an independent adult woman, this passage shows that she remains haunted by the ghost of her alter ego. She feels an intense pressure to keep up with “Amazing Amy,” and leaps at the opportunity to fling herself into a committed relationship so that she can play some catch up with her literary double.*



For Amy's entire life, her parents have published *Amazing Amy* books that coincide with their daughter's experiences. The “amazing” Amy always outstrips the real Amy, learning lessons and accomplishing milestones that the actual Amy fails and falls short at. Amy describes milling about the book launch party for the new installment, fielding obnoxious questions from journalists about the state of her own romantic life. Amy's parents, Rand and Marybeth, whom Amy describes as looking like a “prehistoric-monster-fish” and a “chicken,” respectively, bob around the party and ignore their lonely only child.

*The intense pressure which has marked all of Amy's childhood has been created and manufactured by her parents, whom Amy describes in unforgiving and frightful terms. She clearly doesn't like her parents, and resents them for how they've turned her life into a spectacle for the masses—all the while reminding their daughter that there is always room for improvement.*



Back at her apartment after the party, Amy cries. She is nearly thirty-two, and despite being pretty, interesting, and rich, she has no one. She both yearns for a companion and fears ending up like her friends who have gotten married just for the sake of getting married, and endure partnerships with weak or roving men.

*Amy feels genuine sadness and confusion at the idea of what it means to be married. She feels pressure to cave to traditional monogamy, but admits outright that she doesn't know what it means to be a partner—or how to choose one.*



The day after the party, Amy runs into Nick on Seventh Avenue, and feels the “pow” of recognition. It seems like they “just know each other,” even after months of having lost touch. As Amy falls headlong in love with Nick over the next few days, she is grateful that the “rest of [her] life” has begun at last.

*Amy's attachment to Nick is cast in a new light thanks to this diary entry, which raises the question of whether she truly loves him or sees him as an expedient way to catch up with *Amazing Amy*, assuage her own fears about loneliness, and assert, oddly enough, her independence from her parents.*



## 5. NICK DUNNE, THE DAY OF (3)

Nick, having called the police, waits anxiously in the kitchen for them to arrive. He has tried phoning Amy and has left her several messages, but she hasn't returned any of his calls. Nick knows this behavior is unlike her, and given the disturbance in the living room, he is anxious for the "next part" of finding out where his wife is to begin. Outside it is a beautiful July day, and the calm atmosphere of the summer afternoon lends an incongruous casualness to the strange situation. Two officers, a woman named Velasquez and a man named Riordan, arrive to survey the house and question Nick.

As the officers ask Nick questions about his morning, and about Amy, the phone rings—it is the nearby nursing home where Go and Nick board their "Alzheimer's-riddled father" Bill, a man both of them despise. Nick quickly hurries the nurse off the phone as the doorbell rings—two detectives have arrived.

The first detective, Rhonda Boney, strikes Nick as "brazenly beyond the scope of everyday ugly." Her partner, Jim Gilpin, is a "fleshy" middle-aged man. They share a calm demeanor, and ask Nick run-of-the-mill questions in spite of his increasing nervousness as to Amy's whereabouts. He tells the detectives that he and Amy used to live in New York, and that he wrote about pop culture for a men's magazine there. The detectives are a little contemptuous of Nick's former career, but when he tells them that he now owns and operates The Bar, they're both impressed. Nick shows the detectives upstairs, where Boney finds a present wrapped in silver. Nick explains that today is his and Amy's anniversary.

Back downstairs, Nick looks at a picture on the wall of his and Amy's wedding day. He recalls their Cape Cod ceremony, and gets lost in memories which lie even further back in their relationship. He remembers the day Amy told him the truth about her family, her fortune, and the *Amazing Amy* books. Nick was neither intimidated nor enticed by the Elliots' wealth, and though he admits to feeling a "heady" joy on vacations to their Cape home, he also remembers feeling disconnected on the day of their wedding.

Boney comes over to Nick and examines the picture with him. Nick tells her that today is his and Amy's fifth wedding anniversary. He feels jittery and can't stand still—he wants to "do something" to find Amy rather than just standing around discussing his wife with the detectives. Gilpin, overhearing their conversation, lightly asks if they have reservations at Houston's—the only upscale restaurant in Carthage. "Of course, Houston's," Nick replies—admitting silently that this is his "fifth lie" to the police so far.

*Nick seems genuinely worried about his wife's disappearance—but at the same time, his anxiousness to get onto the "next part" reveals a creeping dread and a cold acceptance of the procedure ahead of him.*



*Nick and Go don't care for their father, Bill, adding another layer of emotional removal to the twins' already cold outlook on most things and people.*



*The fact that Rhonda Boney is described, by Nick, as "brazenly [...] ugly" suggests that he thinks of women by measuring their worth in terms of attractiveness. His casually cruel description of her demonstrates the underlying layer of misogyny which exists both in Nick's heart and in the heart of the narrative itself.*



*The fact that Nick—a down-home Midwesterner of lower-middle-class upbringing—married the fabulously wealthy Amy is a point of interest to the police, who are looking for motive as to why someone might have kidnapped or even murdered Amy.*



*As this chapter draws to a close, Nick admits that in the short time he's been talking with the detectives, he's lied to them five times already. This seems to point directly to his guilt—but as the narrative unfolds, Flynn will explore the power of secrets and lies, and the gray areas between cruelty and guilt.*





## 6. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, DIARY ENTRY, JULY 5TH, 2008

Amy ecstatically declares herself “a happy, busy bumblebee of marital enthusiasm.” She is shocked by her ecstatic transformation into a wife, and though she slightly laments the forfeiture of her “Independent Young Feminist” identity, she says she truly doesn’t care—she is just too happy to be married to Nick Dunne. Nick has helped Amy to put her life into perspective and see that the little things don’t matter—all that matters is their love, and the fact that they have found one another.

Nick and Amy’s life together as a married couple is blissful, fun, and uncomplicated. They do things like drive to Delaware to have sex, simply because neither of them have ever had sex in the state of Delaware. They live in a large, gorgeous Brooklyn brownstone that Amy’s parents purchased for them, and spend time decorating the space with knick-knacks and trinkets. One night, as they relax in their cozy living room, Nick tells Amy that he is living the life he always imagined.

As their one-year anniversary approaches, Amy constructs a scavenger hunt filled with clues to celebrate their traditions and inside jokes. She plans for the treasure hunt to take them on a “grand tour of New York,” culminating in a lobster dinner, an exchange of gifts, and sex on the living-room floor. Amy writes that she thinks everyone who says marriage is difficult is absolutely ridiculous.

*In this passage, Amy seems to be flush with the happiness of true love—but as the novel’s twist will reveal, Amy is actually making fun of women who accept the role of “wife” unquestioningly, revealing her own misogyny and contempt for certain kinds of women.*



*As Amy paints a portrait of her happy, carefree marriage, it’s impossible to tell what’s fact and what’s fiction. Her idyllic portrait of marital bliss has an undercurrent of imbalance and blame: she seems to be suggesting that Nick was happiest when they were rich, setting up their long slide into financial ruin and misery.*



*There are some parts of Amy’s tale of wedded bliss that ring true, but even the happiest memories and grandest traditions she creates are laced with the sense that she’s leading Nick along, pulling him towards something.*



## 7. NICK DUNNE, THE NIGHT OF

Boney and Gilpin move their interview with Nick to the small Carthage police station. They ask him if he wants to call Amy’s parents, but Nick insists waiting just a couple more hours to see if she turns up. The officers tell Nick that they want him to be comfortable—but at the same time, are relying on him for information and need to “rule [him] out” first. Nick agrees to answer all their questions and submit to a cheek swab—in his head, he knows the officers are thinking “it’s always the husband,” and wishes they’d just be transparent with him about his status as a suspect. Nevertheless, Nick complies—he was raised to be a people-pleaser, and still “crave[s] a constant stream of approval” and longs to prove he’s a “good guy.”

*Nick doesn’t seem too wary of the police, suggesting that he doesn’t have anything that grave or serious to hide. Still, he admits that he can’t turn off his need for approval—he wants to prove to them that he’s the “good guy” he wants to be, and this suggests that there’s another side of Nick he’s anxious to keep hidden.*



After swabbing Nick's cheeks and hands, Boney sets up a tape recorder and starts it rolling. Nick wonders if he should call a lawyer, but convinces himself that "only guilty people need lawyers," and agrees to answer her questions on tape. Nick answers Boney's questions about his and Amy's old lives in New York and their new ones here—he divulges that Amy excelled as a quiz-writer because of her master's degree in psychology, but struggled once they moved to Missouri. With no friends and no job, Amy became obsessed with mastering French cooking and learning Spanish in just a few months, desperate to remain "Amazing Amy" even in a midwestern town where no one is interested in being competitive or exceptional.

Boney asks Nick if Amy could have gotten involved with drugs—layoffs and stagnancy in the wake of the recession has led to a serious drug trade in Carthage, Gilpin says—but Nick insists Amy would never get into drugs. The detectives ask about Amy's friends—Nick says she doesn't really have any in North Carthage, and all her friends are back East. Boney asks if Nick has called any of Amy's New York friends to tell them what's going on, but he insists he's been too busy answering questions and cooperating with the investigation to make any calls.

As the detectives ask Nick to go through his morning with them, he tells them that he'd been at a beachhead on the river this morning before arriving at The Bar to read the newspaper, drink his coffee, and "just sit." No one saw him at the beach, he says, and no one can confirm his whereabouts. What Nick doesn't tell the police is that Amy had suggested he go to the beach this morning—over breakfast, she said she knew that they were in a rough place in their marriage, and wanted Nick to have some alone time to think about their relationship.

Boney, satisfied with the questions she's asked Nick, begins listing the things the police are doing to help track down Amy: they are monitoring her cell phone and credit cards, interviewing known sex offenders in the area, canvassing the neighborhood, and tapping the Dunne's home phone in case a ransom call comes in. Nick asks if Amy's disappearance is being treated as an abduction or a missing persons case. Nick begins getting worked up, and for the first time out loud, says with anger and panic, "My wife is gone!"

*Nick's perception of his wife—as a woman who was always trying her best to put on an "Amazing" front and dazzle everyone around her—gets with his own compulsion to prove that he's a "good guy" through and through to everyone he meets.*



*Boney's questions to Nick make it clear that while he believes he knows his wife very well, he may not know her at all. This constant undermining of what one person truly knows about another forms the bedrock of the narrative, and calls into question the nature of what it means to be married to someone.*



*The first tip-off that Nick has perhaps been positioned to look guilty comes from Amy's suggestion that he spend some time alone. Nick chose a secluded beach where no one would see him—making it so that he does not have any semblance of an alibi.*



*Nick has, so far, been behaving very stoically and detachedly—just as he describes feeling disconnected on his wedding day, which is for many people the most momentous and emotional day of their lives. Nick's sudden burst of emotion perhaps come from the knowledge that he hasn't shown the police enough feeling—or from the first shock of genuine realization that Amy might not be coming back.*



Boney assures Nick that the police are taking the investigation seriously—but the most Nick can do right now is tell them more about Amy. As Nick describes his wife to the police, he tells more and more lies—he is now up to eleven. The Amy he's describing is the Amy he fell in love with, but the Amy he knows now is abrasive, unlikable, and aggrieved. Boney suggests Nick go call Amy's parents. Though it's past midnight, and Nick knows Rand and Marybeth go to bed early, he goes out to the hall and makes the call. He tearfully tells Marybeth that Amy has been missing since earlier that morning, and Marybeth demands to talk to "whoever's in charge." As Nick hands the phone over, he feels that making the call to Amy's parents has made things official—"Amy is gone."

On the way back to the interview room, Nick sees his father, Bill, standing in the police station, repeating the word "bitch" over and over again to himself. A female officer sits beside him, and when Nick asks what his father is doing here, she tells him that he escaped from his nursing home earlier in the day and has been wandering around for hours. Nick stares at his father in disbelief, who continues to repeat the word "bitch." Boney arranges for an officer to drive Nick's father back to the nursing home—as Nick helps the officer get his dad into the car and settled, his father never once acknowledges Nick's presence.

At two in the morning, Boney and Gilpin tell Nick he can go home, and offer to have an officer drive him back to his house. Instead, he asks to be taken to Go's. All he wants is for "a woman to fix [him] a sandwich and not ask [him] any questions." Boney and Gilpin tell Nick to return to the police station in the morning for a press conference.

At Go's house, Go suggests they go out and drive around looking for Amy, but Nick says doing so would be utterly pointless. Go seems more worked up about Amy's disappearance than Nick. Nick gets angry with Go for trying to insinuate that there's more he could be doing, and tells her he's "scared shitless." Go pours Nick a drink, sits down beside him, and says, "Poor Amy."

*Nick's lies mount as he begins describing his wife. He's forced to admit to himself—but not to the police—that he doesn't actually like his wife very much, and perhaps doesn't even love her anymore. Nick has a role to play—worried, loving husband—but knows that he may not be able to muster up the emotion to play it very well at all.*



*Nick's father's verbal tic—in which he can utter little other than the word "bitch"—is an obvious manifestation of the man's misogyny and cruelty. As the novel expands, Nick will reflect on his father's cruel treatment of his mother—and admit that he worries that Bill's militant misogyny has somehow seeped into his own DNA.*



*The way Nick sees women is strange indeed. He is a former New Yorker and progressive magazine writer—and yet at the end of a hard day, wants to watch a woman submit to him, shut up, and make him some food. Though Nick fears becoming a misogynist like his father, it's clear he already is one.*



*Nick still shows very little emotion at the end of Amy's first day gone—but even her adversary Go has enough empathy to worry for Amy's well-being. This shows that there is much more to Nick and Amy's story than meets the eye.*



## 8. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, DIARY ENTRY, APRIL 21ST, 2009

“Poor me,” Amy writes in her **diary**. She describes having dinner with two of her girlfriends, during which they talk about little other than their husbands. All three women text their men to meet them at the restaurant for a nightcap—only Nick doesn’t show, and doesn’t even call Amy to tell her why he’s not coming. The other women seem to delight in Amy’s inability to control her husband. Amy and Nick, though, regularly make fun of couples in which the wives treat their husbands like “dancing monkeys,” and Amy prides herself on never forcing Nick to play that “happy-hubby role.”

Amy and Nick arrive home at their brownstone at the same time. Amy blithely asks Nick how he spent his night, and he tells her he was playing poker after work with some guys from his magazine. Amy seems happy that Nick spent his night the way he wanted to. They go upstairs together, have a drink, make love and fall asleep tangled in one another’s arms. “Poor me,” Amy writes again, sarcastically.

*Amy is positioning herself, through her diary entries, as a woman who dotes on her husband, gives him free run of his life, and never nags. There is a lot to unpack here: Diary Amy, different from the real Amy readers will meet later on, seems contemptuous of other women’s need to control their husbands—and yet it will become clear that the actual Amy is contemptuous of women like Diary Amy who try to seem cool, aloof, and blasé about their husbands’ behavior.*



*Amy wants to emphasize the fact that she allowed Nick to do as he pleased throughout their marriage—and was happy to be the obliging, pliable wife he wanted.*



## 9. NICK DUNNE, ONE DAY GONE (1)

Nick stays up all night drinking, unable to calm himself down enough to get to sleep. In the morning, he has a hangover, and drives home in Go’s car to get some clothes—the police have taken Nick’s own car in for inspection. Three police cruisers and a few neighbors are gathered on the street. Officer Velasquez escorts Nick upstairs and stands near him while he goes through his closet, picking out clothes. As Nick combs through his suits, trying to decide what to wear, he thinks about what an interesting essay writing about picking the “appropriate clothes [for] when a loved one goes missing” would be. He laments not being able to switch off the greedy writer voice inside of him.

Nick, seeing the silver present Amy wrapped for him, asks Velasquez if anyone has looked inside yet. She nods. Nick asks if he can take a look inside, but she tells him he can’t. Nick becomes irate, and Officer Riordan comes into the room to force Nick down the stairs. Nick tries to calm himself down as he drives back over to Go’s, repeating to himself the mantra: “Do not antagonize the cops.”

*Again, as Nick prepares to face another day of his wife being gone, he shows an inadequate amount of distress. He’s focused more on his own image than her well-being, and finds himself thinking about how he could profit off the strange position he’s found himself in.*



*Nick knows that he needs to put on a calm demeanor and try to keep himself on the cops’ good side—but something about the sight of the present drives him slightly mad.*



Later, at the police station, Nick arrives to find that Marybeth and Rand are there, with their arms around one another. Nick is, and always has been, put off and shocked by the couple's displays of affection for one another, given the fact that Nick's parents hardly ever touched or kissed one another. Nick can see now that his father was a raging misogynist, and his mother lived her life under his thumb. Bill and Maureen separated when Nick and Go were still young, and Nick hardly ever saw or spoke to his father. Nick knows that he and Go still bear the scars of their father's cruelty—Go shirks intimacy with men because she doesn't want to be dismissed or rejected, while Nick knows that he has some of his father's rage within him in spite of all his best efforts, and that it sometimes rears its head in ugly ways.

Though Nick braces himself for Rand and Marybeth to be angry with him when they spot him, instead, they embrace him warmly and tearfully and reassure him that they are all going to work together to find Amy. Nick only has a moment alone with his in-laws before chaos descends on them all—a woman approaches to help prep them for the press conference, and advises Nick that he should give a short statement. Go arrives, and tells Nick that he looks terrible, but admits that if it were her, she would've been up all night drinking, too.

Nick, Rand, Go, and Marybeth are all brought into a large conference room, where on a nearby easel there sits a giant photo of Amy, smiling and looking beautiful. Cameras flash as Nick and the others take their places at the front of the room. Nick gives a speech which he worries that he is "unconvincing [and] disconnected." Marybeth and Rand step in to "save" Nick by speaking more emotionally. As they weep and lean on one another, Nick—performing a nervous tic he's developed to "remind people [he isn't] a dick," flashes to the crowd a "killer smile."

## 10. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, DIARY ENTRY, JULY 5TH, 2010

Amy writes that she refuses to blame Nick for being laid off—along with fifteen other writers—from his magazine job. To do so, she says, would be to "turn into some pert-mouthed, strident angry-girl!" It is the day of their third wedding anniversary, and despite the occasion, Nick has called Amy to tell her that he needs to stay out with his coworkers, many of whom are distraught, angry, and upset. Even though Amy knows that Nick will surely pay for all these men's drinks with a credit card linked to her bank account, and even though Nick and Amy had their annual treasure hunt planned, Amy insists that in getting mad she'd just be "being a girl!"

*Nick has trouble with Amy's family dynamic because of the scars he bears as a result of his own twisted one. Nick is made uncomfortable by the fact that Rand and Marybeth are not only crazy about each other after years and years of marriage, but also treat one another as equals. Though Nick and Go loathe their father for his cruel treatment of their mother, he admits that there are parts of his father which live in him—parts he can't fully deny.*



*Nick is going to have to speak in public about his wife's disappearance—and knows he must muster up the correct amount of sensitivity and pain for the cameras and the media in order to maintain his "good guy" image.*



*Nick's compulsion to make other people happy and be liked is so strong that he deploys a smile as he poses with a picture of his missing wife. Nick's desire to seem affable and likable is going to be something that works against him—he's prioritizing his own image over the feelings he should be having about his wife, making him look like the polar opposite of a "good guy."*



*Again, Diary Amy is engaging in an hyperconscious rejection of wifely tropes. She draws herself as a woman who has always tried to resist reacting out of anger, jealousy, or scorn her husband's many missteps and misdeeds. Amy is demonstrating the ways in which women who speak up for themselves are classified as being nagging or high maintenance, demonized for their self-respect and agency.*



Nick gets home at four in the morning. Amy is waiting up for him, angry that he's missed their anniversary. When Nick doesn't say anything to acknowledge the milestone, Amy passively-aggressively wishes him "happy day after anniversary," and the two have a small argument. When Amy realizes just how scared Nick is to have lost his job—despite Amy's wealth, he still feels nervous about money because before their wedding he signed a prenup—she softens a bit. Nick tries to explain to Amy that he's never not had a job, and has worked his way up from blue-collar jobs in the Midwest to achieve his spot at the magazine—now, he has lost it all. When Amy pokes fun at one of Nick's old jobs (working as a Huck Finn impersonator), Nick curses at Amy and goes to sleep.

The two of them have never gone to bed angry, and have rarely had arguments as pointed and personal as this one. Amy goes over to the trash can and digs through it, pulling out Nick's receipts from the night. She sees he's been to two bars and two strip clubs. Though she knows she should be a "good sport" about his trip to the adult establishment, she finds herself feeling angry. What's more, she snoops through Nick's notebook and finds a phone number with a woman's name next to it on the most recently used page. Amy begins crying, but wonders how seriously she should be taking Nick's callous actions. After a few minutes, she goes to the bedroom, joins him in bed, and they apologize to one another at the exact same time.

