



# Gone girl

By Gillian Flynn

First published in 2012

## Genre & subject

Suspense fiction

Missing person fiction

## Synopsis

'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?' Just how well can you ever know the person you love? This is the question that Nick Dunne must ask himself on the morning of his fifth wedding anniversary when his wife Amy suddenly disappears. The police immediately suspect Nick.

Amy's friends reveal that she was afraid of him, that she kept secrets from him. He swears it isn't true. A police examination of his computer shows strange searches. He says they aren't his. And then there are the persistent calls on his mobile phone. So what really did happen to Nick's beautiful wife? And what was in that half-wrapped box left so casually on their marital bed?

## Author biography

Gillian Flynn was born in 1971 in Kansas City, Missouri and raised in midtown Kansas City. Both of her parents were professors at Metropolitan Community College–Penn Valley: her mother was a reading-comprehension professor, and her father was a film professor.

After attending Bishop Miege High School and graduating in 1989, Flynn attended the University of Kansas, where she received her undergraduate degrees in English and journalism. She spent two years in California writing for a trade magazine for human resources professionals before moving to Chicago and attending Northwestern University for a Master's degree at its Medill School of Journalism in 1997.

Flynn initially wanted to work as a police reporter, but chose to focus on her own writing as she discovered she had "no aptitude" for police reporting.

Flynn has published three novels: *Sharp Objects* (2006), *Dark Places* (2009), and *Gone Girl* (2012).

## Discussion starters

- Consider Amy and Nick Dunne as characters. Do you find them sympathetic...at first? Talk about the ways each reveals him/herself over the course of the novel. At what point do your sympathies begin to change (if they do)?

- Nick insists from the beginning he had nothing to do with Amy's disappearance. Did you believe him, initially? When did you begin to suspect that he might have something to do with it? At what point did you begin to think he might not?
- How would you describe the couple's marriage? What does it look like from the outside...and what does it look like from the inside? Where do the stress lines fall in their relationship?
- On their fifth anniversary, Nick wonders, "What have we done to each other? What will we do?" Is that the kind of question that might present itself in any marriage? Yours? In other words, does this novel make you wonder about your own relationship? And can you ever truly know the other person?
- Amy and Nick lie. When did you begin to suspect that the two were lying to one another...and to you, the reader? Why do they lie...what do they gain by it?
- Do you find the Gillian Flynn's technique of alternating first-person narrations compelling...or irritating. Would you have preferred a single, straightforward narrator? What does the author gain by using two different voices?
- A skilful mystery writer knows which details to reveal and when to reveal them. How much do you know...and when do you know it? In other words, how good is Flynn at burying her clues in plain sight? Now that you know how the story plays out, go back and pick out the clues she left behind for you.
- Flynn divides her narrative into two parts. Why? What are the difference between the two sections?
- In what way does Amy's background—her parents' books about her perfection—affect her as an adult?
- The Dunnes move to North Carthage, near Hannibal, the home of Mark Twain. How has *Tom Sawyer* been worked into *Gone Girl*...and why? What does that extra-textual detail add to the story?
- Did you suspect Nick's big secret? Were you surprised—shocked—by it? Or did you have an inkling?
- Does Amy try hard enough to like North Carthage? Or is she truly a duck out of water, too urbane to ever fit into a small, Midwestern town?
- What are Amy's treasure hunts all about? Why does she initiate them for Nick?
- Critics, to a one, talk about the book's dark humour and author's wit. What passages of the book do you find particularly funny?
- Movie time: who would you like to see play what part?
- Bryson paints the 50's as an innocent, almost idyllic time. Was it?
- Does the childhood Bryson describes take place in a lost America? He paints a rich portrait of community ties and identity. To what degree do those ties still exist? What has been lost? Consider the effects of TV and the computer.
- Discuss Bryson's mother, a professional woman, and his father, who was also absent a good deal of the time. How did their manner of parenting strike you? Do we have a different concept of parenting today?



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