Out of Hours

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The Girl On The Train

LOOKING INTO THE LIVES OF OTHERS

The Girl On The Train

Paula Hawkins

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We have all travelled on a train and stared, often absent-mindedly, out of the window. The trains in and out of London pass Victorian terraced houses which, at first glance, might all seem pretty similar. But imagine travelling the same journey every day as a commuter to and from work in the city. You might already do this? Those houses, if you look, are all different with often visible evidence of the lives of the strangers who are inside, behind the old brick work and sash windows, and outside in the gardens running down to the railway line. The train allows a glimpse into the unknown world of the people who live beside the track, from the equally anonymous world of the railway carriage.

Most GPs, myself included, love the stories accompanying every patient entering their consulting room. Whatever the patient's presenting problem, there is a multi-layered backdrop of complex personal circumstances and experiences which we ignore at our peril. The consultation is our window into the lives of the people we look after. They are familiar to us, but do we really know the whole story?

The Girl on the Train is a best-selling thriller that has nothing to do with medicine at all. But it does examine the complexity of individuals, and the effect we have on each other, through a journey into the lives of the people living beside the tracks, and some of the people travelling on the trains. From the carriage, the main character Rachel is witness to the comings and goings of an interconnected group of people living next to the railway. Over time commuting to and

from work, she has developed a distant familiarity with the occupants of one of the houses. Then one day, the characters she has previously only ever watched and pondered come into her real world when a sudden event means her imagination collides with harsh reality.

The story is told from the perspective of Rachel and two other female characters, all of whom have very different lives and experiences but are similarly flawed. The author's sometimes scathing description of their personalities, and the social norms and aspirations which drive them to be this way, is exquisite. Each has dark attributes, often as a consequence of past events, which drive their behaviour. The interactions between the characters are subtle and evolve as the novel progresses. I want to refrain from giving you too many details to ensure the suspense is not lost!

The book has been likened to a British version of *Gone Girl*. The novel is certainly a fast-paced race through an exciting series of events keeping the reader totally gripped. I'm not a particularly speedy reader but polished this book off over a bank holiday weekend. It's one of those you reluctantly put down to eat dinner and can't wait to pick back up again the moment your plate is empty.

The perception of reality that we have as

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GPs (and as people, of course), is as much about how we view the world as the events that actually occur. The patient we see across the consulting room, and imagine we know so much about, is just a snapshot of their whole reality. There is so much we cannot and will not ever know.

This book is exciting, well-written, and an easy read to enjoy after a busy day. I promise you will not be disappointed and be kept guessing right to the end.

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