## 11. NICK DUNNE, ONE DAY GONE (2)

After the disastrous press conference, Gilpin pulls Nick aside to tell him that there have been vagrants living in the Dunnes' neighborhood—Nick is unsurprised, as the whole town is "overrun with pissed-off, unemployed people" let go from their jobs at a recently closed mall. To himself, Nick laments the strange and tough times he has found himself living in, and thinks about how between the recession, the inundation of media and advertising, and his increasing cynicism about the world, he has stopped feeling, over the last few years, like "a real person." He would do anything, he thinks, to "feel real again."

*Nick and Amy can't seem to get on the same page in this passage. Their resentments towards one another have begun to pile up, and are coming out in nasty new ways as the newlyweds confront the first real challenge to their marriage.*



*It's impossible to say whether the information contained in this passage is true—Diary Amy seems to be trying to set Nick up as a man tempted by the desire to stray, always reeled in by his love for her. Their marriage, at this point in the "narrative" of their lives together, is still strong—but there are cracks in the foundation.*



*Nick's strange language in this passage is meant to deliberately confuse readers—and make them distrust him. His desire to "feel real" positions him as someone desperate for catharsis—a kind of emotional release that he could have perhaps achieved through murder. Readers will learn, however, that while Nick is not a murderer, he has done some shady things in the name of "feel[ing] real."*



Gilpin brings Nick back to the interrogation room he'd been in the night before to show him, lying on the table, the silvery gift box from Amy. Inside, nestled in tissue paper, is an envelope bearing the words "FIRST CLUE." Gilpin laughs, remarking how strange it was for them to open a box containing a "clue" before they realized it was a part of Nick and Amy's anniversary treasure hunt. Gilpin allows Nick to open the envelope and read the clue. The clever rhyming poem contained within makes reference to a sexy game of student and teacher which Amy envisions. Nick tells Gilpin the clue must be leading him to his office at the nearby junior college, where he's an adjunct professor of journalism. Gilpin and Nick decide to go over to his office together to find the next clue.

As Nick opens his office door, he sees two envelopes sitting on his desk. He is nervous about what they contain, but when he opens the envelope marked with a heart, he sees that it contains a gushing letter from Amy describing how "brilliant" Nick is. Nick finishes reading the note, confused and flattered, but continues staring at it—Gilpin, meanwhile, uses the tip of his pencil to pick up a pair of lacy red underwear that are hanging off a knob on the AC unit. Gilpin laughs at the "randy professor and naughty student" game Amy and Nick have apparently had going for quite some time. Nick reads the second clue, and so does Gilpin. Gilpin asks Nick what it means—Nick, lying, says he has "no idea."

After separating from Gilpin, Nick drives aimlessly up and down the highway, trying to make a call on a disposable cell phone. When he fails to get the person on the other end to pick up, he drives to meet the Elliots at the local Days Inn. He goes up to the Elliots' room and Marybeth lets him in; together, they watch the five o'clock news from St. Louis. Amy's disappearance is the lead story. Rand asks Nick how he's holding up, and they all commiserate over how sick and useless they feel.

Rand asks Nick if he's given the police lists of his employees at The Bar, and then admits he's given them lists of his own *Amazing Amy* employees. The books—which featured lessons for children and a quiz at the end of each chapter—are immensely popular throughout the country, and Rand admits that there are some people who've worked for him and Marybeth over the years who might be suspicious.

*The strange circumstances of Amy's disappearance are heightened by the sing-song-y treasure hunt "clues" she has left behind. The police want to solve the treasure hunt in order to track Amy's recent whereabouts—and the uncanny coincidence of being led through a series of "clues" in the wake of a disappearance is too uncanny to pass up.*



*Nick wants to solve his wife's treasure hunt—but doesn't necessarily want the police to come along with him. He's clearly afraid of what he'll find, and surprised by the warm tone of Amy's note—suggesting that Nick knows just how unhappy his wife has been in their marriage.*



*Nick's disposable cell phone is a major red herring throughout the first quarter of the novel. Nick purposely conceals who he's using the phone to contact—and why—but dangles its presence as a clue to what he's really up to. Secrets, lies, and half-truths are woven into the very fiber of this narrative.*



*Rand and Marybeth—puppet masters of Amy's childhood—seem to realize that their enterprise has perhaps done their daughter more harm than good, and put her in the way of danger.*



Nick asks Rand and Marybeth what the police have asked them about him—they console Nick and promise him that they know he'd never hurt Amy, and have told the police as much. Rand and Marybeth tell Nick that they love him like a son. Nick's phone vibrates, but he silences the call, insisting it's a number he recognizes as his college's alumni fund. Marybeth tells Nick that "an Amy obsessive" could have kidnapped Amy—there have, over the years, been stalkers and strange fans, including one of Amy's own high school classmates, Hilary Handy, who threatened to kill Amy and take her place as Rand and Marybeth's daughter.

Another of Amy's stalkers was her boarding-school boyfriend Desi Collings, a wealthy classmate who approached his relationship with Amy with too much intensity, and then tried to kill himself in her bed when she broke things off. Nick has heard a lot about Desi over the years—despite the macabre end to his relationship with Amy, Desi has continued phoning and writing letters over the years; he lives, now, in St. Louis, just forty minutes from Carthage. Despite the unsettling coincidence, Nick can't imagine Desi, whom he pictures as a "slender dandy," forcibly kidnapping Amy. However, when Nick mentions to the Elliotts that Desi is living in St. Louis, they insist on informing the police. Marybeth states that the authorities think the case is "close to home," and "shiver[s]" as she looks at Nick for just a "beat too long."

*Some of the clues to Amy's past begin to emerge. The fact that she's had a number of "obsessive[s]" interested in becoming or harming her over the years is yet another red herring meant to complicate the mystery at the heart of the narrative.*



*This passage makes it clear that while Rand and Marybeth are worried about a whole host of threats from Amy's past, there's also a part of them that hasn't entirely ruled out Nick's guilt. The "shiver" Marybeth gets when she relays that the police are looking "close to home" for the answers to Amy's disappearance shows that she, perhaps, is loath to believe Nick has something to do with it—but can't shake the doubt in the back of her mind.*



## 12. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, DIARY ENTRY, AUGUST 23RD, 2010

Amy walks through Prospect Park in Brooklyn, thinking of how much of her life has come apart in the wake of Nick's having been laid off. At first, he was optimistic about learning new skills that might help him get a different job, and spent his days reading classic novels and studying online language lessons—quickly, though, he descended into lethargy, and now spends his days eating take-out and playing video games in pajamas. When Amy loses her job at her magazine, too, Nick "barely shrugs," telling Amy that at least she has her family's money.

One afternoon, Amy comes home and begins cleaning the apartment. She finds bags full of luxury bespoke goods from high-end men's stores. When she confronts Nick about the extravagant purchases, he claims that he bought the clothes for future job interviews. Amy is angry that Nick is provoking her into nagging him, trying to turn her into a kind of woman she's never been and never wanted to be.

*Nick is clearly resentful of Amy's position—though he has claimed to be blasé about her fortune in his own timeline, Amy asserts that Nick has always seen Amy and the things that happen to her differently because of her money.*



*In this passage—which sets up a major twist which will be revealed in the present timeline, in Carthage—it's impossible to say whether Amy is telling the truth about Nick's overspending, or laying the groundwork for the story she wants to tell about Nick and his habits.*





When Amy gets nervous about their “his-and-her layoffs,” she checks her bank account to calm her mind—she has nearly eight hundred thousand dollars in savings. Though her trust fund from the *Amy* books is a huge chunk of change, she knows it’s not enough to let her and Nick stop working forever—especially not in New York.

One day, Marybeth and Rand call to ask if they can come over. Amy grows frightened, afraid that one of her parents has fallen ill—instead, when they arrive, they sit Nick and Amy down to tell them they’ve fallen on hard times, having been living beyond their means for years. Marybeth asks to borrow money from Amy’s trust to help keep their mortgage payments on both their house and her brownstone afloat. Amy agrees, even when her parents request six hundred and fifty thousand dollars—and ask her to wire transfer it to them immediately.

### 13. NICK DUNNE, TWO DAYS GONE

Nick wakes up on the pullout couch in the Elliotts’ suite. Though Nick is usually a heavy sleeper, last night he felt an insomniac energy take over his brain—he has hardly slept at all, and is exhausted. He goes downstairs with Marybeth and Rand to an underused ballroom the inn has donated as a Find Amy Dunne headquarters and the three of them begin spiffing it up. At ten, Boney arrives, along with several volunteers—mostly women—and when one strange “loner guy” shows up, Boney kindly reassures Nick that the police are monitoring everyone who comes in and out of the headquarters in case someone suspicious comes around. Boney also warns Nick not to get too close to any of the women helping with the investigation—she says that many can get “a little too interested in consoling the worried husband.”

Boney asks Nick why he never mentioned Noelle Hawthorne—Amy’s best friend. Nick assures Boney that Amy isn’t friends with anyone named Noelle, but does attract people who tend to “latch on” to her. He explains that readers of the *Amazing Amy* books especially often feel like they know Amy without really being close to her. Boney nods, replying that “people want to believe they know other people.”

*Amy’s money is her independence. Though it doesn’t guarantee her a stress-free or work-free life, it allows her not to worry—it will keep her afloat in a difficult time.*



*With the news Marybeth and Rand bring, Amy knows that the flotation device of her trust fund is gone—without the money that symbolizes her independence, she is at the mercy of the economy and in uncharted territory.*



*There is a careful protocol which must be followed as Nick navigates his wife’s disappearance. He is trying to moderate his suspicion, his likability, and his friendliness—all of which are needed to keep the focus off of himself.*



*In this passage, Boney expresses one of the novel’s sad central truths: though it’s hard to ever truly know another person, everyone wants to believe they know those they admire, and those closest to them.*



Many of Nick's old high school friends and girlfriends come by throughout the day—often with their own children in tow. Nick thinks back to his mother's illness—Maureen always wanted grandchildren, but never knew that Amy, who'd been 37 when they moved back to Carthage, did not want children. One of Nick's high school friends, Stucks, approaches him and suggests that a disgruntled homeless person laid off either from the blue book paper factory at the edge of town or the mall might be responsible for Amy's abduction. He tells Nick that the "Blue Book Boys," as they're called, have essentially colonized the mall—last month, some of them assaulted a woman.

Nick drives over to the afternoon search area and calls Boney to ask if cops are searching the mall—she assures him that they're on it. Nick arrives at Wolky Park, a local nature spot with hiking trails, to join the search party. There are TV crews present, and several reporters bother Nick, peppering him with "pointless questions." Nick wants to join the search party, but a cop on the scene suggests he stay by the trail entrance with flyers and posters of Amy to be "friendly and encouraging" to anyone who arrives to help join the search. He wonders if the cops are perhaps trying to keep him away from a crime scene they think they might uncover.

A local woman named Shawna Kelly arrives to help with the search, and begins chatting with Nick, who is worried that Shawna's repeated touching of his arm and overt friendliness looks "inappropriate." Nick silently wishes Shawna would go away, but instead she pulls out her cell phone and takes a selfie with Nick. He is angry, but smiles automatically in an attempt to staunch his rage. As he catches a glimpse of the photo Shawna takes, he resents his own "smarmy" smile.

#### 14. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, DIARY ENTRY, SEPTEMBER 15TH, 2010

Amy writes a **diary** entry from an anonymous motel off the highway in Pennsylvania. She and Nick are on their way to their "new adventure"—they are moving back to Nick's hometown in Missouri. Nick's mother, Maureen, is sick with stage four cancer, and will soon die. Nick insisted the two of them "do the right thing" and leave New York to care for his mom. Since he made the decision, Amy feels that Nick is treating her "like a problem that need[s] to be dealt with" or "an object to be jettisoned if necessary." Amy thinks of last night—the night before they left—when her parents came over to say goodbye and Nick promised the crying pair that he'd take care of Amy. In spite of this promise, Amy feels afraid—like she could "disappear" at any time.

*Nick's past collides with his present as the search for Amy goes on. Everyone wants to help—and Nick, who has no clue what is going on but is desperate to take the focus off of himself, appears ready to follow any possible lead.*



*With every development, Nick becomes increasingly frightened that the police are moving him around like a piece on a chess board. He is allowed to participate in "Find Amy" activities—but kept at arm's length. He senses that the cops don't fully trust him, and this makes him very anxious.*



*Nick is now something of a local celebrity—but he has to be careful not to draw any more attention, and certainly not negative attention, to himself. Boney warned him about women like Shawna Kelly—but Nick's hands are tied when she approaches him, as he can't be rude or dismissive, either.*



*Amy is, it seems, drawing off emotional truth to lay the groundwork for a much more sinister narrative. Leaving for Missouri, she feels like she's playing second fiddle to Nick's familial obligations—like she's only standing in his way. She uses the truth of this feeling as fuel for a diary entry which suggests that Nick wanted to get rid of his wife and make her "disappear."*



## 15. NICK DUNNE, THREE DAYS GONE

The next morning, after hours of search parties at many locations around town, authorities have turned up no clues or leads. There is an air of defeat hanging over the volunteer center, and as Nick picks listlessly at a Danish, he overhears two men discussing how Amy could have been chopped into pieces and thrown in the river—if so, her body would be “all the way to the Gulf” by now. Nick feels his disposable phone vibrate in his pocket, but he silences the call.

Marybeth and Rand are frustrated by the police’s refusal to look into one of Amy’s old stalkers, Hilary Handy, who lives five hours away in Tennessee. Marybeth pleads with Nick to drive there himself and check things out. He agrees, and even volunteers to stop at Desi Collings’s place in St. Louis on the way back. When Stucks approaches Nick and tells him that the police having searched the mall in broad daylight was the wrong move—the place is only active at night—Nick suggests the two of them go down there themselves later. Rand gets word of their plan, and asks to come along—Nick tells him that he’d be a welcome help.

The police return Nick’s car to him. A volunteer takes him to the police station to pick it up, and he is privately grateful to have “a good ten unscheduled hours to work with.” Nick gets into his car, where he removes Amy’s second clue from his pocket and reads it. It makes reference to his “boyhood adventures” in Hannibal, where he dressed up like Huck Finn for tourists. The two of them took a trip there a couple years ago, and Nick now drives the twenty minutes to get there to hunt for the next of Amy’s clues.

As Nick arrives in Hannibal and looks around the depressing Main Street, full of closed storefronts and depressing tourist traps, he laments that he has “brought Amy to the end of everything.” The end of their jobs and print journalism in general, the end of Carthage’s way of life as well, even the end of their marriage.

Nick arrives at one of the spots referenced in Amy’s clue and goes inside—it is an old courthouse where Mark Twain’s father once worked. Nick gets down on his hands and knees and looks beneath the benches—he eventually finds the clue, in a blue envelope. There is a long note inside, in which Amy writes about how this year, she has chosen not to make the treasure hunt a “test”—but rather a celebration of their marriage. She thanks Nick for always being so funny and full of wit. Nick feels his soul deflate over his and Amy’s poor timing.

*Nick is disheartened by the way the investigation is going—but he’s clearly hiding a lot from the people who are in charge of finding Amy. This tension propels the narrative forward and suggests that Nick is not the “good guy” he seems to be.*



*Nick is more than willing to look into individuals the cops are overlooking—he seems to desperately want to take the heat and focus off of himself. Nick’s desperation, though, reads as concern for his wife, and a self-sacrificing desire to do anything it takes to get her back.*



*Nick wants to be free of the police so that he can start an investigation of his own. He needs to finish Amy’s treasure hunt—he’s unsure what the clues will hold, and doesn’t want to risk discovering anything that makes him look bad in full view of the authorities.*



*Nick realizes that he has, perhaps, truly ruined his wife’s life. When he and Amy met, they were young and in control, and their lives were full of possibility—now it seems their lives are crumbling around them.*



*Nick keeps discovering these little love letters from Amy—letters which make him rethink how he was feeling about their marriage at the time of her disappearance and lament their inability to ever get on the same page.*



The next clue attached to the note tells Nick exactly where to go, but he's not ready to go there yet. Instead, he drives back to Go's, where the two of them watch television and commiserate. Go asks Nick if he's okay—she thinks he's being “weird” about everything concerning Amy's disappearance. He admits that he knows hasn't been acting or even feeling upset enough—Go says she understands, but warns Nick to be careful how he expresses himself around other people.

At 11:00 p.m., Nick goes back to the Days Inn to meet up with Stucks and Rand. As Stucks tells Rand how sorry he is about Amy, and tells nice stories about her, Nick realizes that everything his friend is saying is false. He's angry—“facts [are] facts,” he feels, and is mad that everyone is turning Amy into someone she wasn't. The Hillsam brothers, Joe and Mikey, also join the expedition to the mall, and on the way warn Stucks, Nick, and Rand that the mall is truly a dangerous place.

The group walks through the mall looking for vagrants, and eventually, they come across a man and a woman huddled on blankets, looking sweaty and emaciated. They points the group in the direction of “the Hole,” an old department store at the far end of the mall. Nick and the others make their way to the Hole, where junkies are sprawled out all over the floor. Nick and the Hillsam brothers begin asking questions about Amy, insisting that it's not her drug use they're worried about, but rather the idea that a junkie kidnapped her. When Nick shows one man, Lonnie, a picture of Amy, he recognizes her—and says that she came in not too long ago, wanting to purchase a gun.

## 16. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, DIARY ENTRY, OCTOBER 16TH, 2010

Amy writes peppily in her **diary**, celebrating her one-month anniversary in Missouri. Although Amy misses New York, and though she, Nick, and their cat Bleecker are having some fits and starts adjusting to their new home, Amy is taking a kind of anthropologic joy in learning about her new hometown with the guidance of Nick's mother, Maureen. At a housewarming party thrown in their honor by Maureen and some friends, Amy is shocked by everyone's niceness, and finds herself struggling to come up with things to say.

Though Amy delights in bulk shopping at Costco and marvels at the “cheap and easy” casserole recipes Maureen's friends constantly send her, she does feel strange in Carthage. She thinks that Nick “has decided on a version of [her] that doesn't exist.” She's invested money in his and Go's bar, participated in the community and tried to make friends, and even been kind to Nicks' volatile, Alzheimer's-ridden father Bill—but nothing she does seems like enough.

*Nick has said that Go is the only person he can be his true self with—but even she is put off by his strangely unemotional response to Amy's disappearance. She wants the best for her brother, and though she doesn't take his flat affect as an admission of guilt, she warns him that others could interpret it that way.*



*Nick is infuriated by the ways in which his wife's disappearance has made her into an angelic, revered figure in the community. Nick knows the real Amy, warts and all, and is frustrated that she gets to take on an angelic quality while his every move and motivation is questioned.*



*Nick was hoping that the trip to the mall would expose someone—or something—that pointed to Amy having been taken by a vagrant or an outcast member of society. Instead, what Lonnie tells them reveals that Amy was scared—and desperate to secure protection for herself. The narrative is not unfolding the way Nick wants it to.*



*Amy arrives in the Midwest with an open heart and mind. She is curious about her surroundings, and hopeful that she can have a nice life here, just like she had in New York. She's willing to do her part to make sure that she and Nick stay together and appear happy to everyone else.*



*In both their separate timelines, Nick and Amy both admit to feeling like copies of themselves—they are not, at their cores, exactly who their spouse thinks they are.*



Towards the end of the housewarming party, Bill has a fit and begins cursing at Amy, claiming she doesn't belong in the house and calling her a "dumb bitch." As he screams again and again about how Amy doesn't belong, she walks out of the party and into the rain, stunned and a little bit creeped out by the truth of Bill's words. She waits in the rain for Nick to come outside and comfort her, but he does not.

*Bill's Alzheimer's, which leads him to terrible and misogynistic outbursts, frightens Amy—and foreshadows the mounting misogyny she is yet to face in the story of her time in Missouri.*



## 17. NICK DUNNE, FOUR DAYS GONE (1)

Rand and Nick are sitting in the empty Find Amy Dunne headquarters in the wee hours of morning, waiting for the cops to check on Lonnie—the vagrant who told Rand and Nick that Amy had come to the mall on Valentine's Day looking to buy a gun. Rand wonders aloud what Amy could have been afraid of, and Nick suggests perhaps Amy was afraid Desi would come looking for her. Rand says he never liked Desi, who was always "possessive" of Amy. Nick suggests that Noelle Hawthorne, too, could have been obsessed with Amy—Rand admits that yesterday, Noelle approached him and "quoted some *Amazing Amy* stuff."

