The passage begins by focusing on the normality of the visit to the supermarket. Even at this stage, however, the father is trying to remember details of the other shoppers in a way that you wouldn’t if this was a boring shopping trip. This alerts us to the possibility that something awful will happen. When the father talks about this being ‘a desperate memory’, this adds to the sense of disquiet. The details of the figure and the dark coat draw our attention away from the normal, everyday description and make us more alert.

In the second paragraph the father is focused on what is happening in front of him at the checkout. The words ‘Kate was gone’ form a single short sentence and so come as a real shock to the reader.

At the word ‘traffic’, the focus shifts again. It’s like a danger signal has flashed on and in the next paragraph the pace increases as he rushes to the street, taking the reader with him. McEwan increases the pace by letting us hear the father’s speeding thoughts as he searches. Now the writing takes on a frantic, blurred quality – like a dreadful dream. We continue to hear the father’s thoughts as they switch between fear and reassurance. We see the supermarket through the narrator’s eyes as he seems separated from this world. At this point, the writer introduces the physical symptoms of panic. He is still in control, though, until he loses any sense of embarrassment and shouts his daughter’s name, which changes the focus again.

Now, ‘Faces were turning towards him’ and we feel their empathy. As the other shoppers become aware of his situation, the focus draws back. We see the supermarket from a wider angle, with the father at its centre, striding around and bawling his daughter’s name. Finally, we move away from the father’s point of view and join the other shoppers.

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