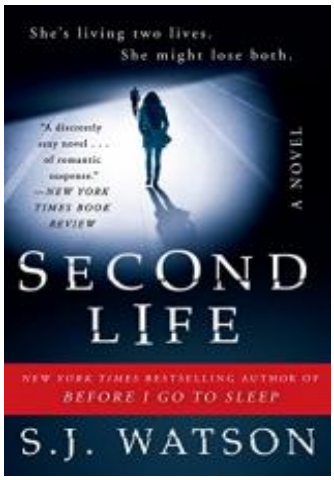
ReadingGroupGuides
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Second Life

by S. J. Watson



About the Book

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of BEFORE I GO TO SLEEP, a sensational new psychological thriller about a woman with a secret identity that threatens to destroy her.

How well can you really know another person? How far would you go to find the truth about someone you love?

When Julia learns that her sister has been violently murdered, she must uncover why. But Julia's quest quickly evolves into an alluring exploration of own darkest sensual desires. Becoming involved with a dangerous stranger online, she's losing herself...losing control...perhaps losing everything. Her search for answers will jeopardize her marriage, her family and her life.

A tense and unrelenting novel that explores the secret lives people lead and the dark places in which they can find themselves, SECOND LIFE is a masterwork of suspense from the acclaimed S. J. Watson.

Discussion Guide

1. How would you describe Julia?s personality at the beginning of the novel? What are the central concerns in her life?

2. What themes are introduced in the very first scene, at the photography exhibition? What role does Julia?s celebrated photo of Marcus play? How does it set up the rest of the story?

3. Having removed herself from the famous photograph, Julia admits that she ?used?art to lie.? What does she mean? How does this reflect Picasso?s statement that ?art is a lie that makes us realize truth??

4. As a young photographer, Julia ?didn?t consider a life lived unless it was also documented.? What?s drives this need

for documentation? What are the benefits and the dangers of many ways modern technology allows us to document our own experiences so extensively?

5. What kinds of addiction exist in the novel? Are some addictions worse than others?

6. Does passionate love or desire count as an addiction? Have you ever experienced a romantic feeling of ?addiction? with someone?

7. How do different characters --- Julia, Connor, Hugh --- process of Kate?s death? In what ways do they embody the Five Stages of Grief (Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance)? What elements seem essential to a healthy struggle with grief or loss?

8. Julia says her relationship to her husband Hugh ?went from being friends straight to being companions,? skipping all but a ?muted? physical passion. How might this have affected her behavior with Lukas? Do you think physical desire is an essential part of a healthy, happy relationship?

9. What are the pros and cons of online chat or dating sites? How has modern technology made such interactions more or less intimate?

10. To what extent is online social interaction about fantasy?

11. Throughout most of her interaction with Lukas, Julia finds herself full of ?anxiety, but also excitement.? What?s the relationship between these two feelings?

12. Julia?s fantasy life reveals an attraction to danger and even physical harm. What might be the source of such desire? In what ways is Lukas? attempt to act out Julia?s fantasies healthy or harmful?

13. Julia struggles with what she calls ?an inrush of banality? caused by her domestic life as a wife and mother. What about her life or personality makes it difficult for her to enjoy these roles?

14. Like the figure outside Julia?s bedroom window, much of her life is ?there, yet not there.? What are some of her tenuous experiences or relationships? How has the Internet altered the extent of it?

15. Julia admits to being pulled toward Lukas by ?the sense that something will happen.? How important and powerful is the idea of possibility? How does the electronic world of the internet and text and email fuel it?

16. In her desperate search for Connor, Julia suddenly realizes ?that we?re wearing masks, all of us, all the time.? What does she mean?

Author Bio

S. J. Watson was born in the Midlands. His first novel was the award-winning BEFORE I GO TO SLEEP, which has

sold more than four million copies in over 40 languages, followed by the critically acclaimed novel SECOND LIFE. S. J. Watson lives in London.

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