*The discovery that Amy wanted to buy a gun makes Nick look bad. As he and Rand sit around discussing what they've discovered, Nick tries to pull focus off of himself and cast doubt on other people in their lives. He wants to spin a narrative which allows him to keep looking like the "good guy."*



In the morning, Rand and Nick meet Boney and Gilpin at a nearby pancake house. The detectives chastise Nick and his father-in-law for trying to take the investigation into their own hands. Boney fills the men in on her questioning of Lonnie—the woman he saw at the mall was definitely Amy, but Boney doubts he has anything to do with her disappearance. Boney and Gilpin state that they're looking for "a different kind of motive"—something more "personal."

*Boney and Gilpin are not swayed by the new information uncovered at the mall. They have their own narrative they're exploring—or creating—and it is one of "personal" violence against Amy.*



Boney tells Nick they have a few more questions for him. They tell him that one of Nick and Amy's neighbors has told the police that the couple were heard loudly having an argument the night before Amy's disappearance. Boney tenderly asks what the argument was about. Nick hurriedly says it was a "nothing argument," which is why he never mentioned it to the police. He claims they were fighting over what to do about their anniversary dinner—but settled the argument and were laughing and joking together again within the hour.

*Nick is trying so hard to keep himself from looking bad that he's actually making himself look worse. By telling lies of omission to the police, he makes it seem like there are even more lies he's not telling them—and yet he can't get out of his spiral of half-truths.*



After breakfast, Rand and Nick drive back to the hotel. Back at headquarters, Nick decides to dial the number for Hilary Handy—one of Amy’s high-school stalkers. Hilary tries to hang up on Nick, but he calls her back and tells her Amy’s gone missing—then asks if the two have had any contact lately. Hilary asks if the call relates to “bullshit back in high school,” and insists she “learned [her] lesson”—if she were to see Amy on the street now, she’d “run the other way.” She hangs up on Nick. After a couple of strange interactions with Shawna, the woman from the search, and Noelle Hawthorne—who seemingly threatens Nick with information about Amy she wants to bring to the police—Nick leaves the volunteer center and drives to Bill’s vacant house. Amy has referenced it in her third clue.

It is 10:00 p.m. by the time Nick gets to the house, which has been for sale for over a year without a single offer. Entering the house, Nick has trouble entering the alarm code—though the code is his own birthday, the alarm pad won’t accept it. The intruder alert goes off, and Nick waits for his cell phone to ring as the alarm company calls him—but it doesn’t. Nick begins sweating, and after a minute, his phone rings. The call center on the other end asks for the password: Amy’s first pet’s name. Nick, frustrated with Amy’s endless trivia, snaps at the woman on the other end, and she threatens to call the police. Nick, angry, hangs up. He calls back and speaks to someone else, who obliges him and turns off the alarm.

As Nick gathers his thoughts, he sees Amy’s next clue sitting on the kitchen counter. Again, it is a note praising Nick’s warmth and calling him a “good man.” Nick’s throat tightens as he imagines Amy standing beside him. He opens the envelope marked “FOURTH CLUE” and reads the rhyme inside. It references a place “where you store goodies for anniversary five” and warns Nick that a “big surprise” awaits him there. Nick can’t figure out the clue though, and desperately rereads it over and over again, his frustration mounting as he fears he won’t finish Amy’s treasure hunt. Thinking of all the women who have messed with him throughout the day—Boney, Noelle, Shawna, Hilary, the woman at the security company, and even Amy—Nick thinks there’s only one woman he can be around right now.

*The strange conversation with Hilary—not to mention the odd run-ins he has with Shawna and Noelle—make it seem like Nick is surrounded by women who want to make him look guilty. Nick knows he needs to keep up with his own investigation and stay one step ahead of the police in order to remain in control of the narrative of what’s going on.*



*Something is off at the house—and yet Nick blames the alarm code malfunction on Amy, on the call center receptionist, on anyone but himself. As the novel goes on, it seems as if Nick wants to be a tertiary character in his own story—not responsible for any of the twists and turns, but rather a victim of circumstance. He blames his problems overwhelmingly on the women around him, showing his contempt and disrespect for the women he sees as cardboard cutouts of people.*



*Nick grows flustered and frustrated by Amy’s fourth clue. He knows he can’t solve it yet—and thus can’t get ahead of the police. He is angry and upset, and instead of directing his anger at his own incompetence, he blames the stress and frustration of his day on all the women he’s come in contact with.*



Nick heads to Go's house, and his twin makes him a grilled cheese and pours him a beer. She asks Nick if he wants to watch a ball game to take his mind off the investigation, but Nick is anxious and upset. Go tries to distract him by playing one of their old games—telling the longest, most boring, most pointless story she can think of—and Nick feels a surge of gratitude for his sister. He kisses her on the cheek. After the baseball game ends, Go heads to bed. Nick sits alone on the sofa flipping through TV channels and magazines. Without warning, his disposable phone buzzes in his pocket. He flips it open to reveal a text message: “im outside open the door,” it reads.

*Go is the only woman Nick really likes—and the narcissism of that, considering she's his twin, is plain to see. Go, though, doesn't even know what's really going on with Nick—as the chapter ends on a cliffhanger, it becomes clear that whoever is at the other end of Nick's burner phone is about to be revealed.*



## 18. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, DIARY ENTRY, APRIL 28TH, 2011

Amy's life in Missouri is difficult. Nick has lost all interest in taking care of his parents, leaving his wife the responsibilities of driving Maureen to her doctor's appointments and checking on Bill at his nursing home. Amy has found, on Nick's computer, a book proposal for a memoir about “a Manhattan magazine writer who returns to his Missouri roots to care for both his ailing parents.” The draft is titled “Double Lives: A Memoir of Ends and Beginnings.” Amy feels the unfinished proposal is self-indulgent and exploitative, and she is unhappy to discover herself as a character within it. While Amy struggles to bear the burden of caring for Nick's parents, Nick spends all his time at The Bar. He has lost weight and gotten a new haircut, and Amy worries that just as he “jettisoned his parents,” he is soon going to “drop” her, too.

*Amy is using Nick as fodder in her own twisted narrative through her diary entries—but in this entry, she makes it seem like the roles are reversed, and Nick sees her only purpose as part of an interesting story he can tell for his own gain and illumination. Amy writes about feeling like she is on increasingly unsteady ground within her marriage—a sentiment that, while exaggerated and made more sinister, may have been true at this point in time for both her and Nick.*



## 19. NICK DUNNE, FOUR DAYS GONE (2)

Nick walks outside to find his “very young mistress,” Andie, standing on the doorstep. She runs into the house and embraces Nick, and he feels both “relief and horror.” Nick writes that he knows how unlikable having a mistress makes him. Andie chides Nick for not having called her in days, and pleadingly tells him how worried she's been. Nick ogles Andie's hair and breasts, and soon she grabs him and kisses him, pushing him onto the sofa and straddling him. As Andie pulls her dress down and places Nick's hands on her breasts, he can't help but think of Amy, and he recoils.

*The discovery that Nick has been cheating on Amy with a much younger woman makes him look terribly guilty—if not of murder, than at least of being the opposite of the “good guy” he wants to present himself as. From the way he interacts with Andie, it's obvious that he feels that guilt more acutely than he has at any other point in their affair.*



Nick tells Andie that she shouldn't have come—his sister, Go, is sleeping in the other room. Andie tells Nick that she “need[s]” him. Nick feels himself being overcome by lust—but realizes that to sleep with Andie right now would not only be wrong, but dangerous.

*Nick's behavior in Andie's presence is gross and lecherous—but he knows that now that Amy is missing, he can't afford to risk coming off that way.*



Nick met Andie when she was one of his students in a class called “How to Launch a Magazine Career.” Though their affair began as just sex, he has come to truly love Andie. Andie doesn’t see Nick the way Amy does—instead of considering him a laid-off magazine writer, Andie only knows him as a successful writer and a teacher with all the answers. Andie seduced Nick, and he let himself be seduced. At home, Amy “slipped past [him] like a fish,” avoiding sex and even basic touch—he found refuge in Andie’s attentions and embraces. One night, in April of the previous year, there was a strange and sudden snowstorm while Nick was working alone at The Bar. Andie came in, and as Nick poured drinks for the two of them, he realized for the first time that he no longer loved his wife.

After closing The Bar, Nick walked Andie home during the snowstorm, and they had sex for the first time at her apartment. It was the first time Nick had had sex in a long time, and he climaxed quickly. Afterwards, he felt swarmed by guilt—even as he knew there would for sure be a “next” time with Andie. Nick carried on the affair for months and months, promising himself all the while he’d tell Amy and ask for a divorce. Every time he psyched himself up to do so, though, he remembered the money Amy had put into The Bar. He eventually resolved to “drift on,” hoping that at some point Amy would be the one to ask for a divorce—then Nick would “get to be the good guy.” He admits now that this desire “to escape the situation without blame” was “despicable.”

Back in the present, Andie tells Nick that she loves him “no matter what happens.” He is unable to return the sentiment, despite Andie’s pleas for him to reciprocate her unconditional love. He begs Andie to be patient with him and warns her that they will only be able to be together at the end of all this if they’re both very “careful.” He entreats Andie to take Amy’s disappearance “seriously,” and she promises she will—but demands Nick call her once a day, every day, even for just a few seconds, or else she’ll “go crazy.” The two of them begin having sex.

Nick wakes up at five in the morning to the sound of Go, in the hall bathroom, running the water. He wakes Andie up hurriedly and hustles her towards the door. He pushes her out, but not in time—when he turns back around, Go is standing in the living room with her hands on her hips. She tells Nick that he is a “fucking idiot.”

*As Nick reflects on the origin of his relationship with Andie, it becomes clear that he was initially drawn to her because she allowed him to see himself in a new light. After months of Amy’s cold disinterest, a subtle indictment of Nick’s past errors and mistakes, Andie’s interest and kindness made him feel like the hero in his own story again.*



*Nick’s inability to come clean about the affair shows that he had—and has—little respect for both Amy and Andie. He can’t choose between the two women, and has kept them both strung along, unwilling to rupture his “good guy” image by admitting to infidelity.*



*Andie is desperate for Nick’s attention, even as the haze of Amy’s disappearance swirls all around them. Nick succumbs to Andie’s need—he wants to feel wanted and desired just as badly as she does.*



*Go’s discovery of Nick’s affair opens up a new chapter for both of them: Go is finally able to see her twin in a new light, and understand that there are a whole lot of things he’s not telling her.*





## 20. AMY ELLIOT DUNNE, DIARY ENTRY, JULY 21ST, 2011

"I am such an idiot," Amy writes. She feels "ridiculous, frivolous, [and] spoiled" in Missouri, crushed by the gravity of Maureen's impending death. One day, she accompanies Maureen and some of her friends to a plasma donation center, where they are planning to give plasma in exchange for money. Maureen has brought Amy along to be her "proxy," and adds that it's good for a woman to have a little cash of her own. Amy holds her tongue, wishing she could tell Maureen she used to have cash—before she gave it all to Nick. Amy is reluctant to give blood, and faints shortly after her session. Maureen brings her home and tucks her into bed, and they both try to call Nick, but he doesn't answer.

That night, Nick slips into bed with Amy past eleven. He's heard some of what happened from Maureen, but claims he couldn't pick up his phone because it was "out of juice." Amy calls out the paradox—and then waits for Nick to come up with a lie. Amy "swallow[s] her disappointment" and hardly even listens as Nick lies to her.

*Amy's fear of blood points to a delicate and squeamish nature. The trip to the plasma donation center also shows just how dire things are for the women Amy has met in Missouri—she is not in New York anymore, and is surrounded by people who have been affected by the financial crisis even worse than she herself has.*



*Nick wasn't there for Amy when she needed him—and the fact that he's lying about why is clear as day. Amy has no patience for Nick's stories, and tunes him out as he tells her what she wants to hear.*



## 21. NICK DUNNE, FIVE DAYS GONE (1)

Go angrily lambasts Nick for sleeping with one of his students, lamenting that he is not "one of the good guys" like she always thought he was. She points out that even their deadbeat father, Bill, didn't go so far as to cheat on their mother, Maureen—and adds that Nick is "fucked" in terms of the investigation, as news of Andie will surely come out soon. Nick accuses Go of turning against him, pointing out that she never even liked Amy, but Go tells him he's "insane." Go, exhausted, sits down and tell Nick that they need to hire a lawyer before the media turns him into "the evil philandering husband." Go gets up and goes to her room, planning to make some calls.

Nick falls back asleep and dreams of Amy, her head misshapen and bloody. He knows that he needs to go home and face "the scene of the crime." He drives back to his and Amy's neighborhood and steps back into his house for the first time in days. The police have been everywhere, and the house smells strange. Nick greets his and Amy's cat, Bleecker, who's been fed by the police, and then heads upstairs, where he looks around getting lost in thought as he looks back on "the day of." His phone rings—it is Go, telling him that the notorious and "permanently furious" cable news host Ellen Abbott is doing a segment on Amy right now.

*Go's image of her brother is forever changed. She realizes that the man she's been sticking up for all this time doesn't really exist. The same shattering that occurred in Nick and Amy's marriage is now taking place in Nick and Go's relationship—and yet Go is determined to make sure that no one else has to have their faith in Nick shattered the way she has.*



*Nick's thoughts about Amy are getting more and more frightening—his disdain for the women all around him, both in his life and in the media, is also growing more intense. This case is getting to Nick—and exposing some of his misogynistic tendencies bit by bit.*



Nick turns on the TV and watches the segment, in which Ellen reveals that Nick's full name is "Lance Nicholas Dunne." She interviews Shawna Kelly, and shows the "cheerful" selfie Shawna snapped during the search for Amy. Ellen Abbott devotes the segment to "obsessing over [Nick's] lack of alibi" and indicting Nick's character. As he watches the program, he calls Ellen and Shawna horrible names inside his head.

Nick, needing to do something "useful," gets in his car and drives to St. Louis to track down Desi Collings. As he approaches Desi's neighborhood, he realizes that the man is "extremely, sickly wealthy" and lives in a mansion that must cost at least five million dollars. Desi greets Nick cordially at the door, seeming to know both who he is and why he's here without having been told. He and Nick sit down in the living room, and begin discussing Amy. Desi admits that when he saw the story on the news for the first time, he thought only "Of course"—he knows that Amy has long had a way of "making people want her."

As Desi describes his relationship with Amy—in which he basked in her attention in its early stages, and became desperate once she saw his "flaws" and lost interest—Nick feels a "rush of disgust for sharing this emotion with [an]other man." Desi brings Nick a framed photograph of himself and Amy from high school—Nick points out how odd it is that Desi has the photograph, but Desi insists the shot was too "perfect" to toss. Desi asks if there are any leads in the case, and Nick admits that he came to question Desi because Desi stalked Amy in high school. When Nick reminds Desi that he tried to kill himself in Amy's dorm room, Desi says he has no idea what Nick is talking about. A woman comes in from another room—it is Desi's mother Jacqueline, who is a "blurry vision of Amy."

As the conversation goes on, Desi admits to having written Amy letters over the years. Jacqueline praises them for sustaining the lost art of letter-writing. Nick asks why Desi would write letters to a woman who never wrote him back, and insists that Amy always threw all of Desi's letters into the trash—Nick would see them there sometimes. Desi's eyes light up at this information. Jacqueline politely but definitively dismisses Nick, guiding him towards the door and pressing a business card into his hands. She instructs him to call their lawyer the next time he wants to get in touch with Desi.

*Nick is beset on all sides by women who question the truth of who he is and what he's done. The constant inquiries into his personal life and his past are proving to be too much for him, and parts of himself he'd rather stay hidden are being uncovered at a rapid pace. Nick is growing angrier and angrier towards the women in his life.*



*Nick, overwhelmed by the negative effects of all the women swarming around him, knows he needs to do something. He seeks out contact first with Desi Collings rather than Hilary Handy, perhaps consciously or subconsciously desiring male companionship—even if it means tracking down his wife's frightening ex-boyfriend.*



*Something is off about Desi—he seems to still be stoking at least a low-level obsession with Amy, and yet claims that the allegations of stalking and harassment against him are false. Even as he outright denies having violently pursued Amy, the appearance of his mother—to whom Amy bears a startling resemblance—points to the fact that if Desi isn't guilty, he's at least suspicious. Flynn is casting all the major players in this drama in shades of gray—even if someone's not guilty, it doesn't mean they're not morally dubious at best.*



*Once again, it becomes clear that Nick might not have all the facts about Desi. It seems as if perhaps Amy has been writing Desi back after all—but Nick can hardly process this information before Jacqueline rushes him out, unwilling to have her son implicated any further in Amy's disappearance.*



## 22. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, DIARY ENTRY, AUGUST 17TH, 2011

Amy writes about how there has recently been a change in Nick after many months of sadness, tension, and even anger between them. Last week, they had sex for the first time in months, and Nick has been leading Amy around town on a “full tour of his boyhood haunts,” like she’s been asking him to do since they moved to Carthage. It seems their love for one another has been renewed. Amy has found herself wondering what the “catch” is—she wonders if maybe he just wants more money for The Bar, since last week caught him rifling through their shared box of important files. Amy tells herself she’s being “crazy,” and vows not to “let [her] worst self ruin [her] marriage.”

*The present timeline in Carthage and the past timeline of Amy’s diary entries are constructed to be at odds with one another. As things get more complicated for Nick in the present, they grow less complicated for the Nick and Amy of days gone by. Flynn—and by proxy, Amy—orchestrates this dissonance in order to keep readers guessing, constantly unsure of what the truth of Nick and Amy’s marriage could be.*



## 23. NICK DUNNE, FIVE DAYS GONE (2)

As he leaves Desi’s house, Nick gets a voicemail from Gilpin asking him to meet the detectives at his and Amy’s house at four. He drives back to Carthage, and soon finds himself in the living room with Gilpin and Boney “for the first time since The Day Of.” Boney begins telling Nick that she has “some stuff [she wants] to get clear on” with him, but Nick tries to digress by telling them he’s just paid a visit to Desi and believes they should look into him more. Boney stonily replies that Desi is not a suspect, and will not relent in spite of Nick’s accusations against the man. Nick mentions that other men have been calling the tip line obsessively, including one old boyfriend of Amy’s named Tommy O’Hara, but Gilpin insists the three of them need to focus on the basic facts of the case.

*As Nick feels Boney and Gilpin trying to corner him—though he’s not sure to what end—he tries to throw other ideas and stories at them. At this point in the narrative, it’s still unclear what’s really going on, and whether Nick’s desire to look into other options is borne out of truth or the desire to disguise more lies. The objective truth doesn’t matter right now to the detectives—they clearly have a narrative in front of them that they want to test out, and seek Nick’s help in sorting through the clues they’ve found.*



Boney asks Nick about his whereabouts during the time frame Amy went missing—when he was down at the beach. She says if he could give them the name of anyone who might have seen him there, they could “cross this little thing off [their] list.” They question Nick about where he got his coffee that morning, and why he was at the beach—most people who know him have said he isn’t a “beach person”—but Nick dodges their questions smugly. He has an answer for everything.

*Nick is one step ahead of the cops, with answers to all of their questions. Nick knows he has no alibi for the morning of Amy’s disappearance—and whether his answers are genuine or not, he’s clinging to them for dear life.*



Gilpin and Boney tell Nick that they have seen countless home invasions—and have determined that the scene in the living room is odd and obviously staged. When Gilpin stomps, three picture frames fall off the mantelpiece—and yet when they first arrived at the scene, all three were upright. If there had been a real struggle, the detectives say, there would have been a much different crime scene. Gilpin adds that a Luminol sweep of the kitchen “lit up”—Amy lost a good deal of blood in there. They have matched trace amounts of blood to her blood type. Nick feels “a clot of heat” in the middle of his chest. Boney adds that the blood on the floor was poorly but obviously mopped up.

*The inconsistencies in the living room mess showed the cops that something in the house was either amiss or afoot. As they’ve looked into more evidence within the home they’ve found some frightening stuff—and as Nick realizes this, he begins feeling nervous and ill.*



Boney and Gilpin begin questioning Nick about the state of his and Amy's marriage—he insists everything between them was fine, but knows she can tell he's lying. Nick asks if Amy might have run away, but Boney states that Amy hasn't used a cell phone, credit card, or made a cash withdrawal since her disappearance. Boney asks Nick one more time how his marriage was, warning him that holding back information from the cops is the only thing that will make him look bad.

