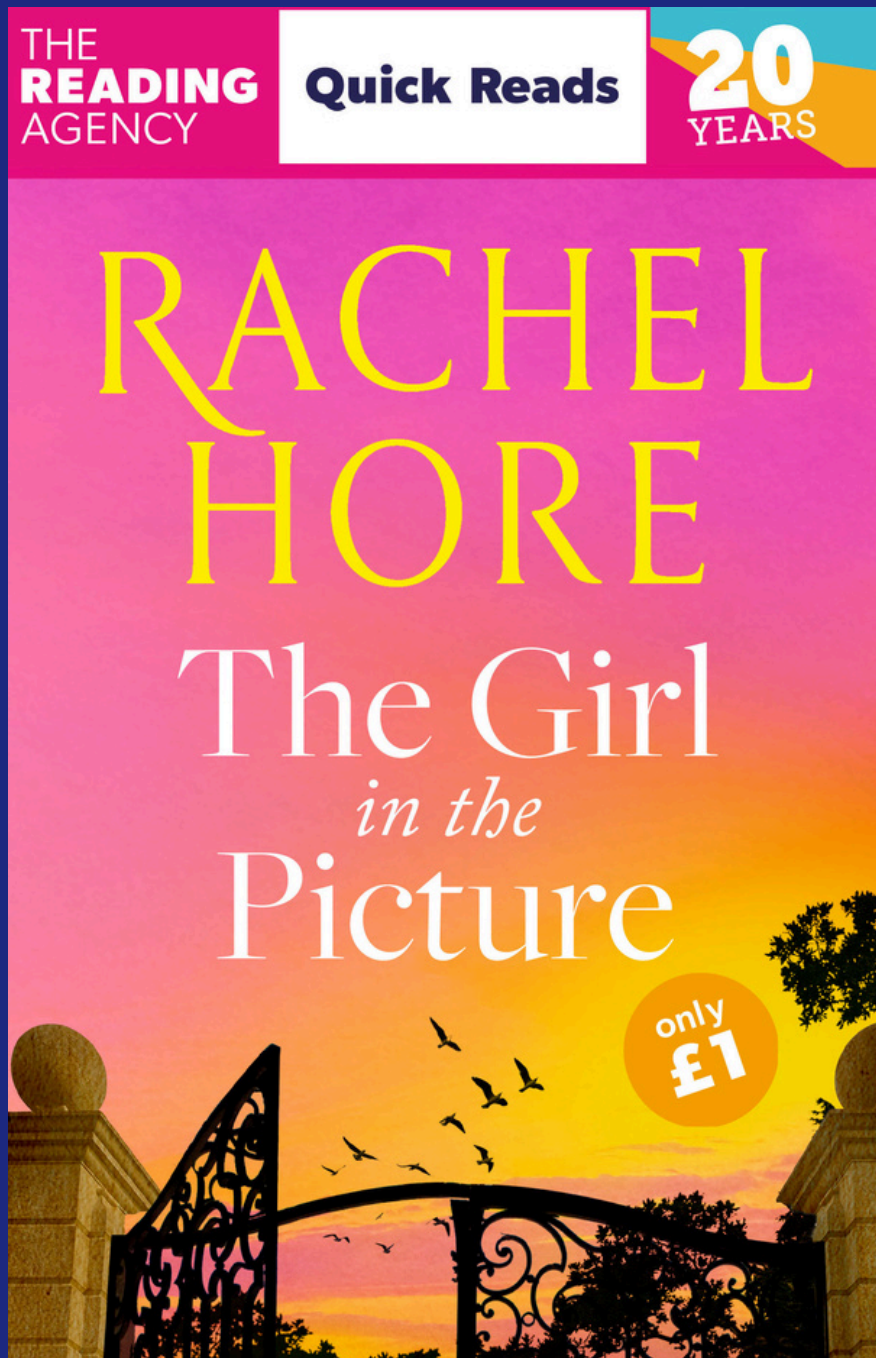


Discussion Guide



About the author

Rachel Hore worked in London publishing for many years before moving with her family to Norwich, where she taught publishing and creative writing at the University of East Anglia until deciding to become a full-time writer. She is married to the writer D.J. Taylor and they have three sons.