Boney and Gilpin continue asking Nick about his marriage, and the kinds of things he and Amy would fight about. Nick eventually admits that he and Amy squabbled about domestic responsibilities—and their move back to Missouri. Gilpin asks how their financial situation was, and Nick admits that though they've had some money problems of late, they've had a good foundation thanks to Amy's wealth. The detectives point out that at the beginning of Nick and Amy's marriage, Amy was wealthy and they wanted for nothing—now, they are living a "very different lifestyle" than the one Nick originally signed up for. Nick chastises himself for playing into their hands.

Boney pulls out a bunch of credit card statements and asks Nick about the two hundred thousand dollars in debt they reveal. Nick is shocked, and stutters as he asks to see the statements. The statements reveal charges to a dozen different credit cards, all long overdue. Nick insists there has been identity theft of some sort—he doesn't even golf, and yet "someone" has paid seven thousand dollars for new clubs. Boney says that Noelle Hawthorne has told them that Amy was upset about finances, and worried Nick had "married her for her money." Nick insists that Noelle and Amy weren't even friends, but Boney states that the Hawthornes' living room is "covered" with framed photos of Noelle and Amy. Nick insists Amy has never spoken Noelle's name to him. Nick suggests the pictures could be photoshopped. Gilpin accuses Nick of "casting about for someone to blame."

Gilpin and Boney begin peppering Nick with other incriminating information. They point out that Nick bumped up Amy's life insurance coverage to over a million dollars last month, and googled "Body Float Mississippi River" two months ago. Nick insists that it was Amy's idea to bump up the policy, and that the strange internet search was related to book research. Nick, exasperated, accuses the police of trying to pin Amy's disappearance on him and asks why they aren't looking into anyone else. Boney softly says that they're just trying to make sure he's "in the hundred percent clear," but Nick counters angrily, stating that he wants a lawyer. Gilpin and Boney look one another "as if they [have] settled a bet."

*Nick has an opportunity to tell the cops the truth, and admit to the problems within his and Amy's marriage—but he knows that to do so would make him even guiltier, and so he continues spinning the yarn that everything between him and Amy was sunny and happy.*



*Boney and Gilpin clearly want to come down hard on the money angle. They believe that Nick grew frustrated with the depletion of Amy's funds, and became upset that his life with her was not the wealthy and comfortable life of plenty he'd envisioned. Nick can't escape this narrative, even though he tries.*



*There are several inconsistencies in what Nick has told the detectives—and here, they begin to lay bare all of the damning evidence they've found which suggests that Nick has been lying to them all along. Though Nick is genuinely bewildered by everything they show and tell him, it's hard to argue with credit card bills and negative character statements from a neighbor.*



*All of the evidence mounting against Nick makes him look completely guilty. Nick insists that he hasn't been behind any of it—but as the cops continue to pile more and more on him, he's forced to realize that the deck is stacked against him. When he declares he wants a lawyer, he feels the cops look at one another as if at least one of them believes he is truly guilty. Nick has lost control of the narrative here, and must find a way to get it back.*



## 24. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, DIARY ENTRY, OCTOBER 21ST, 2011

Amy writes that Nick's mother, Maureen, has died. She stayed positive until the end, even in hospice. Her wake attracted hundreds of friends and neighbors, and Nick seemed all right through it all. But now, a month later, Nick is not the "doting, loving" husband he'd briefly become again. He doesn't want anything to do with Amy at all—he only "uses [her] for sex when he needs to" and seems zombie-like in his day to day life. Amy is upset that her marriage is disintegrating, and she has no clue what to do. She has been going over to Noelle's house every day to spend time with Noelle and her sweet children, and one day, she gets an idea.

That evening, after Nick roughly has sex with Amy up against a wall, she asks him if it's the "right time" for them to try and start a family. Nick coldly rebuffs Amy's plea, claiming it's the "worst time" to start a family. He says he doesn't want to be "one of those couples who has a kid to fix their marriage," and he grabs Amy by the arms. He tells her that he can't take any more pressure—he is about to "snap."

*In Amy's diary, she writes of her and Nick's relationship—recently bolstered by love and connection—taking a swift nosedive. Amy has a life that Nick doesn't know about, or doesn't care to, based on his disaffected and disconnected way of moving through the world in the wake of his mother's death.*



*As Amy's diary entries progress, she paints Nick as an increasingly unstable and violent figure. Information that will soon come to light casts all of these diary entries into doubt—but as always, Flynn has Amy render these painful scenes artfully enough that they seem to be based in at least a kernel of truth about the underlying state of her marriage to Nick.*



## 25. NICK DUNNE, SIX DAYS GONE (1)

Nick is getting ready to attend a candlelight vigil in a nearby park. In the last twenty-four hours, Amy's story has gone national—though she's been missing a week, she's suddenly front-page news. The media loves the Elliotts—but seems suspicious of Nick and his lack of an alibi. Go insists the media's treatment of Nick is a "real problem," but Nick is more focused on the fact that the media is using his real first name, Lance, which he hates.

As Rand, Marybeth, Nick, and Go arrive at the vigil together, Nick notes Rand's psychotic cheer and Marybeth's medicated state—she has been drinking shots of clear liquor around the clock the last several days. Still, all four of them put on a brave face and united front as they head into the park. Up on a makeshift stage, Nick makes a speech about how much he loves and misses Amy, and prays for her return. As he looks up into the crowd he spots Andie, looking "disgusted." Nick finishes up his speech, and a moment of silence begins—but Noelle Hawthorne, pregnant and with her triplets all around her, pushes her way through the crowd towards the stage, screaming at Nick and demanding to know what Nick has done to his "pregnant wife."

*Even as the tide of public opinion begins to turn against Nick, he's not concerned about the larger implications—he narcissistically focuses on all the wrong details, ignoring the statements about his marriage and his possible guilt and focusing on the fact that the media is exposing parts of Nick he's truly embarrassed about.*



*Even the stoic Elliotts are beginning to crack under the pressure and pain of Amy's disappearance. In stark contrast to Nick's obsession with himself, Marybeth and Nick seem to be hollowing themselves out, unable to focus on anything but Amy. As Nick takes the podium, some of the women he sees as the bane of his existence—Noelle and Andie—complicate and derail his attempt to recast himself in a better light.*



The media's flashbulbs start going off, and the crowd goes "berserk." Go appears at Nick's elbow and hurries him off the stage. They flee together towards Go's car, ignoring reporters who chase after them questioning Nick about whether Amy was—or is—truly pregnant.

*This new development makes Nick look guiltier than ever. Flynn is directly making a connection between this case and the infamous real-life case of Laci Peterson, who was killed at seven months pregnant and became the focus of the US news cycle in 2002.*



## 26. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, DIARY ENTRY, FEBRUARY 15TH, 2012

Amy writes that something is "horribly wrong" with her husband, Nick. She can feel him watching her sometimes, and often catches a look of "disgust" on his face as he stares at her. She writes about having discovered him looking over a pile of credit card bills, and also divulges that Nick recently shoved her so hard during an argument that she fell and hit her head against the kitchen island. Amy admits she provoked Nick into pushing her—but was desperate for him to stop treating her like a "ghost." Amy says that the shove itself didn't scare her—but the look on Nick's face afterward, which said he wanted to shove her again, did.

*At this point in the diary, Amy is inventing pure fiction in order to make Nick look as guilty as possible. Readers don't know this for sure yet—but as the gulf between Amy and Nick's stories grows wider, the narrative divergence between their accounts of their shared past tips readers off to the fact that something is amiss.*



Amy writes that yesterday, she drove out to the run-down mall, where Noelle has told her that her husband goes to purchase an occasional bit of marijuana. Amy was on a mission to get a gun. If she had one, she thought, she'd feel "safer." She chides herself for not being able to leave Nick, even though something inside of her knows that he is going to hurt her again.

*The motif of Nick and Amy feeling yoked to one another and unable to separate will continue recurring throughout the novel. They are a dangerous duo, drawn to one another even as they destroy one another emotionally and—according to Amy, at least—physically.*



## 27. NICK DUNNE, SIX DAYS GONE (2)

As Nick and Go speed away from the vigil, Nick wonders if the detectives already knew Amy was pregnant, and are trying to make Nick look as bad as possible—which would mean they believe he killed her. Go starts to ask Nick if the rumor about Amy is true, but Nick admits he doesn't know—Amy certainly didn't say anything to him about being pregnant. Go laments that nothing is making sense.

*This new development in the case makes Nick look worse than ever—but he insists he had no idea that Amy was pregnant, and judging from his past recollections of his and Amy's lackluster sex life and her disinterest in having children, it seems like something is wrong.*



Back at Go's, Nick receives a phone call from Rand, who angrily demands to know whether Nick was aware of Amy's pregnancy. Nick tries to delicately tell his father-in-law that not only did he have no idea Amy was pregnant, but that at the time of her disappearance they hadn't even been having "relations" regularly. Rand reveals that the detectives have subpoenaed Amy's doctor for her medical records—the truth will be clear soon.

*Amy's parents are growing increasingly distraught over their daughter's disappearance and the upsetting new details that keep emerging. They are beginning, like Nick, to realize that they didn't know Amy as well as they thought they did.*



Go accuses Nick of “fibbing like a little boy” throughout the entire investigation to avoid looking like the bad guy—she warns him that he will soon have to stop and come clean. Nick asks Go if she thinks he killed Amy—Go replies only that she “would still love [him]” if he did. Nick states definitively that he did not kill his wife, and asks Go if she believes him—she is unable to give him an answer. Go heads to bed, and Nick’s disposable rings—he picks the call. Andie asks him to meet her at an old watchtower at the edge of town, and he does. He is almost warmed by the fact that Andie is still willing to meet “the pregnant-wife killer” alone late at night in a remote part of town.

An hour later, Nick returns to his house. The lawn is teeming with paparazzi, and he waits uneasily for a call from the police to come in about Amy’s medical records. His father’s nursing home calls to tell him that Bill has gotten out again, and that if he does it one more time, they’ll have to “terminate” his stay. Moments later, Nick sees a dark shadow huddled by the boathouse in the backyard—Nick goes outside to see his father dangling a foot into the river. When Nick asks his father what he’s doing at the house, Bill replies that Amy “told [him] to come”—she’s the only one who “loves” him. Nick brings his father inside, calls the nursing home, and gently walks his father out to the car they sent amidst the swarming photographers.

Nick is walking back up to the house when a cop car pulls up—it is Boney, who delivers the news that Amy was pregnant after all. Nick knows that Boney is watching to see what his reaction will be, and he silently tells himself not to “blow it.” He forces himself to “act the way a man acts when he hears this news,” and buries his face into his hands and sobs.

*Even though Go warns Nick that he needs to start behaving better and stop lying, Nick can’t resist meeting up with Andie for a rendezvous at the edge of town. The worse things get, it seems, the more he abandons common sense and focuses on short-term satisfaction rather than making himself look good in the long term.*



*For the first chunk of the novel, Nick’s father Bill largely serves as a red herring. Between his frequent escapes from the nursing home and his alternating love and hatred of Amy, it seems as if he could be behind her disappearance. His other function is to make Nick question his own relationship with Amy, and women more generally—he’s afraid of becoming his father, and afraid of the patterns of misogyny and abuse the man represents.*



*Nick is getting better at looking out for himself—but the fact that he has to consciously make an effort to display emotion when it comes to Amy makes it clear that even if he’s not guilty, he’s not as good a husband as he wants others to think he is.*



## 28. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, DIARY ENTRY, JUNE 26TH, 2012

Amy writes that she has never felt more “alive” in her life. Earlier this morning, she threw up—she ran to the store to get a pregnancy test, took it, and found that she was with child. She ran to Noelle’s house to deliver the exciting news right away, but now, back in the quiet of her home, she feels “scared” again. She begins crafting a treasure hunt for next week’s anniversary, planning to lead Nick to an antique wooden cradle at the end. She also laments that she was unable to secure a gun at the mall.

*Amy is describing the early days of her pregnancy as an exciting time which enlivens and emboldens her—yet in Nick’s memories of Amy, she is coldly disinterested in the idea of children. These two things can’t possibly both be true—tipping readers off to the increasingly deep cracks and divergences in Nick and Amy’s accounts of their lives together.*



Amy knows that her “value” to Nick has decreased. She is nearing forty and has lost her fortune. Still, she knows she won’t get an abortion, and won’t yet give up on her marriage to Nick. She dreams of how happy they’ll be together once she convinces him to be excited about the baby—but also admits that she could be “very wrong.” Sometimes, when Amy catches Nick looking at her with disgust and boredom, she thinks to herself, “This man might kill me.”

*This diary entry ends on a dramatic and decidedly macabre note as Amy, for the first time, admits that she believes her husband may murder her if things between them get any worse. This narrative wrench seems to clinch Nick’s guilt—which is exactly what it’s designed to do.*



## 29. NICK DUNNE, SEVEN DAYS GONE (1)

At nine in the morning New York time, Nick picks up the phone and finally calls a lawyer. He phones a man named Tanner Bolt—a somewhat cheesy but effective criminal lawyer whose nickname is the “Hubby Hawk.” He’s known for “swooping down in high-profile cases to represent men accused of murdering their wives.” After a brief call, Nick secures a 2:00 p.m. appointment for that same day. As he hops in his car and speeds to the airport to catch a plane to New York, he tries calling Marybeth, but she won’t pick up his calls.

*Though Nick hasn’t wanted to hire a lawyer to keep from seeming guilty, he knows that the circumstantial evidence is mounting, and it’s time to act. His choice of Tanner Bolt—a hypermasculine guy who has a reputation for acquitting guilty men—shows that Nick doesn’t really care how he looks anymore. He just wants to be free.*



Nick arrives on the twenty-sixth floor of a large midtown high-rise—Tanner Bolt’s office. Nick “pre-hate[s]” Tanner Bolt due to his sleazy reputation, but is surprised to find that the law firm is both professional and dignified. As Nick sits on the sofa waiting for his appointment, he pulls Amy’s clue from his pocket and rereads it, trying to figure out what the “end prize” could be. Go calls to apologize for not believing Nick—she says she was feeling “insane” the night before, and is on his side no matter what. Nick tells Go that he’s in New York to see Tanner Bolt, and she assures him he’s doing “the smart thing.”

*Nick and Go’s relationship has been put to the test over the last several days. Though Go has never felt any particular love for Amy, she’s been off-put by Nick’s stoic and callous reaction to his wife’s disappearance. Now, though, she declares that she’s firmly on his side no matter what happens.*



Tanner Bolt finally calls Nick into his stately office for a meeting. He gets down to business right away, stating that his retainer is one hundred thousand dollars, but worth every penny. Nick will, he predicts, soon be up against an “unwinnable” case. Tanner’s game plan is to confront the public’s woeful opinion of Nick before they even start on the legal portion of the case. Tanner says they need to find an alternative suspect, keep the support of Amy’s parents, and fix Nick’s image. Tanner asks when the last time Nick spoke to Amy’s parents was, and he says he hasn’t heard from them since the cops confirmed “that Amy was pregnant.” Tanner reprimands Nick for speaking about his wife in the past tense, and tells him he needs to start being more careful about how he speaks.

*Tanner is slick and savvy, and knows from experience exactly what Nick needs to do to salvage his reputation and his narrative. Tanner charges a high price and demands a lot—but his track record speaks for itself, and Nick has faith that with Tanner’s help he can get to the bottom of what’s going on and protect himself from further scrutiny.*





Tanner asks Nick to make a list of “all the nice things” he’s done for Amy over the years. Nick is troubled to find that he can’t think of a single “decent” thing he’s done for Amy in the last two years. Tanner also reveals that he’s looked into Tommy O’Hara, the man who kept calling Amy’s tip line—O’Hara was accused of raping Amy in 2005. Nick is shocked to hear this—Amy has never said anything to him about the incident. Lastly, Tanner demands Nick be completely honest with him about everything. Nick divulges the truth about his affair with Andie to Tanner. Tanner tells Nick to cut off all contact, immediately, or go to “fucking prison.” Tanner says he’s ready to fly to Missouri and “set up camp.” Nick says he’s ready for Tanner’s help.

On the flight home to Missouri, Nick convinces himself to fall out of love with Andie—and is surprised by how easy it is. He also ruminates on the history of his relationship with Amy. Though she’s gone, she’s “more present than anyone else.” Looking back on why he fell in love with his wife, he admits that she made him the version of himself he most wanted to be. Amy made Nick believe he was “exceptional”—but he couldn’t keep up with her, and his slow-burning resentment of this slowly became their “undoing.”

As Nick arrives home, he finally believes he has solved Amy’s final clue—he thinks she’s gotten them a wooden cradle and hidden it away somewhere. He tries desperately to figure out the location—somewhere one would “store goodies for anniversary five” would have to be made out of wood. A line in the clue that says Amy has been a bad girl and needs to be “punished” makes Nick think of **woodshed**—there is a woodshed behind Go’s house which she hardly ever uses. Go and Nick have often joked that the woodshed would be a good place to bury a body. Horrified, Nick drives across town as fast as he can and approaches the woodshed. He slinks towards it, opens the door, and immediately thinks: “Nonononono.”

### 30. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, THE DAY OF (1)

“I am so much happier,” Amy writes, “now that I’m dead.” Though she’s “technically [just] missing,” for now, Amy knows she’ll soon be “presumed dead.” She feels lighter and looser as she looks up into her rearview mirror—Carthage is miles and miles behind her, and her “shitty, oblivious husband,” Nick, has no idea. Amy laughs out loud, gleeful.

*Go has tried to get Nick to face some hard truths, but Nick has clung to his affair with Andie as a balm against all the madness unfolding around him. Now, Tanner tells Nick point blank that he must choose between short-term gratification and securing his freedom.*



*Nick seems deeply detached from his feelings, and is able to easily sever the kind and longing feelings he has for Andie. Even when thinking about the last time he felt true love, Nick admits that the roots of that love were narcissism and as desire to prove himself as the man he always wanted to be.*



*As Nick finally solves Amy’s treasure hunt, it becomes clear that the narrative is about to collapse. Whatever is hiding in Go’s woodshed—a remote and slightly sinister place—makes Nick’s head spin with horror. Flynn purposefully manipulates this chapter into a cliffhanger which threatens to upend the entire story so far—playing into her themes of secrets, lies, and the grab for narrative control.*



*In the wake of Nick’s discovery, the narrative splits apart—and Flynn reveals that Amy has indeed orchestrated her own disappearance, seemingly to get revenge on Nick, for whom she has nothing but hatred and contempt.*



Amy reaches into the passenger seat of her cheap getaway car and pull out her checklist for today—"one of the many checklists" she's made over the last year. There is a spot of blood on the page next to Item 22: "Cut myself." Amy points out that "**diary** readers will say" she's afraid of blood—she's not, in reality, but has spent the last year telling anyone who will listen that she is. She looks back on "swooning at the plasma center" as "a nice touch."

Earlier this morning, Amy took a boxcutter to the inside of her upper arm, and then sat cross-legged on the kitchen floor letting the blood drip out of her. Hours later, the gash still hurts and burns. She goes over other items from her list she's already completed—stage the living room, wrap up first clue, fill the cat's kibble dish "in case people forget to feed him once everything starts." Amy makes imaginary checks in her head as she runs down her perfectly executed lists.

Amy writes that she wants her readers to finally know her—not "**Diary** Amy, who is a work of fiction," but Actual Amy. She begins telling the true story of her life, starting with the fact that she "should never have been born." After five miscarriages and two stillbirths—all girls—Marybeth gave birth to Amy, refusing to quit until they had their child. Amy grew up feeling "special [and] proud" because of the long struggle her parents fought to have her—but always sensed in her mother the deep sense of loss brought on by her other failed pregnancies. The "seven dead dancing princesses" who came before Amy got to be perfect because they had never lived, while Amy, "stuck here on earth," soon came to realize she'd always be less than perfect.

Nick's deep, all-consuming love for Amy was the first time in her life she'd felt truly appreciated—but at the same time, she knew he didn't know the real her. She'd been playing "Cool Girl" for years, since the very first night they met. To Amy, the "Cool Girl" is someone "hot, brilliant, [and] funny" who "adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping," and who "jams hot dogs and hamburgers into her mouth like she's hosting the world's biggest culinary gang bang while somehow maintaining a size 2, because Cool Girls are above all hot. Hot and understanding."

Amy thinks about how stupid all men are for believing the Cool Girl actually exists—really, she knows scores of women are just pretending to be this girl. Amy has equal disdain for the men who believe in the Cool Girl and the women who perpetuate the myth that the Cool Girl is real. No matter what kind of man a woman is dating, he always, Amy believes, wants some version of the Cool Girl—and there is always a woman out there desperate enough to play the game.

*Amy has engineered her entire plot—and her entire story so far—down to the letter. She has been working hard for a long time, and has no regrets about what she's done—she's feeling happy and self-satisfied.*



*Amy reveals that she mutilated herself in order to get the right amount of blood on the kitchen floor—a gruesome act which demonstrates how far she's willing to go to make her husband suffer.*



*Amy delves into her painful origin story—like any good villain, there are forces at work in her past which have helped shape who she is today. The immense pressures she felt all throughout her childhood as the result of being the only one of her mother's children to survive has made her a perfectionist, a narcissist, and a person who hates anyone who takes the spotlight from her—even as she feels herself struggling to catch up with other's expectations.*



*Amy's rant against the "Cool Girl" archetype—widely considered one of the novel's most famous passages—shows just how contemptuous she is not only of other women, but of herself for stooping to engage in such ridiculous tropes of femininity and womanhood in order to feel safe, protected, and loved by a man.*



*To Amy, courtship and partnership are not rituals based in attraction, love, and mutual vulnerability—rather they are "game[s]" which reward the most cunning, the most desperate, and the most deluded.*



Amy is able to admit that there were parts of being Nick's Cool Girl she enjoyed—she loved him so much, and even though she could feel herself turning off her brain and dulling herself for him, she was too happy to care. Before Nick, she'd always felt like a "product"—the face of *Amazing Amy*. Now, looking back on her blissful first few years with Nick, she finds herself unable to decide "what [it] means" that she had never before been so happy in her life—and hasn't been so happy since.

Eventually, Amy writes, she grew tired of being the Cool Girl, and started showing Nick the real her. As opposed to the fictitious **diary entries** Amy wrote about not wanting Nick to be a "dancing monkey," she reveals that she *did* start to nag him for not paying enough attention to her or for demanding she "wax [her] pussy raw and [blow] him on request." Amy writes about the devastation she felt when she finally showed "Real Amy" to Nick—and found that he didn't actually like her. That, she believes, is where "the hating first began."

### 31. NICK DUNNE, SEVEN DAYS GONE (2)

Nick leans against the inner wall of the **woodshed**, catching his breath. As soon as he deciphered the clue, he knew whatever was inside would be bad—the woodshed is one of the places he used to have sex with Andie when they were sneaking around. He realizes now that the other spots Amy left clues—his father's abandoned house and his office at school, and even Hannibal—are all places where he and Andie carried on their affair. Now, at the "final stop" on the tour of Nick's infidelities, he has found the woodshed packed with all the things he's recently sworn to Gilpin and Boney he didn't buy with his many credit cards—Amy has dumped it all here, and it looks now like he's stored it all away in anticipation of the day when Amy would be dead and he "could have a little fun."

Nick drags Go out to the **woodshed** to show her what's going on. He tells her that Amy is framing him for her murder, feeling like he is going to "sob or laugh" as he does. He realizes that Amy's final clue is her victory lap—she's unable to resist showing Nick just how "fucked" he is. Go asks Nick where his "real" anniversary present is, and he wades into the mess of stuff inside to try and find it. At last he comes upon a heavy box which weighs at least thirty pounds and makes a rattling noise when he picks it up. Attached to it is a note—a cryptic one which reveals that Amy has "made a study" of Nick. She knows where he's been and where's he's going: for their anniversary, she's arranged a trip for him "up up up!" the river—in other words, to prison.

*Amy has always been one step short of her "Amazing" alter ego. With Nick, masquerading as Cool Girl, she at last felt like enough. By stooping to a hollow impression of femininity, Amy realized that she didn't need to be trying so hard all along. Flynn's indicting revelation in this passage—that the deck is always stacked against women, even the "amazing" ones—speaks to the novel's central theme of misogyny.*



*Amy grew sick of the charade which had initially drawn her husband in—when she shed the façade of Cool Girl, however, she was horrified to realize that not only did her husband not recognize her, but he didn't even like her. Amy began to resent Nick for his cruelty—and, presumably, began plotting her revenge against him.*



*Nick is coming to grips with what he's found in the woodshed—in a way, he's found his entire fate. One of the novel's most potent symbols, the woodshed is full of falsified purchases attributed to Nick—but more largely the woodshed represents the piling up and hiding away of all the secrets, lies, half-truths, and deceptions which have defined Nick and Amy's entire relationship. Now, they are all laid bare—and Nick is going to suffer for them.*



*As Nick unravels the last of Amy's clues, he begins to understand just how angry and sadistic his wife truly is. Amy wants him locked away for what he's done to her—and she wants him to know that she's responsible for her deep unhappiness. Nick is helpless to stop the things Amy has already put in motion, and the only person who might believe him is Go.*



Nick opens the box to find two wooden **puppets**, side by side. There is a husband puppet and a wife puppet—beneath the wife puppet is a tiny baby puppet attached by a ribbon. Nick picks up the male puppet and moves it using its large wooden handle—the “creepy” movements freak Go out.

Inside, Go and Nick arrange the **puppets** on the dining table and try to figure out the full picture of what’s going on. Nick realizes that Amy arranged the treasure hunt to keep him busy, and that the puppets are a message of some sort—Nick is a “puppet on a string.” As the twins hunch over another note inside the box, written by Amy, which reads “That’s the way to do it!” Go realizes that the words are the “trademark” of Punch and Judy—a traditional, old-timey puppet show in which Punch kills Judy and their baby. As she looks up more about the puppet show on the internet, Go realizes that Amy is truly “crazy.” Go and Nick realize that Amy’s endgame is to get Nick charged with her murder in Missouri—a state that has the death penalty.

### 32. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, THE DAY OF (2)

Amy reveals that she saw Nick and Andie together months and months ago—when she showed up to surprise him at The Bar one night, she saw the two of them kissing. Amy wasn’t so much hurt by the discovery of the affair as she was by the knowledge that she was now “Average Dumb Woman Married to Average Shitty Man.” Nick, she felt, had “single-handedly de-amazed Amazing Amy.” Amy became filled with rage at the idea that Nick could change her forever and “win.” She began thinking of a different story she could tell about their marriage—one that would “make [her] the hero” again.

Amy writes that she’s fully aware of how “extreme” it is to frame one’s husband for murder. At the same time, to leave or divorce Nick would still allow him to win—and she wanted her husband to lose big. She was desperate to teach her husband a lesson—and admits that she might have “gone a bit mad” in the process.

*The “creepy” antique puppets—a husband and wife—seem to suggest that Nick, Amy, and even their fictitious “baby” are all puppets engineered by forces larger than themselves—even Amy is controlled by the narratives others have foisted on her.*



*The puppets are meant to show Nick that he has no control over what happens to him anymore. His story has been written—and now, though he knows the ending, he’s powerless to stop himself from speeding towards it.*



*Amy is something of a misogynist herself. She has a great deal of contempt for other women, and hates considering that she herself is anything like the common, dull women she looks down on and resents. Amy feels, though, that Nick has dragged her down to this level—he’s made her unremarkable by subjecting her to such an everyday, embarrassing humiliation. Amy is determined to reclaim her own story instead of being a character in her husband’s narrative.*



*The shocking twist at the heart of Gone Girl wasn’t just hard for Amy to pull off—Gillian Flynn, too, needs to suffuse Amy’s psychotic actions with a little bit of self-awareness in order to keep the narrative convincing.*



As Amy approaches the hundred-mile mark on her journey, she reflects on the way she plotted the “perfect murder.” She purchased an old Ford getaway car in cash, and has been rotating it from long-term lot to long-term lot down in St. Louis for months. She’s now planning on holing up in the Ozarks, in a cheap rent-by-the-week cabin. She stops at a rest stop on the highway, cuts off large chunks of her hair, and dyes what’s left a dark, mousy brown. As she admires her handiwork—how ugly she’s made herself—she finds herself thinking that she could have avoided everything with Nick if she’d just been “less pretty” when they met.

Amy writes that she must figure out how to be “Dead Amy.” She was able to figure out “**Diary Amy**” without a hitch, and enjoyed sprinkling incriminating clues throughout her entry. She applauds herself for the “discipline” that constructing a retroactively written but convincing diary took, and creating someone that not only the cops but the public could easily love. Looking back on all her careful planning, Amy doesn’t even regret leaving her parents in the lurch—she hates them, too, for siphoning money from her, deserting her, and “consigning” her to a life with no money, no home, and no friends. Amy believes that Nick, Rand, and Marybeth “killed [her] soul”—which should be a crime worthy of a fitting punishment.

*Even as Amy resents Nick for making the story of her life average and unremarkable, Amy finds herself wishing that she were just a little less special—a little more like everyone else. Amy’s astounding beauty has long masked the less attractive parts of her personality, but now, free of her long hair, she’s actually grateful not to look so “amazing.”*



*Amy has created so many different selves that it’s hard to keep track of which one was the original Amy—the Amy she feels that Nick and her parents have, over the years, wiped out of existence. Amy doesn’t want to go back to being the old her—she wants to be a new person entirely, in control of her own life and removed from the people who have slowly decimated her.*



### 33. NICK DUNNE, SEVEN DAYS GONE (3)

Nick calls Tanner to tell him seven unbelievable words: “I think my wife is framing me.” Tanner doesn’t seem to believe or disbelieve Nick—he simply tells him to get some rest and wait for Tanner’s arrival in the morning. Go pops two sleeping pills and goes to bed, but Nick stays up. At nearly midnight, there is a knock on the door—Nick answers it to find Andie standing there. He yanks her inside and tells her she’s going to “put [his] neck right in the fucking noose.” As Andie chastises Nick for not calling, he wishes he could “smack” her.

Nick tells Andie he’s hired a lawyer—whose advice is to break things off with Andie. Andie keeps saying she “need[s]” Nick, and is “scared all the time,” but Nick has no sympathy for her. Andie suggests she and Nick go together to the police to give them Nick’s alibi, but Nick doesn’t want to. He tells Andie they need to end their relationship out of “decen[cy].”

Andie is disgruntled and angry, and accuses Nick of having used her for sex. She asks Nick “what kind of man” he is and calls him horrible names before storming out of the house. Nick realizes that Andie will soon tell other people about their affair, and that news of it will “spread like an infection.” Nick tries to stand in front of Andie and stop her from leaving. She slaps at him and pushes past him, biting him when he tries to grab her.

*Nick enjoyed Andie’s attention for a while—it made him feel like in spite of all the bad press and misery of the investigation, someone still wanted him. Now, though, Nick sees Andie only as a liability, and the misogynistic cruelty and violence he’s been trying so hard to convince everyone doesn’t exist within him at last comes out.*



*Nick once threw away his marriage and risked his freedom to be with Andie—but it’s almost as if a switch has flipped, and he now regards her as insignificant and burdensome.*



*Nick wants it both ways—he wants Andie out of his hair, but he wants her to keep quiet. He realizes, in this passage, that he must have one or the other—and he has already scared Andie off so definitively that he knows it’s just a matter of time before she leaks the truth.*



## 34. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, FIVE DAYS GONE

Hidden in an extended-stay motel called the Hide-A-Way Cabins in the middle of the Ozark, Amy is able to sit back, relax, and watch the drama she's engineered unfold. At 10:00 p.m. one night, her disposable burner phone rings—the alarm company is calling the new number she gave them a few months ago. She knows that Nick has made it to Clue 3, and imagines him fumbling around in his father's empty house. Amy knows that she's "left enough" evidence for the police to make their case against Nick already—the mopped-up blood in the kitchen and the credit card bills, for starters. She's also hoping that Noelle will soon "spill [the] pregnancy news," and then it'll be just a matter of time before the police find out about Andie.

When she turns on the television, Amy is thrilled to see that Ellen Abbott has picked up her story. She is delighted to be making her "debut," and happily watches as Ellen airs beautiful pictures of Amy and rails against the "idiot" Nick.

Amy has planned well for herself: she has a little over ten thousand dollars in cash, which she has stockpiled using cash forwards from the credit cards in Nick's name. Moreover, Amy made a habit of stealing out of the tip jar any time she visited The Bar. She's being careful with her money, and learning to budget so that her cash will last her the time it takes to watch Nick be arrested and marched off to prison. After Nick's incarcerated, Amy is planning on traveling south upon the river, taking a handful of sleeping pills, filling her pockets with rocks, and committing suicide. Her body will be the "last bit of evidence" needed to make sure that Nick is given the death penalty.

Amy has met a couple people in the Ozarks—one of her neighbors, Jeff, brings her fresh fish, and the woman who works the front desk, Dorothy, brings her tomatoes from her garden. She is obsessed by thoughts of Andie and Nick, unable to keep lurid thoughts of their lovemaking out of her head. Amy tans daily, getting "brown as a berry" for the very first time in her life. Between her new tan, her brown hair and helmet bowl cut, and the nearly twenty pounds she's slowly put on over the last several months, she is unrecognizable—the "opposite" of herself.

*Amy relishes being able to watch from afar as her insane, dangerous opera unfolds back in Carthage. She has told a huge, dramatic story and engineered each and every part of it. She knows she's done a good job, but without any external validation to take joy from, she has to be the one to congratulate herself and bask in her achievement. Amy has not even the slightest worry that things will go awry—she's put her "amazing" energy and smarts into every step.*



*The real Amy is a textbook narcissist, totally preoccupied with herself and how others see her. Whether her parents have made her this way, or whether she's always been self-obsessed remains unclear.*



*This passage is one of the rare moments after the big reveal that makes Amy seem, strangely, a little bit sympathetic. One reading of this moment is that she hates her husband so much, she's petty enough to end her own life for revenge—but another way to look at it is that Amy has been so hollowed out by the years of pretending to be someone else for Nick, for her parents, and for everyone, that deep down she really feels there's nothing left of her, and dying would just be a formality in a way. She's already truly "gone" on a soul-deep level.*



*Amy adjusts to life in the Ozarks, remaining inconspicuous and trying each day to look and act less and less like the version of herself she's been pretending to be all these years.*



## 35. NICK DUNNE, EIGHT DAYS GONE (1)

In the morning, desperate to “contain” the drama he’s started with Andie, Nick tries calling her and leaving her voicemails apologizing for his actions—but she does not pick up. Boney pulls into the driveway, and Nick opens the door for her—she has two cups of coffee, and insists she just wants to “check on” Nick. She seems sympathetic, and tries to remind Nick that she’s on his side, but he doesn’t believe her.

Boney tells Nick that cops have turned up Amy’s purse on a riverbank outside of Hannibal, Boney says the purse has Nick’s fingerprints all over it and has been deliberately, conspicuously placed to be found. Boney asks Nick if he’s been to Hannibal lately—he deflects the question, insisting Boney talk to Tanner Bold. Boney is bemused by Nick’s choice of a lawyer—Tanner, she remarks, is “the guy guilty people call in.”

An hour later, Tanner arrives at Go’s house. He, Nick, and Go all settle down together at the kitchen table with all of Amy’s clues, and Tanner asks Nick to tell him a story that will convince him that Amy is framing Nick for murder. Nick explains that Amy is both brilliant and self-righteous, and tells some anecdotes from the course of their relationship to illustrate just how far Amy will go to punish someone she believes has done her wrong. Nick lays out how Amy found out he was cheating, created a “fishy” crime scene, saddled Nick in credit card debt, and then picked an argument the night before she went missing standing near an open window.

Nick continues explaining each of Amy’s twisting, rhyming clues, laying out for Tanner the diabolical intent behind each one. He admits that he was sidelined by the warm, loving notes Amy left him at each stop, and tells Tanner that Amy knew he’d be distracted by flattery.

As Tanner looks at all the steps of the treasure hunt, he points out that there are incriminating pieces of evidence at each stop—panties that don’t belong to Amy at Nick’s office, a purse in Hannibal, and credit-card purchases in the **woodshed**. With equal parts horror and intrigue, Tanner asks Nick what Amy could have possibly hidden at his dad’s house.

*Nick is alienating anyone who could possibly speak well of him—first Rand and Marybeth, and now Andie. He’s totally unable to control the people around him—he’s the opposite of Amy, who has a way of spinning every misfortune into a secret advantage.*



*Amy’s machinations just keep on rolling—Nick, though, hardly even feels affected by each new piece of evidence anymore. He doesn’t care how he looks, because he’s never going to look anything but bad—all he cares about is finding a way out of Amy’s mess.*



*Nick is probably kicking himself for not having seen the truth earlier, given Amy’s penchant for retribution—and her belief that she’s somehow better than everyone else around her. Nick can now see that Amy has played him through and through, orchestrating nearly everything he’s experienced the last several weeks.*



*Amy hates Nick—but she knows him better than anyone. They share a sense of narcissism, perhaps borne out of serious self-esteem issues, and Amy was able to prey upon that to keep Nick playing into her hand.*



*Tanner realizes something that Nick hasn’t yet—that there’s still one incriminating piece of evidence waiting to be found. Nick, Tanner, and Go must now race the police to get to what’s waiting at Bill’s.*



## 36. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, SEVEN DAYS GONE

As the news of Amy's (fake) pregnancy finally makes the national news, Amy watches on with glee. She reveals the story of how she faked being with child. Using her "vacant-brained friend Noelle," she took advantage of Noelle's pregnancy to drain the toilet at her own house, invite Noelle over for lemonade, steal Noelle's urine from the un-flushable toilet, and arrange for a doctor's appointment which would put a pregnancy on her official medical record. She made sure to tell Noelle, knowing that the easily "pliable" woman, over-attached to Amy, would come out with the news soon enough.

After a few hours of television, Amy puts on a swimsuit and goes down to the pool. She frets about being unable to control things back in Carthage—Andie still hasn't come forward, and Amy's own **diary** still hasn't been found. She resolves to call the Find Amazing Amy hotline and leave an anonymous tip in a few days if certain things haven't come out.

Down at the pool, Amy runs into one of her new neighbors—a girl who's staying in the cabin next door to Amy's. The girl is very young and "proud[ly]" bears a split lip. Amy engages the girl in conversation, introducing herself as "Nancy." The girl introduces herself as Greta. The two women admit that they're both here alone—and both landed here because of "guy trouble." Greta invites Amy to come over to her cabin whenever she wants to watch TV.

Later that afternoon, Amy goes over to Greta's. Greta makes the two of them some deli-meat sandwiches, and they settle in to watch the news—Ellen Abbott *Live* fills the screen, and Amy delights in the chance to discuss her case with someone else. Greta, however, talks slightly disparagingly about Amy, recalling the *Amazing Amy* books as "so fake" and stating that the picture they show on the news of Amy makes her look "good [for] forty." As they watch the program, Greta describes Amy as seeming "spoiled" and "bitchy"—and when she goes to the bathroom, Amy goes into her fridge and spits in the food and drinks inside.

The two of them continue watching the program as it transitions into disparaging coverage of Nick. Greta looks over at Amy suspiciously, and says she hopes that Nick didn't kill his wife—she hopes the woman "ran away from him, and [is] hiding out all safe and sound." Amy can't tell if Greta is messing with her or not.

*Amy loves reflecting on how she's duped and triumphed over all the dull people in her life. She likes feeling "amazing" and capable, and is proud of all the hard work she's done in pursuit of her intricate and insane plot. Amy has been the subject of other people's stories for so long, that manipulating people as part of her own is a true victory for her.*



*Amy is beginning to get anxious that things aren't going perfectly—she is still afraid of being less than incredible at everything she attempts after years of measuring herself against her perfect alter ego.*



*Amy finds herself connecting with another woman—and not judging or hating her at first sight. Amy is a misogynist deep down in her bones, and any interaction she has with another woman seems doomed. Even though her meeting with Greta is pleasant and they even bond over their troubles, Flynn is foreshadowing chaos and drama.*



*Amy is furious with anyone who doesn't think of her as being perfect—Greta's joking disparaging of Amy is more than she can take. Amy is obsessed with how other people see her—and if Greta thinks she's "fake" and "spoiled," Amy worries what the rest of America truly thinks.*



*This passage muddies the idea of whether Greta knows Amy's true identity or not. As Amy and Greta continue to interact over the next several chapters, Amy will always have a seed of doubt and fear in the back of her mind.*





## 37. NICK DUNNE, EIGHT DAYS GONE (2)

Tanner, Nick, and Go search every nook and cranny of Bill's house, but don't turn up anything lurid or suspicious. Tanner is slightly frustrated, and tells Nick that he wants to start getting ahead of the many details that threaten whatever shreds of reliability Nick has left. He wants to report the stuff in the **woodshed**, but both knows that once they do the cops will go after Go, and is worried about whatever Amy has left somewhere in the house—or what could happen if Andie comes forward.

As Tanner goes over the many ways in which the cops could see any admissions about the items in the **woodshed**, or Andie, as evidence of Nick's guilt rather than Amy's plan, he asks Nick to definitively, once and for all, state where he was the morning of Amy's murder. Nick sheepishly reveals that he was hiding in an abandoned garage in their development, reading back issues of his old magazine alone.