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Discussion Questions

Chapter 1

1. The house is described as mysterious and almost alive. How does the author use the setting to create mood and tension?

How does the house feel creepy or mysterious and how does the author make it feel that way?

2. The narrator has childhood memories connected to Farthington House. How do these memories shape her reactions when she returns as an adult?

How do her childhood memories change how she feels about the house now?

3. Kyle says, "Every family has skeletons in the cupboard." What hints do we get that the Rutherford family really does have secrets?

What clues show that this family is hiding something?

4. What is the effect of the final revelation, that the portrait looks like the narrator? How does this change the direction of the story?

Why is it shocking that the painting looks like her and what does it make you expect next?

5. Both the narrator and Kyle seem uneasy at times. Who do you trust more at this point in the story, and why?

Do you trust the narrator or Kyle more? Why?

Chapter 2

1. The narrator is shocked by how much the girl in the portrait looks like her. Why is this discovery so unsettling, and what does it add to the mystery?

Why is it creepy that the girl in the painting looks like her?

2. What kind of person is Aunt Julia? How do her behaviour, home, and reactions to questions shape your impression of her?

What is Aunt Julia like, and what kind of life do you think she's had?

3. Julia often says, "Mother wouldn't have liked it." What does this suggest about Diana and the way she controlled the family?

What does this tell us about Julia's mother and how she treated people?

4. What do we learn about Bird (Esme) in this chapter, and what questions are still unanswered about her disappearance?

What do we know about Bird, and what don't we know?

5. Do you think Julia is telling the whole truth about Bird? Why or why not? What makes this family so secretive?

Do you think Julia is hiding something? Why?

Chapter 3

1. Why is the discovery of the bluebird pendant in Gran's things so shocking and important to the story?

Why is it a big deal that Amy finds the pendant?

2. What does this chapter reveal about Amy's family and her relationship with her parents and Gran?

What do we learn about Amy's family and her past?

3. The pendant links Amy, her Gran, and the girl in the portrait. What different explanations could there be for this connection?

How could all these people be connected to the same pendant?

4. Amy tries to focus on her work but keeps thinking about Farthington House. What does this show about her state of mind?

Why can't she stop thinking about the house and the painting?

5. At the end of the chapter, Amy starts to "pitch" the article in a safe, ordinary way. Why do you think she avoids mentioning the mystery?

Why doesn't she tell her boss about the strange parts yet?

Chapter 4

1. Why is Amy so disappointed and frustrated by what she finds (and doesn't find) in her gran's papers?

Why does she feel she's getting close to answers but still stuck?

2. What do we learn about Amy's family history from the scrapbook, the family tree, and the marriage certificate?

What new things do we find out about her family?

3. How does this chapter strengthen the connection between Amy's family and Farthington House?

What makes the link between Amy's family and the house seem more likely now?

4. Dad and Amy remember Gran very differently at times. What kind of person does she seem to have been?

What was Gran like?

5. By the end of the chapter, Amy feels that "there was surely more than coincidence at work." Do you agree? Why or why not?

Do you think this is more than just chance? Why?

Chapter 5

1. Why does Amaya say there is “not enough of a story” yet, and what does this show about what kind of article she wants?

What is missing from the story so far?

2. What do Amy and Kyle learn at the museum, and why is it both interesting and disappointing?

What do they find out, and why isn't it enough?

3. How does Kyle's attitude to his family's past differ from Amy's?

How do they feel differently about the Rutherfurds and the mystery?

4. Why does Amy become especially interested in the women of the Rutherford family?

Why does she think the women are more important to the story?

5. The chapter ends with new hope when Kyle finds something in the borrowed book. Why is this a turning point?

Why does this feel like the story is about to change?

Chapter 6

1. Why does Amy visit the church and graveyard before going to see Kyle, and what does she learn there?

What new information does she discover about the Rutherford family?