Nick returns home after noon and finds the street outside his and Amy's house lined with reporters and news vans. Nick dodges their questions and heads inside for a shower. When he gets out, the doorbell rings—he pulls on some clothes and goes downstairs to find Rand and Marybeth standing on the doorstep. Nick invites them in, and once the door is shut, they immediately begin asking him why he would hire Tanner Bolt—a lawyer for guilty people. They are sad, distressed, and clearly strung out. Marybeth demands to know what is going on, and whether Nick did in fact hurt their only daughter.

Nick is furious that Marybeth and Rand are treating him like this—they are the ones who “created [Amy].” Nick attempts to soothe Marybeth, promising he never would have hurt Amy, but she says she's tired of his words. She senses something “wrong” with him, and promises that even if Amy is returned unharmed, she'll never forgive him for how “casually” he's acted throughout the entire investigation. Marybeth runs out to the car sobbing. Rand asks Nick to “say it”—to promise him that he didn't kill Amy. Nick says he did not kill Amy or harm her in any way, but Rand begins laughing, admitting he doesn't know what to believe anymore—he feels like he's in a “movie” he can't get out of. He leaves, too.

*Tanner knows that they are dealing with a true control freak—as such, they need to grab at control themselves anywhere they can lest Amy's narrative outrun and incriminate them.*



*Nick's admission about his true alibi is painfully sad and despicable. On the morning of his anniversary he was—allegedly—reading his old articles alone in an abandoned garage, pining for a life that has passed him by.*



*Marybeth and Nick have grown more distant from Nick over the course of the last several days—they, too, are being reeled in by all the mounting evidence against Nick. Meanwhile, Nick has no way of explaining things to them—they'd never believe the truth about Amy—and so he is cornered, unable to do anything to secure their trust and support.*



*Nick feels rage and contempt for Rand and Marybeth—he feels that they are the ones responsible for the situation he's in, as they're the ones who sowed the seeds of perfectionism, narcissism, and even cruelty in Amy throughout her childhood. Still, Rand's uncanny admission that he feels like he's in a movie—part of a narrative he can't escape—humanizes him a bit to Nick, who surely feels the same way.*



Nick grows intensely nervous, knowing that if the Elliotts have lost faith in him—and say so publicly—the case for his innocence will fall apart even more. Nick knows he needs to find a way to prove that Amy is not who she has been pretending to be, and is inspired to call up Tommy O’Hara—the man who allegedly raped Amy years ago. He rings Tommy and tells him who he is—Tommy says he’ll call back in just a few minutes.

Tommy calls Nick back from a bar, admitting that to have the conversation they’re about to have, he needs a scotch. He tells Nick that Nick is totally screwed—Nick asks Tommy to tell him about the assault charge Amy filed against him. Tommy insists that he never raped Amy, and likens her to the “Old Testament God” whenever she’s unhappy in a relationship. Tommy tells Nick that over seven years ago, he met Amy at a party, and they began dating. He was overwhelmed by her smarts, humor, and beauty at first—but several months into the relationship, Amy began to change.

Tommy tried to get some space away from Amy without breaking up with her, hoping that things could still turn around. When Tommy started casually seeing another girl, Amy found out—she showed up at his apartment with movies and burgers and the two had consensual sex. Afterwards, Amy left—but in the middle of the night, cops came to Tommy’s apartment to arrest him. They told him that Amy had wounds consistent with rape as well as ligature marks on her wrists. When searching Tommy’s apartment, they found two neckties tied to the headboard. Tommy hadn’t seen Amy put them there—but realized she was responsible.

After putting Tommy through weeks of hell, Amy dropped the charges—two weeks later, he received a typed anonymous note in the mail which read only, “Maybe next time you’ll think twice.” Tommy tells Nick that last week, when he saw the news about Amy, he watched the coverage realizing Amy had “graduated to murder.” Tommy tells Nick that he should be very scared.

### 38. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, EIGHT DAYS GONE

Amy goes to a little amusement park with Greta and Jeff—though they’re an “odd crew,” the three of them have fun riding bumper boats and playing mini-golf. Amy notices how sad both Jeff and Greta are—both are reeling from lost romances. Amy has decided, recently, that she’s not going to kill herself after all—it wouldn’t be fair, she thinks, for her to have to actually die at the end of all this.

*Nick is growing desperate to find people who will vouch for him and stay in his corner—people who will side with him rather than Amy. He turns to people from her past, hoping against hope that he’ll be able to put together a defense for himself.*



*Tommy, too, has had a miserable experience with Amy—she told everyone he raped her, just as she told everyone that Hilary Handy tried to kill her, Desi Collings stalked her, and Nick murdered her. Amy takes slights enacted against her and transforms them into life-altering charges meant to bring those who have wronged her to their knees.*



*Tommy, like Nick, was unfaithful to Amy—and, like Nick, was stage-managed into looking like a cruel, sadistic rapist. Nick sees echoes of his own story in Tommy’s, and realizes just how long his wife has been honing her skills at framing the people who’ve wronged her.*



*Amy took revenge on Tommy in the exact same way she took revenge on Hilary—and in a remarkably similar way to the way she’s now taking revenge on Nick. Tommy believes Nick is ruined—Amy has clearly grown more capable, savvy, and conniving over the years, and her plots have become more intricate and ironclad.*



*Amy doesn’t quite trust Greta and Jeff—but their friendship has helped her to see that maybe there’s value to her life, and a way to move through the world even after Nick’s been locked away.*



After mini-golf, Amy goes with her new friends for lunch at a hot-dog stand. She reaches into the zippered money pouch she always keeps around her waist, and Greta sees her doing it and teases her lightly, calling her “Moneybags,” but doesn’t press the issue any further. After lunch, the three return to their cabins, but even then Amy does not take off her bunched money pouch. When Jeff and Greta come by and ask if she wants to watch Ellen Abbott, Amy begins feeling paranoid—sure that Greta and Jeff have either figured out her identity, or simply want her money. She tells them she’s feeling tired, and they leave—but Amy remains on high alert.

That night, Jeff knocks on Amy’s door. Earlier, Amy told Dorothy at the front desk that she was strapped for cash and needed work—now, Jeff is showing up with an offer of fifty bucks for a couple hours of work fishing. Amy accepts his offer, and gets into his car with him and they drive down to the lake. At the edge there’s a restaurant called Catfish Carl’s—Jeff’s enterprise is stealing live catfish from the restaurant’s lakefront and reselling them. Amy and Jeff work hard netting and gutting the fish and placing them on ice, and at the end of the night, Amy is covered in blood and guts.

Jeff suggests the two of them take a quick dip in the lake to get all of the catfish detritus off of them—Amy, not wanting to seem suspicious, agrees. She waits until Jeff is already in the lake, and then removes her money belt from under her sundress and places it on the rocky shore. She dives into the water, but as soon as she’s in, Jeff starts swimming quickly back up to the rocks. Amy paddles in and scoops her money bag off the ground just in time.

### 39. NICK DUNNE, EIGHT DAYS GONE (3)

Realizing that his own “murder” of Amy is a lie—as is Tommy O’Hara’s “rape”—Nick begins to wonder if Hilary Handy, too, was falsely accused of stalking Amy. He tries calling Hilary again, and talks quickly as he tries to keep the reluctant woman on the phone. He explains that he has sensed a “pattern of behavior” in Amy that he wants to talk to her about. Hilary sighs, admitting that she has been following the coverage of Amy’s disappearance—and feels bad for Nick, not Amy.

*In this passage, Greta and Jeff become full-on threats as they realize that Amy has a ton of money on her person at all times. Amy begins fearing her new friends, and realizing that she needs to find a way out of this new and precarious situation.*



*Though Jeff is a threat to Amy, she really wants to try and prove to him that she honestly does need money. She perhaps feels that if she sinks to the level of gross, menial work, she’ll seem poor and desperate. Amy is an expert at creating a convincing narrative, and hopes it’ll work this time around with Jeff.*



*It’s impossible to tell whether Amy is overly suspicious—or whether Jeff really is trying to make a grab at Amy’s money, and do something terrible to her in the process. Amy has been faking danger and mutilation—but coming up against the real thing, she’s unprepared to handle it.*



*Nick is beginning to see that perhaps the stories Amy has told throughout her life are all false. He wants to see what he can find out—and whether he’s not alone in being one of Amy’s “victims.”*



Hilary explains that she was a transfer from Memphis in her freshman year of high school. Amy took Hilary under her wing, and Hilary became devoted to Amy as a way of feeling popular and making friends. As the months passed, though, and Hilary slowly started getting more attention than Amy, Amy became upset. Amy began “setting [Hilary] up,” though the poor girl didn’t realize it at the time. Amy got Hilary to dye her hair the same color as her own and enlisted Hilary’s help in prank-calling the Elliott house constantly to mess with her annoying parents. Amy is the one who dared Hilary to approach Marybeth on the street one day and tell her she wanted to be the “new” Amy.

Soon after, Amy accused Hilary of pushing her down a long flight of stairs—Hilary did no such thing, and always knew that Amy threw herself down the stairs. Amy framed Hilary—and after Hilary and her family were forced to move back to Memphis, Hilary received an anonymous note in the mail, a list of all the ways in which Hilary had let Amy down. Hilary wonders aloud what Amy would do to a man “who was dumb enough to marry her” if in high school she was already throwing herself down stairs out of spite.

Alone in his “haunted” house that night, Nick can’t stop thinking about whether Amy’s pregnancy is genuine or a lie meant to drive him insane. Nick had always wanted kids with Amy, and imagined himself being the perfect father—the kind of father he never had. Amy, however, didn’t seem to want children—until one day, she did. She went off birth control for a few months, but when nothing happened, they went to a fertility clinic, where Amy and Nick agreed to lie and tell the doctors they’d been trying for over a year.

Nick went on his own to the center three times to give semen samples, but Amy seemed uncommitted to following the regimen of medicine the doctors laid out for her. A year later, Nick received a notice in the mail letting him know that his samples would be destroyed. Nick left the letter on the table in an attempt to make Amy feel bad—but days later, found it in the trash. They never spoke about having children again.

Restless and lonely, Nick dons a baseball cap and drives into town to go to a bar. He knows he can’t go to The Bar for fear of encountering groupies or reporters, so he drives to a different joint at the other end of town and enjoys the anonymity—until it’s time for him to pay the barkeep, who recognizes him and angrily says he doesn’t want any of Nick’s money. Moments later, a young and slender woman approaches Nick and offers to buy him a drink—she admits she knows who he is, but thinks he’s the victim of the public’s projection of guilt.

*Several threads connect Nick and Hilary’s experience with Amy. Both Nick and Hilary had fun and blissful starts to their relationships with her—and both became the object of her hate and control when she discovered they had slighted her.*



*Amy has framed Nick, Tommy, and Hilary—and has let all three of them know that she was responsible for the pain, misery, and ostracism they suffered as a result of her manipulations. Amy isn’t satisfied by vengeance itself—she needs to be recognized for her efforts.*



*Amy is doing to Nick exactly what she set out to do—drive him insane with unanswerable questions meant to keep his mind occupied while, all around him, the cops turn up more and more evidence until it’s impossible to see Nick as anything other than guilty.*



*The coldness and remove between Nick and Amy within their marriage was such that they couldn’t have one of the most important conversations a couple could have. They languished in silence, allowing things between them to waste away—neither of them could pretend anymore.*



*Nick is a pariah in town—Amy has done more than just make him look guilty, she’s taken away the last place in the world that truly felt like home to Nick. Her story has been designed to alienated and decimate him on every single level.*



As Nick continues conversing with the woman, he learns that her name is Rebecca—and that she’s a reporter who’s been sent to Carthage to cover Nick. Realizing he has a strange opportunity to try and connect with Amy—wherever she might be—Nick begins telling Rebecca about the “wonderful” treasure hunt his wife set up for him in the days before her disappearance. He knows that he can take control of his story, and repaint himself as “a man who loves his wife and will find her.” As he waxes poetic about how cool and special Amy is to the reporter, inside his head, he calls Amy a “bitch” and wishes she would come home so he can “kill her” himself.

*Nick outwardly plays the loving, remorseful husband—while inside harboring truly violent and angry misogynistic thoughts. Flynn is using Nick to make a larger comment on the insidious nature of misogyny—though Nick has tried so hard to keep his hate for Amy, and women more generally, at bay, he is at last tipping, and may not be able to stop the free-fall once it begins.*



#### 40. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, NINE DAYS GONE (1)

The morning after the excursion to the lake with Jeff, Amy wakes up feeling nervous. She knows she needs to get out of the Ozarks. She plans to leave later that afternoon—but first, goes to the local library to catch up on Nick. She almost immediately finds Nick’s interview with Rebecca, labeled online as “NICK DUNNE, DRUNKEN DECLARATIONS!!!” Excited to watch Nick make a bigger fool of himself, Amy clicks the video—but is shocked and even warmed when she sees that the video contains Nick speaking about how “perfect” and even “power[ful]” Amy is. Nick twirls his wedding band on his finger as he admits to his failures as a husband, and promises that if Amy were to return home, he would make everything up to her.

*Amy is a sucker for flattery—and as she watches Nick’s new viral video, she finds herself transfixed by what he’s saying. There’s no way she can know about the horrible thoughts which were secretly running through Nick’s head as he delivered the interview—she only sees her charming husband prostrating himself for the cameras. She feels she is controlling Nick even from afar.*



Amy returns to her cabin to find Dorothy waiting for her—she is two days behind on rent. Amy says she’s leaving anyway, but Dorothy insists on collecting the eighty dollars Amy owes her. Amy retrieves the money and goes back onto the porch to hand it to Dorothy—as she does, she spies Greta and Jeff on Greta’s porch, watching her pay the landlady. Amy hurries back inside and begins packing and cleaning, wiping every surface down and cleaning all the drains to remove evidence that she was ever here. As Amy frantically cleans, Jeff and Greta knock on the door, claiming they want to come in and say goodbye.

*Amy has been waiting for something bad to happen with Greta and Jeff since they saw her money purse—now, as they knock at her door, she slowly realizes that she’s been unable to escape the Ozarks in time.*



Amy reluctantly lets Greta and Jeff in—they begin going through her things under the pretense of helping her pack, shaking out her sheets and inspecting her fridge. When they are unable to turn up Amy’s money pouch, Jeff confronts her directly. Amy claims not to have anything on her, but Jeff calls out her lie. When Amy threatens to call the police, Greta calls her bluff—she knows Amy is hiding from something. Amy asks if Jeff talked Greta into robbing her—Greta replies that she talked Jeff into it. She then hits Amy, lifts up her dress, and takes her money pouch right off of her.

*Though Amy herself is the mastermind of a scheming plot, she fails to see Greta’s independence and intrepidity and doesn’t recognize that it’s Greta, not Jeff, who’s the mastermind behind the robbery.*



Greta and Jeff scurry out of the apartment, almost tenderly warning Amy to be more careful at the next place she stops and reassuring her she'll be okay. After they depart, Amy looks over to the bedside table, where a quarter and dime sit on the glass—it is her only money left in the whole world.

*Jeff and Greta's kind goodbye to Amy in the wake of their cruel violence against her is strange and dissonant—much like the odd ways in which Amy vacillates between monstrosity and tenderness.*



## 41. NICK DUNNE, NINE DAYS GONE

Nick is in an incredible mood in the morning as he wakes up to find that his “drunken” interview has gone viral—and seems to really have shifted the tide of public opinion. Many commenters on the video assert that Nick is a “good guy,” and probably didn’t kill his wife after all. His mood is shattered, though, when the doorbell rings and Tanner and Go arrive—Tanner is furious, and warns Nick to never do something like that again. He insists that Nick got lucky—if the journalist had worked for Ellen Abbott, or someone else whose prejudices were tilted against Nick, he could have done irreparable damage.

*Nick, driven by desperation and cunning, believes he has gotten himself out of hot water—but more than that, he's happy just to be publicly forgiven, even adored. His “good guy” image is more important to him than getting Amy back by a long shot.*



Tanner is able to admit, though, that conditions are good for Nick—at least for the moment—and that it’s an optimal time to go to the police about the contents of the **woodshed**. Nick asks Tanner what the plan is. Tanner reveals that he’s set up an interview for Nick with Sharon Schieber—a top-rated network newswoman who is the polar opposite of Ellen Abbott. Tanner knows it’s risky to put Nick out in public for yet another interview—but knows they have to try to control the narrative in any way they can.

*In the face of Amy's machinations, Tanner and Nick are nervous that more and more incriminating evidence will keep rolling out. They decide to try and get ahead of the narrative by taking it into their own hands—risky as it is—and hope that perhaps they can even get through to Amy directly, if she really is watching her own disappearance unfold from a distance.*



Tanner warns Nick, however, that he'll need to use the Schieber interview to come clean about Andie—the information is bound to come out anyway, and it's better if Nick is able to get ahead of the story and tell it himself. Though Nick can't use the interview to say anything bad about Amy, strengthening his public image—and then going to the cops with the Amy-framed-Nick theory—will perhaps be enough to get Nick out of the doghouse. Boney, Tanner points out, doesn't seem to truly believe Nick is guilty.

*Throughout all of this madness, the only person who has seemed as incredulous about the details of the case as Nick has is Boney. Tanner knows that the window of time in which they can get her on their side is closing, and they must take desperate measures to try and make themselves look as good to the police as possible.*



That evening, Nick, Go, and Tanner drive together to a fancy hotel in St. Louis—the spot where the interview will take place. They're brought up to an expensive penthouse suite, where Tanner's wife, Betsy, is waiting for them. She sits Nick down and begins coaching him by asking him mock interview questions—she holds a bowl of jelly beans in her lap, and any time Nick hesitates, acts smug, or tenses up, she throws one at him. As Tanner and Betsy both guide Nick through the minefield of tiny linguistic slips and ideological traps Sharon Schieber's questions could reveal, Nick realizes he'll have to use the interview time to prostrate himself, admit he's the bad guy, and convince America that though everything is "all [his] fault," he did not kill his wife.

*Nick is at last ready to part with his treasured "good guy" persona. It hasn't worked out for him so far—he's been chasing an ideal of himself that doesn't exist. Perhaps, he thinks, in being the "bad guy," he can admit to the failures and shades of gray within his and Amy's marriage—and use that honesty to curry favor with both her and the public.*



## 42. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, NINE DAYS GONE (2)

Amy is penniless and on the run. She spends the night in her car in a fast-food parking lot on the banks of the Mississippi, but can't fall asleep—she's afraid of being approached by a real murderer or rapist. As she contemplates her situation—no gas in the tank, no money, nowhere to run—she briefly considers suicide, but then in a flash realizes what she "must" do next.

*Amy is in danger—her own plan has fallen apart, a complication she never saw coming based on how careful and methodical she was for a time. She knows she must take drastic action to get herself out of the hole she's in.*



## 43. NICK DUNNE, TEN DAYS GONE (1)

The next day—the day of the interview—Nick, Go, Tanner, and Betsy hole up in the penthouse and continue prepping Nick. At 5:00 p.m., Tanner gets a call from Boney but decides to ignore it—he doesn't want to let in any information or gossip that might derail the hard work they've done. At 6:00 p.m., Nick and the rest of his team enter the room where the interview is going to take place, and Nick is whisked away to get miked by a producer. After a little while, Sharon enters the room, and they all marvel at her glamor and gravitas. Go tries to talk to Sharon, but one of Sharon's producers pulls her away to whisper something in her ear. Whatever the producer says shocks Sharon, who blurts out "Oh my God" and turns around to look at Nick in horror.

*A pattern repeats through this section of the novel as Nick rides the high of others' approval—and then crashes down to the nadir of public opinion. As the latest roadblock to Nick's on-air redemption emerges, it becomes clear from Sharon's reaction that whatever has come out about him threatens to derail the entire interview—and what's worse, Boney clearly knows what's going on, too.*



## 44. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, TEN DAYS GONE (1)

Amy makes a phone call and arranges a mysterious meeting for later that evening. She spends the rest of the day "priming"—cleaning herself in a McDonald's bathroom and putting on a cheap sundress. At five, she drives to the appointed meeting place—a casino on the Mississippi—and heads inside to sit at the bar. Amy assumed the casino would be a good spot to remain anonymous, but amidst all the hubbub, she feels vulnerable. As she waits at the bar, she grows anxious, and is about to leave when Desi Collings walks up and greets her.

*Amy has summoned Desi in her hour of need. She needs someone entirely devoted to her—someone who will put her above their desire for public attention or validation. She knows that Desi, who she's kept on a string all these years, is still at her beckon call—she can do, she believes, whatever she wants with him.*



Amy has called her “devoted Desi” to her aid. They have never quite lost touch, and in spite of what Amy has told Nick and her parents, Desi doesn’t frighten her. Amy knows that Desi is never happier than when he’s helping a damsel in distress. Now, as he approaches the bar in a white suit, he tenderly touches Amy’s cheek and embraces her. Amy lets herself cry for just a minute—long enough to win Desi’s sympathy, but not to bloat or flush her face. Desi asks to hear about what Amy’s been through, and she spins a story of Nick’s cruelty and his threats to kill her if she ever ran away or left him. She tells Desi she needs him and call him her “savior,” playing into his fantasies of her finally returning to him after so many years.

Desi is full of rage towards Nick, and agrees to keep Amy hidden from him. Desi reveals that Nick came to talk to him several days ago, a fact which sort of thrills Amy—she has always wanted a man to “get in a fight over [her].” Desi says that Nick had heard some “insane” story about how Desi tried to kill himself in Amy’s dorm room—Amy privately thinks to herself about how that story is her favorite lie she’s ever told.

Desi tells Amy he’ll do whatever he can to shield her from the world—he’ll even flee the country with her. Amy says she doesn’t want that, and Desi gets the idea of putting her up in his lake house, which is a secluded mansion. Amy knows that Desi wants to possess her, and keep her “under glass.” She attempts to resist the offer, asking Desi if he can just give her some cash, but Desi insists she try the house out—he promises that if she feels cramped, she can leave after getting a few days of relaxation away from the rest of the world. Amy agrees. She leans over and kisses Desi on the lips, calling him a “wonderful” man.

On the way out of the casino, Amy and Desi pass by a TV—on it, Andie, “the slut,” is holding a press conference. Dressed conservatively and looking tiny and helpless, Amy tells reporters all about her and Nick’s affair, and promises she’s now cooperating with the police in their investigation. As Amy overhears the casino patrons expressing sympathy for Andie, she becomes enraged. Desi tries to hurry her out of the casino—but when Marybeth and Rand take over from Andie, both Amy and Desi freeze. Marybeth announces that in light of Andie’s admission, she and her husband are “withdraw[ing their] support from Nick” entirely.

*Amy knows how to win Desi over. She plays right into his hands by being the person he wants her to be, and behaving the way he wants her to behave. Amy’s not being the “Cool Girl” anymore—but she’s still changing herself to win the protection and adoration of the men in her life.*



*Amy takes delight in destroying other peoples’ lives and reputations. What she’s doing to Nick is nothing new—she’s done it to Hilary, Tommy, and Desi, and what’s worse, she’s enjoyed and relished each damning lie she’s told.*



*Amy was hoping that in meeting up with Desi she could secure his sympathies and a little bit of money—but it becomes clear that Desi wants something in exchange for keeping Amy’s secret. She decides she’s willing to give it to him—though she intuits that Desi may want to keep her to himself forever.*



*Amy is more concerned with narcissistically watching her own story unfold than she is with her own well-being. This symbolizes that the image she’s created of herself—the narrative she’s sold to America--has become more real than her own corporeal safety.*





## 45. NICK DUNNE, TEN DAYS GONE (2)

Nick, Tanner, Go, Sharon, and the rest of the people gathered in the suite watch Andie's press conference. When it's over, Sharon is visibly upset—Tanner apologizes for not being able to drop the “bombshell” themselves, but insists that Sharon interviewing Nick would still be valuable—Sharon can get Nick's first reaction on tape. Sharon agrees to the interview, but warns Nick that he better have something very interesting to say.

The interview goes off without a hitch—Sharon adores Nick, and is openly flirtatious with him as she conducts the interview. Nick answers her questions well—he admits he's not quite as prodigious a liar as Amy, but is “not bad when [he has] to be.” He prostrates himself for Sharon and her viewers, expressing simpering regret for his mistakes and promising that he would never kill his wife—and is desperate for her to come home. After the interview, everyone congratulates Nick on a job well done, and then they return to Carthage to wait for the interview to air the following evening. Back in town, however, the cops are waiting at Go's house—with a warrant to search the **woodshed**.

Boney and Tanner spar about Boney's decision to allow Andie to give a press conference, and then Boney leads Nick out to the **woodshed**. Tanner follows along, trying to bait Boney with an “explosive new theory,” but she has no interest in hearing what he has to say. Boney and her team have broken open the doors to the woodshed and laid bare all of “Nick's” purchases. She kicks a cardboard box of porn DVDs at Nick's feet and points out the lurid, brutal, violent titles—Nick turns away from the images, only to see Go, in the driveway, being put into the back of a cop car.

An hour later, Nick and Tanner are at the police station, heading into a conference room with Boney and Gilpin. Boney confronts Nick and Tanner with the fact that Nick's fingerprints are all over every piece of evidence in the **woodshed**—including the violent pornography. Nick realizes that Amy must have brought the items into their bedroom and had him touch them while he slept his signature deep sleep. As a final coup de grace, Boney sets **Amy's diary** down in front of Nick. Though Nick insists Amy never kept a diary, Boney claims the book contains seven years of entries. Nick knows that something very bad is about to happen.

*Sharon Schieber and her team know that it's important to craft the story they are going to be telling about their interview subject before the fact—Andie's press conference has derailed their ability to control Nick's narrative, but Nick has confidence that he can get things back on track.*



*Things seem to have swung in Nick's favor as the interview concludes, and everyone is in awe of his ability to spin a convincing narrative and take control of his circumstances. Things take a turn for the worse, though, as the group arrives back in Carthage to find that the situation there is spinning out of control.*



*Amy has engineered the contents of the woodshed not just to make Nick look like a greedy spendthrift, but a man with violent fantasies of harming women. Nick feels this twist of events—the cop's discovery of the loot inside the shed—may be too big for him to worm his way out of.*



*With every new revelation, Nick realizes more and more about how twisted his wife truly is—and how far she has gone to punish him. Nick didn't know his wife at all—he wasn't paying attention to just how angry she was growing, and ignored the warning signs about how desperate Amy is, and always has been, for control over those around her.*



## 46. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, TEN DAYS GONE (2)

Amy and Desi arrive at his grandiose, secluded lake house, and Desi gives Amy the grand tour. The space is impossibly luxurious, complete with a billiards room, sauna, wine cellar, and five bedrooms—one of which Desi has had specially repainted in Amy's favorite color from high school, dusty rose. Amy knows that Desi derives an almost sensual pleasure from impressing her, and so she does her best to act extremely impressed.

As the piece de resistance, Desi shows Amy to an elaborate greenhouse—which he has had filled with tulips, Amy's favorite flower. Amy admits that the gesture is sweet, but also feels a little bit of panic as she realizes that the tulips seem to have been planted for much longer than the twenty-four hours that have passed between Amy's call to Desi and now. Nevertheless, Amy thanks Desi for creating a "fairy tale" for her. Still feeling nervous, she asks Desi if she can have some money—he assures her that she won't want for anything, and hands her two twenties. Amy worries that she has made a huge mistake.

*Amy is slightly freaked out by the way things are laid out at Desi's lake house—he seems to have built and decorated the entire house in anticipation of Amy's return to his life.*



*The tulips—Amy's favorite—which have been growing in the greenhouse for a long time confirm Amy's suspicion that Desi has been waiting for her to come back into his life. She's suddenly afraid—she's found herself in a story she didn't want to be a part of.*



## 47. NICK DUNNE, TEN DAYS GONE (3)

As Boney begins going through the **diary** with Nick, he begins to realize that the things contained within its pages are going to "ruin" him. The diary contains allegations that Nick poisoned Amy with antifreeze, pushed her around, and committed sexual acts which bordered on rape. When Boney points out the diary's final lines—"This man might kill me"—Nick says snidely that it's a "convenient" note for Amy to end on. Tanner hushes Nick and asks the detectives where the diary was found. When they tell him they found it at Bill's, Nick asks if they received an "anonymous tip" pointing them to the house. The cops don't say anything. Nick tells Boney and Gilpin they were supposed to find the diary, and Tanner at last lets loose with the fact that Amy is trying to frame Nick for murder.

Boney points out that it would have taken six months or a year for Amy to set all this up—to do so, she'd have to be "crazy." Nick insists that Amy's "sense of justice" is such that she would have committed to this rather than just divorced him—she'd want him to suffer. Tanner backs Nick up, but every time the two of them offer the detectives evidence of Amy's destruction—Hilary Handy and Tommy O'Hara, the labyrinth clues—the cops find a way to bend the narrative towards Amy's innocence. Even when Nick and Tanner produce the **Punch and Judy puppets**, Boney points out that Judy is missing her handle—an item as heavy and solid as a club. Nick knows that Boney and Gilpin will never see him as anything other than a killer.

*Nick knows the diary is all a fiction—and a twisted one at that, designed to bring him down and make him look like a heartless killer. Even though Nick is aware that Amy is orchestrating everything, he is unable to get the detectives to see this. Amy has told her story so well that Nick doesn't seem to stand a chance of poking holes in it or rendering it questionable.*



*Even though Tanner and Nick do their best to present the cops with the truth, it is so unimaginable to the cops that they refute it outright. Nick and Tanner are spinning a good story—but Amy is one step ahead of them, and by positioning herself as the victim, she has secured the advantage.*



## 48. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, ELEVEN DAYS GONE

Amy settles in to watch Nick's Sharon Schieber interview. She wishes she could watch it alone, but Desi will not leave her side. Though Desi brings Amy fine groceries and delicious wine, she feels like his captive, subject to his total control.

Amy watches the interview, rapt and focused. She realizes that Nick is wearing a tie she bought him, and hangs on his every word as he describes what a bad husband he was, and how much he wants Amy back. Desi offers snarky remarks at everything Nick says, but Amy is totally sucked in by Nick's honey-sweet words of devotion and promises that if Amy were to return he'd do anything it took to win her love back. Desi clicks the interview off, warning Amy that Nick is lying—but all Amy can focus on is that Nick is finally saying the things she's wanted to hear for years.

After the interview is over, Amy admits to herself that she wants to go back to her old life. She begins dreaming of what could be in store for her if she returns to Nick—they could move back to New York with the money gained from the "skyrocket[ing]" *Amazing Amy* sales in the last ten days, and resume their normal lives. Amy misses Nick, and how the two of them just "fit together." She becomes determined to get home to him any way she can.

*Desi is lavishing Amy with attention, good food, and fine things, but it doesn't change the fact that she's effectively his prisoner.*



*Even though just a couple of weeks ago Amy was hell-bent on punishing her husband for everything he'd done to her, watching him gush about his devotion to her—watching him transform into the man she first fell in love with—is enough to convince her that she needs to backtrack.*



*Amy sees the old Nick and is pretty much immediately convinced of the fact that if she returns to him, things will go back to the way they used to be at the beginning of their relationship. Amy is certain that she can still achieve perfection in her marriage—but knows she'll have to escape her present circumstances in order to get that second chance.*



## 49. NICK DUNNE, FOURTEEN DAYS GONE

Nick wakes up on Go's couch with a hangover. Since the **diary** interview he has been drinking heavily, essentially doing nothing but waiting around for the police to get enough evidence to arrest him—an event Tanner has warned him is coming down the pike sooner rather than later. Go walks into the room with her laptop and delivers the news that the public once again hates Nick—someone leaked the information about the **woodshed** and its contents, and Nick is now in the public's crosshairs once more.

As Nick and Go talk, they snipe at each other more and more—after so many days holed up in the house together avoiding the paparazzi, they're getting sick of one another. Nick decides to go home, and before Go can stop him, he grabs his keys off the counter and goes out onto the lawn, dodging the paparazzi's invasive and pointed questions. Go follows him and turns on the lawn hose, spraying the paparazzi with water and laughing. Nick is grateful for Go's solidarity.

*Nick feels like a dead man walking—he knows that all of his efforts to get Amy's attention have failed, and that her plan to have him arrested and charged with her murder will soon come to fruition. He feels resentful and listless, and the slights just keep mounting.*



*Even though Nick and Go are getting slightly sick of one another, this passage makes it clear that the love between them runs deep. Go is willing to stand up and fight for Nick even in his toughest moments.*



Nick arrives home and spends the rest of the day imagining all the different ways in which he'd kill Amy if he could. He becomes lost in a spiral of rage directed at all the women in his life who have let him down—Andie, Marybeth, Go, Boney, and Amy. He has tried his whole life to be a “decent guy,” but he feels that because of these “bitches,” he's failed.

Late at night, there is a knock on the door. It is Bill, escaped from the nursing home once again, ranting and raving about a “little ugly bitch.” As Nick helplessly watches his father spew misogynistic vitriol, he realizes that he does not want to be the kind of man who hates women—he only hates Amy, and if he can find a way to focus that rage, maybe he can stop himself from becoming his father, the thing he's always feared. He puts his father in the car and drives him back to the nursing home. On the lonely drive back home after dropping Bill off, Nick thinks horrible, terrible thoughts about Amy on a loop.

## 50. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, TWENTY-SIX DAYS GONE

Amy is growing tired and wary of Desi, who is constantly trying to remind her how safe and loved she is—though she doesn't feel safe and loved, as she has become his prisoner. She has no way to leave the house, and has begun to fear that Desi's mother, Jacqueline—who has always hated Amy, and has always been onto her lies—will come up to the lake house and discover her.

Desi comes daily to bring Amy lunch—small portions of fruit and seafood designed to force her to lose the weight she's gained. Desi has also bought Amy hair dye and all but forced her to dye her hair back to its normal blonde. Desi always couches his demands in a desire for Amy to feel like her best self, so she can't say anything to push back against him. As the days go by, Desi begins making “threat[s] disguised as concern,” telling Amy that if he ever comes by and finds her gone, he'd go right to the police—for fear that Nick had kidnapped her back. Amy realizes she has underestimated Desi, and has lost control of the situation entirely.

## 51. NICK DUNNE, THIRTY-THREE DAYS GONE

One afternoon, after going out for groceries, Nick comes home to find Tanner, Boney, and Gilpin in the living room. On the coffee table is a plastic evidence bag, containing the **Judy puppet**'s missing handle. Boney says they found it in the river behind the house early on in the investigation but didn't think anything of it—recent tests, however, have found traces of Amy's blood on it. Boney officially places Nick under arrest for the murder of his wife.

*Nick is turning into the misogynist he never wanted to become. His hatred towards Amy has broadened, leaving him rabidly angry at all of the women in his life, including his beloved twin sister. He's telling himself that the reason his life is in shambles is entirely the fault of the women around him.*



*Nick has slid into a pattern of destructive, harmful, and cruel thoughts. Confronted with his father's example once again, he fears that he has become Bill at last—he resolves to stop blaming his problems on women in general, but continues steadily hating Amy and wishing for her to suffer pain.*



*Amy has made a mistake in giving herself over to Desi. She underestimated his rabid adoration of her, and has essentially become his captive. The lies Amy has sown are catching up with her, and the truth is becoming stranger than any fiction she could spin.*



*Desi is clearly trying to mold Amy into the woman of his dreams based on the narrative he's told himself over the years about who Amy is, and about what being with her would be like. By being his prisoner, Amy is getting a taste of her own medicine on all fronts.*



*As Nick is arrested for Amy's murder, he realizes that there was a much more sinister component to the Punch and Judy puppets all along—they are literally designed to be the instruments of his demise. Amy has written the story of her murder, and Nick is a helpless character within it.*



## 52. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, FORTY DAYS GONE

Amy has begun a “project.” Using old twine and an empty wine bottle, she prepares for the task ahead of her. When Desi arrives after lunch, Amy is dressed in a pink dress he’s bought her, and is wearing no bra or panties beneath it. She greets Desi with a warm embrace, and tells him she’s had a horrible nightmare about Nick. Amy tilts her face up towards Desi and allows him to give her a weak, disgusting kiss.

Desperate to get the act over with, Amy pushes herself on Desi, seducing him and begging him to take her to the bedroom. On the bed, Desi slowly and sensuously kisses Amy, but she begs him to roughly penetrate her. As he does, Amy forces herself to cry, knowing that Desi will want her “happy” tears.

Once Desi finishes, Amy insists he stay in bed while she fixes them a post-coital drink. She returns to the bedroom with two martinis—Desi’s is spiked with sleeping pills. He guzzles the drink and soon falls asleep, and Amy is relieved—she can finally “begin.”

*Amy is planning a way to escape from Desi—and considering how desperate she is to escape, she’s surely planning something twisted, vindictive, and morbid.*



*Amy knows how to manipulate Desi into doing what she wants—even though she’s about to destroy him, she makes sure to put on a good performance to keep him from suspecting anything.*



*Her seduction complete, Amy now has the upper hand—and she uses it to incapacitate Desi and begin her plan to escape his clutches.*



## 53. NICK DUNNE, FORTY DAYS GONE

In the late, hot days of August, Nick is out on bond and awaiting trial. The proceedings won’t begin for months, and Nick feels helpless as he knows the police are turning into a product as they make their case against “Nick Dunne, Killer.” Tanner’s team of detectives has been unable to track Amy down, and though Nick has made several videos begging for Amy’s return and posted them on the internet, there’s been no sign of her.

The doorbell rings, and Nick answers it—Amy is standing on the doorstep in a thin pink dress. There is twine dangling from one of her wrists, her hair has been chopped short, her face is bruised, and she is covered in blood. Amy flings out her arms and wails Nick’s name, collapsing onto him as the camera crews go wild. Nick pulls Amy close, pretending to fawn over her and embrace her. He lets the camera crews get their shots, and then whispers “You fucking bitch” in Amy’s ear before pulling her inside the house.

Once the door is shut, Amy looks at Nick with a “triumphant smile.” She proudly announces that she has made it back to Nick. Unimpressed, Nick asks her what her “story” is. Amy trembles as she tells Nick that Desi Collings took her on the morning of their anniversary. She says she was holding the handle to the **Judy puppet** when she opened the door, because it had fallen off while she was getting the gift ready. She claims Desi wrestled the handle from her, clubbed her, and she blacked out.

*Nick is desperate to get Amy home—if she doesn’t come back, he’ll go to trial and surely be convicted. Nick knows that Amy is his last chance to secure his freedom, and will tell her anything she wants to hear to get her back.*



*Amy is back—it’s what Nick has been praying for, but not for the reasons a man might pray for his missing wife’s return. As soon as Nick sees Amy covered in blood, he knows she’s done something awful. He isn’t happy to see her, and his cruel curse confirms that he still longs to do harm to Amy—or at least get even for what she’s put him through.*



*Amy has her entire story planned out—and she is gleeful about it. In this passage, she’s oddly both pretending with Nick and giving him a heads up through her body language and facial expressions that she knows he knows what’s really going on. She’s not yet ready, though, to admit to anything else.*



Nick bluntly accuses Amy of framing him for murder. She promises she can explain everything, and Nick says he'd love to watch her try. Nick asks her the first question on his mind—why every clue was hidden in a spot where he'd had sex with Andie. Amy replies that she didn't know about Andie until she saw it on TV, tied to Desi's bed, his prisoner at the lake house. Nick asks Amy why all the clues led to places where there seemed to be evidence tying Nick to Amy's murder. Amy insists again that in time, she'll explain everything. Nick then asks her where Desi is, and Amy offers only a "sad little smile."

*Amy is determined not to reveal the truth behind her twisted story just yet, even though Nick is desperate for answers from his conniving wife. Though Amy tries to distract Nick with snippets of her experience at Desi's, he has no belief in or sympathy for her at all.*



## 54. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, THE NIGHT OF THE RETURN (1)

Amy presents the medical examiners with the evidence of her body—a "textbook" example of a rape victim. Amy knows that when the police arrive at Desi's lake house they'll find him "naked and drained" in a bed soaked with Amy's blood.

*Amy has created the perfect scene, engineering a tableau that makes it look as if Amy finally killed her captor after months of rape and torture, fleeing straight back to her husband.*



Boney asks Amy if she's able to come to the station for an interview, and Amy—determined to maintain her "Amazing" front and always put others first—agrees. At the station, the officers hold the press back while Amy makes her way inside and reunites with her parents. Gilpin and Boney quickly whisk Amy away into a private room, where they interrogate her on the details of the day of her disappearance. As the interview progresses, it becomes clear that Boney wants to poke some holes in Amy's story. Amy is too good, though, and always one step ahead of each question—she even criticizes the cops for their lazy policework, and for attempting to pin everything on her sweet, innocent husband, Nick. The interview concludes with Boney telling Amy what she wants to hear—that she is an "absolute hero."