2. How has Kyle changed Farthington House, and what does this tell us about him?

What does his “studio” say about his personality and his life?

3. Why is Margaret Jary's book so important to both Amy and Kyle?

What new clues does it give about the Rutherfurds and Amy's own family?

4. What kind of man was John Rutherford, according to Margaret's account?

How does this change or confirm what we already thought about him?

5. Why does Amy offer to speak to Aunt Julia, and why might this be risky?

What does this show about Amy's character?

Chapter 7

1. How does Julia's attitude towards Amy change during this chapter?

What moments show her becoming friendlier and more open?

2. What do we learn about John Rutherford, Ann, Diana, and Bird from Julia and the photograph album?

How do these personal details change our view of the family?

3. Why is Bird's story so mysterious, and why does her death seem especially significant?

What clues suggest there is more to her story than we yet know?

4. Why does Julia blame John Rutherford for “all the trouble”?

What kind of man does he seem to have been, and how has his behaviour affected the family?

5. How do Amy's feelings about Kyle complicate things at the end of the chapter?

Why does she decide to keep their relationship “cool and professional” for now?

Chapter 8

1. Why does Diana decide to write her story, and why does she find it hard to begin?
What does this tell us about her life and feelings?
2. How is Diana treated differently from Bird, and how does this shape her character?
Why does she grow up feeling jealous and unwanted?
3. What kind of father is John Rutherford, and how does he affect the whole family?
How does his behaviour control the household?
4. Why is school the happiest time in Diana's childhood?
What does it give her that home does not?
5. What signs are there by the end of the chapter that the family is heading towards serious trouble?
What changes suggest that a crisis is coming?

Chapter 9

1. How does Diana feel about Bird as Bird grows older and more beautiful, and why do these feelings become stronger?
What shows her jealousy and resentment?
2. Why is Diana's "season" so important to her father, and how does Diana hope it will change her life?
What does she want to escape from?
3. What does Will Bramerton represent to Diana, and why does their relationship ultimately disappoint her?
Why does she think he is her way out?
4. How and why does Bird's relationship with Mr Fuller begin, and what are the consequences for the whole family?
What goes wrong and how does it affect everyone?
5. Looking back, how does Diana judge her own life, her marriage, and her relationship with Bird?
What regrets does she have at the end of her memoir?

Chapter 10

1. Why does Amy feel that the Rutherford family story has finally come alive for her?
What has she understood that she didn't before?
2. Why is Amy tempted to use Diana's memoir for her article, and what stops her from doing so?
What moral problem does she face?
3. What question about Bird is still troubling Amy at the end of the memoir?
Why is this detail so important?
4. Why does Amy decide to contact Kyle, and what do they agree to do next?
How does this move the investigation forward?
5. What does this chapter show about Amy's character and her approach to other people's secrets?
What does she choose to do instead of acting selfishly?

Chapter 11

1. Why is Amy so angry when she finds her father in the loft, and what does this lead them to discover?

How does this accident change everything?

2. What is the significance of the letter addressed to Rosalie?

What does it reveal about Bird, the baby, and the bluebird pendant?

3. How does the birth certificate change Amy's understanding of her grandmother's identity?

What does the name "Susan Rosalie" prove?

4. Why is Amy shocked that her mother may never have known the truth about her own origins?

What does this say about how secrets were kept in the family?

5. How does the discovery affect Amy's relationship to Kyle and to the Rutherford family?

Why does she react strongly to the idea that they are related?

Chapter 12

1. Why does Amy feel that Farthington House now feels like a place where she belongs?

What has changed in her understanding of the family and herself?

2. What new information does Amy reveal to Kyle about Bird and her baby?

How does this confirm Amy's connection to the Rutherford family?

3. What shocking truth does Julia reveal about Amy's grandmother visiting Farthington House?

Why does this explain Gran's bitterness and sadness?

4. Why does Julia finally agree to let Amy write the story of the family?

What does this show about how Julia has changed?

5. How does the chapter show a turning point in Amy and Kyle's relationship?

Why is their kiss important to the ending of the story?