*This passage makes it clear that while the larger public—and Amy's family—celebrates her return with glee and gratitude, Boney is suspicious of the story Amy has woven. Perhaps privately convinced that Tanner and Nick's story is the true one, Boney attempts to expose an inaccuracy or inconsistency in Amy's story—but Amy, a mastermind, is unable to be stumped. In the end Boney, like Nick, is forced to just tell Amy what she wants to hear.*



## 55. NICK DUNNE, THE NIGHT OF THE RETURN (1)

Nick arrives at the police station to find inside a scene that looks like a "holiday party gone awry." People are drinking champagne and discussing the harrowing details of Amy's ordeal, discussing how she escaped from Desi's clutches by slashing his throat with a steak knife. Nick alone sees how absurd the story is—if Desi kept her tied up, how would she have gotten the knife? As Nick encounters Amy's fawning fans and happy parents, he wonders what she will "become" now that she is the center of all this "worshipful" attention.

*Nick is able to see the grotesque web Amy has woven in full as he walks into the police station. She has positioned herself at the center, like a spider, and is allowing everyone to thrash around, unknowing, firmly in her sights. He knows that being the center of attention will only make Amy worse—she is being rewarded for her cruelty, violence, and manipulations.*



Tanner and Betsy arrive with Go, and Nick senses the “bizarre” nature of their reunion—they are not sure what’s going on, and have no script for how to act. Jacqueline Collings arrives, her face a teary wreck, demanding to know where the “lying little bitch” who killed her son is. She tells anyone who will listen—the press included—that Amy murdered Desi in cold blood, and is lying about her entire story. No one heeds her, though, and the cops quickly usher her into another room. As Amy is brought out of the interrogation room, the paparazzi flood her with questions—the only questions Nick has for her, are the ones that have made up the “ominous refrain of [their] marriage.” He wonders what they have done to another, and what they will do next.

The media follows Amy and Nick through streets like a “royal wedding procession” as they drive back to their house. Nick is floored by the abruptness which with they’ve returned home. Alone in the house, Nick expresses fear about sleeping under the same roof as Amy—but she insists that all she wants is to be with her husband. She promises Nick she forgives him—even when he states that all the videos he made were him just telling her what she wanted to hear, Amy insists that this is what makes them perfect for each other: how well they know one another’s wants and needs. Nick is forced to concede that Amy knows him better than anyone else in the world—the bond between them is “catastrophically romantic.”

Nick pulls himself back, telling Amy that he can’t be with someone who has killed a man. Amy tries to calm Nick down, insisting he has heard some “bad information” that he will need to forget if they are going to move forward as a couple. Nick demands to know the truth—the actual truth—of where Amy has been for the last month and a half. She orders him to take off his clothes.

After making sure that Nick isn’t wearing a wire, Amy strips herself and leads Nick into the shower, where she whispers her entire story into his ear. As she tells it, Nick is struck by what a good storyteller his wife truly is. After an hour, Amy is done with her story, and asks Nick to admit how “brilliant” it is. Amy suggests they get out of the shower and get into bed together, but Nick says he wants to sleep downstairs. Amy reminds Nick that she can still do “very bad things” to him. She tells Nick that she has saved some vomit laced with antifreeze—she reminds him how important it is to always have a “backup plan.”

*There are people, still, who challenge—or could challenge—Amy’s narrative, and upend the story she’s spun, but everyone’s swift dismissal of Jacqueline shows that any contradiction to Amy’s tale will be ignored and suppressed. Just as the cops and the public were quick to accept the narrative that Nick murdered his wife, they are now quick to accept Amy’s intricate story as truth.*



*Though Nick lured Amy home so that his name would be cleared and they could at last go their separate ways, Amy wants something else. She wants to pick up where they left off in New York—pretending to be the best versions of themselves and living a lie in order to satisfy one another’s worst desires for an idyllic, picture-perfect life.*



*Nick is not willing to swallow Amy’s lies so easily. He wants to know what he’s dealing with—and Amy is willing to tell him, as long as she knows that there’s no way anyone else will become privy to her story.*



*Amy is delighted with the things she’s done—and the things she could still do if Nick challenges the public story they’ve told. Amy wants to be applauded for reclaiming and rewriting the story of her life, the one thing she’s always wanted to do.*



After Amy goes to sleep, Nick calls Tanner and desperately relays the details of Amy's deception—and the new threats she's made. Tanner warns Nick to lay low and "play nice" until they find something they can use against Amy. Nick hangs up, furious, and again begins fantasizing about killing Amy. After a moment, he hears Amy call his name. He turns around to find her standing on the bottom of the stairs in her nightgown. She smiles at him and tells him to "play nice."

*Nick realizes in this passage that he is not safe anywhere—Amy will always be there, listening in and watching over, making sure he keeps their shared secret.*



## 56. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, THE NIGHT OF THE RETURN (2)

Amy stands at the foot of the stairs after listening into Nick's phone call, desperate to ignore his hatred of her and "make him be the man [she] married" once again. Nick is furious, and asks Amy why she'd even want to be with him, knowing how average he is—and how much he hates her. Nick tells Amy he doesn't want to be married to her—he wants to be with a "normal" person. Amy is furious. She warns Nick that he'll never again be some "boring-ass middle American." Nick calls Amy a "psycho bitch." Amy tells Nick that he'd be nothing without her, and that she's the one who made him into the best man he's ever been. Searching for a weak spot, she tells Nick that without her, he'd be just like his father, Bill.

*As Nick and Amy hurl insults and let out their pain, anger, and frustration, Amy reveals some potent truths. She calls Nick's bluff—though he claims to be shocked and horrified by her actions, she's well aware that she has the upper hand. She may be stabbing in the dark, but she hits on something salient when she claims that without her around to keep him on his toes, Nick will backslide into the worst possible version of himself and realize his worst nightmare—becoming his father.*



Amy threatens Nick with violence and retribution if he ever tries to divorce her—and tells him that even if he were able to be with someone else, he'd be bored stiff. As Amy continues riling Nick up, he grabs her by the arm and then the neck. He sobs and shakes as Amy tells him she's the "bitch who makes [him] a man."

*Nick wants to fight against the things Amy's telling him—he doesn't want them to be true, and he doesn't want to spend his life yoked to a monster. As Nick seizes his wife's neck, though, they both realize she's at last made him into the dark-willed monster she cast him as all along.*



## 57. NICK DUNNE, THE NIGHT OF THE RETURN (2)

With his hands around Amy's throat, Nick wonders who he would be if he killed her—who he would be without her. He lets go of Amy and she rasps and coughs as she catches her breath. He doesn't want to be a killer, just like she tried to make him seem to be, and the sickening knowledge that he truly would be no one without Amy hits him hard. Nick concedes that Amy has "brought [him] to heel." He is dependent on her, as much as he hates to admit it.

*Nick doesn't want to give into Amy's narrative of him as a killer—the only alternate is accepting the narrative that he can't live without her. Amy has presented Nick with two evils, and he chooses the lesser—but remains aware that she's the one writing the story now, and he's powerless.*



At the same time, Nick knows that just as Amy made him into his best self, he made her into her worst self. He demanded she turn herself into someone else for him—and drove her mad in the process. He knows that now, it is up to him alone to stop her—not kill her, but simply stop her.

*Nick still isn't willing to accept total defeat, and remains determined to challenge—if not bring to light—the narrative Amy has foisted upon both of them.*





## 58. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, FIVE DAYS AFTER THE RETURN

Amy is realizing that she needs to be more careful about her husband—Nick is not as “tame” as he used to be. She needs to put one more “spectacular precaution” in place to ensure that he’ll stay in line and meet all of her demands.

Each day since her return, Amy has entertained visits from her parents. They lavish her with careful attention, treating her like a breakable doll, and Nick follows suit, playing along. Amy senses that Nick is about to “burst” with the truth about her—she knows she needs to keep him on her side to keep her story intact. She knows that Boney is itching to arrest her, but is also aware that the cops have earned themselves a reputation for having botched things so badly the first time around that they’ll need something concrete to nail her. Amy has made allowances in her story for the possibility that Jeff and Greta might come nosing around, telling police that Desi kept her tied up in some sort of motel for days. She’s done all she can to discredit anyone who might speak out against her—including Nick.

As the investigation winds down, *Amazing Amy* sales pick up—Rand and Marybeth have secured a book deal for a new entry in the series, and though Amy is angry that they are once again “squatting on [her] psyche” to earn money, she doesn’t care as much as she used to. Her own phone is ringing off the hook with writers, reporters, and journalists desperate to have Amy tell them her story.

Amy knows that Nick hasn’t fallen back in love with her yet—but has faith that he will. They’re both acting like their old selves, but neither seems to truly believe the other’s charade. In time, Amy thinks, she’ll wear him down—she’ll get him to sleep with her again, hold her again, and she’ll slowly “invade every part of him” like a creeping vine.

*Amy wants to ensure she has total control over her husband. She knows how much is at stake if he slips and needs to guarantee his total loyalty.*



*Amy is safe at home, but can’t stop her brain from turning over all the possible ways in which the truth could still come to light. She is always one step ahead of everybody, and prepared for the worst. The one person she can’t entirely control or evade, however, is her own husband, Nick. The two of them are closer than anyone—and yet know each other less and less, it seems, each day.*



*Though Amy is forced to watch her parents once again take up a pen and write the story of her life, for once she revels in the idea that she might have a chance to tell her version of things as well.*



*Amy makes her intentions clear in this passage: she wants to break Nick down and break down the walls between them until he is completely under her spell—and control.*



## 59. NICK DUNNE, THIRTY DAYS AFTER THE RETURN

Amy, Nick writes, “thinks she’s in control, but she’s very wrong.” Boney, Go, and Nick are all working together despite the cops and the FBI having lost interest in Amy’s case; they all meet at a pancake house to have breakfast and discuss what they know. Boney has apologized to Nick for suspecting him, and expresses her frustration at being unable to prove that Amy framed Nick and murdered Desi. The word, though has come down from “on high”—Boney needs to shut the case down. Nick laments that Amy “studies,” and knows police procedure “cold”—they won’t be able to get a taped confession out of her, or any solid evidence. Amy will only talk to Nick about the truth in the shower—and even then, she whispers in his ear, and would easily avoid any bug the cops could place.

Boney remains convinced that at some point, Amy will crack. Go suggests looking through Amy’s diary with a fine-toothed comb, but Boney knows Amy has covered her tracks too well. Go thinks maybe Jacqueline Collings, Tommy O’Hara, or Hilary Handy could help expose Amy—but Boney knows that the public loves Amy too much to believe the words of people she’s slandered. Boney tells Nick that their only chance of showing everyone the real Amy is if she tells him something “useful.”

Go, getting nervous, tells Nick he should move out—she doesn’t want him living with a murderer. Nick says that Amy will “never really let [him] go”—she likes “the game” too much. Go advises Nick to “stop playing” along. Privately, after leaving the diner, Nick admits that he can’t stop—he’s getting “so much better at it,” and wants to stay close until he has a chance to bring Amy down.

Sometimes Nick finds himself letting his guard down and actually enjoying his time with Amy—they playact at love and intimacy, but Nick is waiting for the moment when the tables turn and he offends her, or hurts her feelings, or displeases her in some way. Amy seems to be able to sense Nick’s paranoia, and promises she’d never hurt him. Though they’ve taken to sharing the same bed again, Nick never actually sleeps—he can’t close his eyes next to Amy, and sleeping with her is like “sleeping with a spider.”

*Nick and Amy’s rapidly-alternating perspectives in the book’s closing pages speaks more largely to the theme of marriage: how two people sharing the same home and the same name can never really know one another. While Amy plots ways to sink her teeth into Nick even more, he plans to escape her—or bring her down—behind her back. Neither is aware of the other’s devious intentions, and both are certain they’ll win in the end.*



*Boney and Go—women Nick once felt were bringing him down—are now doing their best to lift him up, help him reveal the truth, and keep him from a fate of being tied to the monstrous Amy for the rest of his life.*



*Even as Nick plots to sever himself from his wife forever, he admits that he loves playing her game—or at least wants to keep at it until he’s able to win.*



*Amy is so good at wearing Nick down that he sometimes forgets the truth of their situation. This shows how dependent not just Nick, but all people are, on their partnerships and relationships—the drive for closeness and intimacy is so strong that it blots out even cruelty, deception, and mistrust.*



## 60. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, EIGHT WEEKS AFTER THE RETURN

Amy feels safe—no one has arrested her, and all the questioning has stopped. Though she knows Nick is onto her, it “hardly matters now”—so many good things are happening lately. Amy has secured a book deal, and is “officially in control” of her and Nick’s story. She feels glee at the idea that she will be able to hold the world rapt with her and Nick’s story—and paint him exactly how she wants to. She knows he’ll have no choice but to come on tour with her once it’s published, and smile at every signing. Amy is planning on calling the book *Amazing*.

*Amy is delighted to finally be in control of her own “amazing” story. She sees the book deal as an opportunity not just to gain control over her own narrative, but to subdue Nick into even more silence and compliance. They’re essentially locked in a silent screaming match; whoever’s truth rings louder in the end will vanquish the other.*



## 61. NICK DUNNE, NINE WEEKS AFTER THE RETURN

Nick has found Amy’s vomit—in the back of a freezer in a jar, inside a box of Brussels sprouts. He has poured the sample down the drain, and though he left the empty jar on the counter for Amy to see, she’s never said a word about it. Nick knows that something is wrong—but can’t put his finger on what it is.

*Nick is still rebelling against Amy in small ways, trying to show her that she doesn’t have the power over him she thinks she does—but he can’t escape the creeping sense that she’s still one step ahead of him.*



Nick’s life, he says, “has begun to feel like an epilogue.” He and Boney and Go still meet up to try and find ways to take down Amy, but are unable to find a single thing suspicious about her **diary**. Only Boney and Go are still in Nick’s corner.

*Flynn plays with narrative structure in this passage as she has Nick poke fun at the “epilogue” his life has become. He feels like an afterword in his own story, unable to reckon with what has transpired up to this point and unsure of where he’s headed next.*



Bill finally dies one night in his sleep. Though Nick always imagined he’d feel better once his father died, he feels a “frightening hollowness open up” inside of him once he learns of the man’s death. After the funeral, Nick doesn’t cling to Go for comfort—rather, he goes home with Amy, and lets her hold him that night. All the while, he thinks about how he has to get out of the house, and be done with Amy forever. He has no idea who he is without her—but is determined to find out. The next morning, as Amy sits down to work on her memoir, Nick takes his laptop to the living room and begins working on his own lurid tale of their marriage.

*Nick goes back and forth between finding comfort in Amy and feeling horrified by her. He’s aware that with each step they take to get closer to one another, he entangles himself more firmly in her web and keeps himself from ever growing strong enough to escape her. In attempting to do the only thing he can think of—write his story—he’s fighting fire with fire, weaponizing against Amy the thing she holds dearest: narrative control.*



## 62. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, TEN WEEKS AFTER THE RETURN

Though Nick is “pretend[ing]” to be happy with Amy—and she is pretending right back—she hears him writing late at night on the computer. She tries to hack onto his laptop, but can’t decipher his password. She isn’t sure what he’s writing—but can definitively say it “isn’t [...] a love story.”

*Amy knows Nick is trying to take control of the story back, but is unable to stop him yet. She knows she must step up and do something to gain control back once and for all.*



### 63. NICK DUNNE, TWENTY WEEKS AFTER THE RETURN

Nick lives with Amy, pretending nothing is wrong, while he finishes his manuscript. He titles it *Psycho Bitch*, and when it's finished at last, he goes to Amy with "weak legs" to show her the manuscript and walk out forever. Amy looks at the book, tells Nick he has "perfect timing," and declares she has something of her own to show him—it is a pregnancy test, and it is positive. Nick, in disbelief, makes Amy take another test, in front of him. Still unbelieving, he takes her to the doctor's office for a blood test—the doctor confirms that Amy is truly pregnant. Nick realizes that the clinic never destroyed his semen sample, and Amy has used it to impregnate herself.

Amy tells Nick that she needs him to do some things "for [her] security." She demands he destroy his manuscript, and sign an affidavit that it was he who bought the stuff in the **woodshed** and hid it there, and that though he once thought Amy had framed him, everything is now "good" between them. Nick asks what will happen if he refuses—Amy replies sweetly that "that would be awful." Nick realizes that in the battle for control over their marriage and story, he has been "thoroughly, finally outplayed." Nick is Amy's prisoner—with his child in her womb, she has him "forever." Nick deletes his manuscript willingly, unable to bear the thought of losing his child.

Nick calls Boney to tell her the news—she tells him to take care of himself. Nick heads to Go's to tell her as well. He expects her to be at least a little excited, but instead she is furious, and accuses Nick of being "addicted" to Amy. Go predicts that Nick and Amy won't make it eighteen years—one of them will kill the other. Nick, though, says he finally has a chance to be "the best husband and father in the world." Go collapses on the floor and cries.

In spite of the madness of the situation, Nick feels he is "finally a match for Amy." He can feel her changing him—he was a boy, then a "man, good and bad," and is now, at last, the hero. Amy is his "forever antagonist," and their story is "one long frightening climax."

*Amy has one-upped Nick once and for all. Though he thought the threat of his manuscript would be enough to mute Amy, he has forgotten that his wife does know him better than anyone. By dangling the promise of fatherhood—and a chance at redeeming his own father's mistakes—over Nick's head, she places him in her clutches for good.*



*Nick is willing to submit to whatever Amy asks of him now that a baby is on the way. Flynn is making a larger comment, through this swift and decisive end to Nick and Amy's silent war, about the ways in which being in a marriage can either strengthen or destabilize someone. Married couples know each other better than anyone—and this means they know each other's weaknesses profoundly.*



*Go and Boney react in horror and muted solemnity, respectively, as they come to realize that Nick is firmly and forever under Amy's thumb. Go wants a different fate for her brother, but it is too late—Nick and Amy have chosen one another and all that comes along with the twisted partnership they've created.*



*Nick is effectively Amy's hostage, but the things he says about her in this passage aren't wrong. Amy has changed him, and has become his "forever antagonist"—she is the only one who challenges him and continuously forces him to be on his guard.*



### 64. AMY ELLIOTT DUNNE, TEN MONTHS, TWO WEEKS, SIX DAYS AFTER THE RETURN

Amy wonders about the nature of unconditional love. She was raised to believe that love *should* be unconditional—but if there are no conditions, she points out, "where is the challenge?" Unconditional love, Amy has decided, is undisciplined love—which is "disastrous."

*Amy offers up, in this passage, her ethos on the nature of love, commitment, and partnership. She doesn't think marriage should be a safe haven—it should be a tournament of wills. Amy is determined to reimagine her marriage to Nick in these terms.*



Amy's baby is due tomorrow—ironically, the same date as her and Nick's sixth anniversary. The theme this year is iron, and Amy considered getting Nick a pair of handcuffs, but decided that he wouldn't find it funny "yet." A year ago today, Amy thinks, she was "undoing" her husband—now, she is "almost done reassembling him."

Over the last several months, Nick has spent all his free time doting on Amy—rubbing her belly with lotion, running out to buy her pickles, and so on. Amy believes the two of them are "finally on [their] way to happiness," and are almost the bright, happy family she always dreamed they'd be. All they need to do is sustain it—but Nick doesn't have this part of the equation down perfectly just yet.

Amy says that earlier this morning, Nick was stroking her hair and asking her if she needed anything. Amy asked Nick why he was always so wonderful to her—he replied, "Because I feel sorry for you." When Amy asked him why, he told her plainly, "Because every morning you have to wake up and be you." Amy wishes that Nick hadn't told her the truth—she cannot stop thinking about it. Amy doesn't have anything else to say. She simply wanted, she writes, the "last word."

*Amy has a sense of humor about the incident which has surely come to be the defining one of her marriage—her disappearance—but knows that for Nick, being yoked to her forever is not a lighthearted subject.*



*Nick and Amy are back to where they started—their ordeal has simply brought them full-circle. They are back to pretending to have the perfect marriage, and going through the motions of love.*



*There are cracks in the seemingly perfect surface of Nick and Amy's marriage—and Nick is no longer willing to hide his true feelings all the time. His only weapon against Amy, at this point, is the truth—Amy, meanwhile, shows her hand here and reveals her utter desperation to continue controlling the tenuous narrative she has constructed.*





## HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

### MLA

Tanner, Alexandra. "Gone Girl." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 17 Apr 2019. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Tanner, Alexandra. "Gone Girl." LitCharts LLC, April 17, 2019. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/gone-girl>.

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Flynn, Gillian. *Gone Girl*. Crown Publishers. 2012.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Flynn, Gillian. *Gone Girl*. New York: Crown Publishers. 2012.