

Blackthorn Winter Study Guide

Blackthorn Winter by Sarah Challis

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Plot Summary

Blackthorn Winter is a novel by Sarah Challis. The story follows Claudia Knight, who changes back to her maiden name and moves to the countryside, after her estranged husband is sentenced to prison. Claudia Barron, married to Roger Barron, had been living the high-life in London before he is indicted for ripping people off, and before he leaves Claudia for his mistress, Carla. To escape the notoriety of the trial and its aftermath, Claudia finds a cottage in the country to hide away and start a new life.

Claudia decides it is best to hide her true identity from the villagers. She feels if they know who she is, they will shun her. As Roger prepares for an appeal, the news reporters are starting to smell a story once again. This causes them to start looking for Claudia and even reaching out to her two grown children, Jerome and Leila. The reporters get a lead on the family's location when Jerome is injured in a bus crash in India that sends him home to Claudia with a broken leg.

For the first time in her life, Claudia is learning how to depend on herself, rather than her husband, to take care of the house, pay the bills and live life. Claudia starts working and she starts to interact with and get to know her neighbors. As the novel and the story unfold Claudia falls in love again, her daughter Leila becomes engaged, she befriends her elderly neighbor, and she learns that even when people find out who they are, they like you for you rather than who you married.

In addition, Leila and Jerome learn for the first time the pain that their father has put their mother through. Instead of blaming her for not supporting him while he's in prison, they realize that she has chosen a life that she needs to live for herself.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Some of the villagers are talking about an accident they witnessed with a woman driver and a tractor. Separately, the woman, Claudia, who is the woman who had been driving the car that had gotten into the accident recalls the accident. She recalls that the driver of the tractor hadn't been much older than Jerome. Claudia thinks about what a nice morning it is and that it's a shame that her husband had to be taken away this morning to start his prison sentence.

Claudia had chosen the village and the bungalow where she lives now when her London home had been up for sale and they had known her husband would have to go away to prison. Claudia tries to recall what caused her to lose her concentration and cause the accident on the road. Claudia has a small cut from the accident.

Later, Claudia's attorney calls. He tells her that they have moved her husband from one prison to another and that it will be on the evening news. Claudia asks for the lawyer to email her daughter Leila in New York to tell her. Roger, Claudia's husband, asks the attorney about how Claudia is doing and the attorney tells Claudia this on the phone. The attorney says her husband is optimistic about his appeal.

Claudia calls her mother, Olive, to warn her about seeing Roger on the news. By the time she calls, Olive has already seen Roger on the news. When Claudia sees the news coverage, she agrees with her mother that Roger does look well. Claudia also remembers how the trial included covering Roger's relationship with Carla, who is the woman with who he had had an affair during his marriage to Claudia.

Leila calls Claudia before she goes to bed. Leila says she wants to visit her father. Claudia tries to convince Leila to write to him instead. Leila tries to convince Claudia that she must forgive Roger. Claudia tells Leila to come visit her but Leila insists this would make it look as if Leila is taking her mother's side.

In the middle of the night, Claudia gets up and goes outside to enjoy the beautiful quietness of the night. Then, she hears the sounds of breaking glass coming from next door.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Claudia infers that she has just moved to the bungalow where she lives because it doesn't feel like home yet. It suggests that Jerome is Claudia's son. It seems as if Claudia has moved to the village and changed her last name to hide her identity from the villagers in her new village. It seems as if Claudia has chosen this bungalow because the shrubs and trees grow around the property creating a sense of privacy.



Claudia's memories indicate that Roger was involved in a high profile case. The trial had been all over the news at the time. It still is. It infers that possibly he had been stealing people's money because it is implied they had been wealthy when living in London. When Claudia thinks about the man on the tractor in the accident that afternoon, she starts to think about sex and the fact that she's a woman. This foreshadows she might end up having an affair with the young farmer.

Claudia hearing the breaking glass next door infers that her neighbor, Julia, is the victim of a break-in and possibly a murder.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Julia Durnford, Claudia's neighbor, is remembering the first time she had seen Claudia. She remembers how Claudia looks glamorous and careless, but isn't beautiful. Julia catches her first close-up glimpse of Claudia when Julia brings Claudia some of her homemade marmalade. Julia vows to make it her job to make Claudia to feel comfortable, since Julia lives in the most important house and was born and raised in the village. Star Bishop is Julia's cleaning lady.

Julia is very involved in the committees and goings-on in the village. She is also very busy during the holidays when her son comes home from college and her daughter comes home from boarding school.

Julia decides to have a party. She'll have her husband think of a single man to invite and Julia plans to invite Claudia. That night, when Peter gets home, they eat and then Peter spreads the paper to read, while Julia goes on about the dinner party. That night when Peter is going up to bed, he sees Claudia standing in her backyard. It's his first glimpse of his new neighbor.

It is from her other neighbor, Valerie Pomeroy's house, where Claudia hears the crashing glass. Peter sees Claudia enter her home. Claudia is looking for shoes to go check on Valerie. Claudia also picks up a hammer and uses it to try to gain entrance to Valerie's home.

Claudia finds Valerie drunk and slumped on the floor of her home. Valerie cut her hand when she had fallen with the glass in her hand.

Claudia starts crying for the first time since her husband was taken away. She helps Valerie into one of her kitchen chairs and then goes home. The next morning, Claudia wakes up at 7 and starts to get ready to search the newspaper for a new job. She decides to apply for the position as a school cook because she has worked in the same position in the past.

Claudia assesses the condition of her home. She decides the bathroom represents the old, disabled man who lived there before her. As she drinks her coffee, she decides that the kitchen is okay. Claudia realizes that she is lucky to be in her new home and have the freedoms that she has to live her life, that she has her children and her health.

A Land Rover pulls up in Claudia's driveway. Claudia wonders who it is.

Rosco gets off the school bus looking for his friend, Sean. Rosco is Star's son. Rosco has fags in his pocket and his skateboard in his hand. The night before, Rosco had gone to view the car Claudia had been driving and left where the accident had been to see if there was anything good to steal. Rosco remembers there hadn't been anything



good to steal, not even a radio, when Sean walks up and he and Rosco go behind the precinct to smoke.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Julia and Claudia seem to be polar opposites to each other. While Claudia is fashionable and graceful Julia is comfortable in her gardening clothes. It seems as if Peter might be having an affair with one of the women at his office. Since Claudia is breaking into Valerie's house, any crime that takes place in it might be blamed on her even though she is innocent.

Reality seems to be hitting Claudia for the first time in a long time.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

In the morning, Peter realizes he drank too much the night before. Julia offers him breakfast but Peter declines. Peter asks if she decided on a date for the dinner party, but Julia says she didn't and suggests they pick a date now. Peter starts thinking about the neighbor he had seen the night before and is intrigued by her. Peter leaves while Julia is outside hanging out the laundry.

When Peter drives past Claudia's, he sees Anthony Brewer's Land Rover is parked in the driveway. Claudia finds a handsome man standing on her doorstep, saying it is his tractor Claudia ran into the previous day with her car. He says that it looks like her car is a complete write off. As he starts to drive away, he asks if Claudia is single, and suggests that he'll get her out into the village for a drink.

Claudia goes out to mail her application in for the cook job. On her way back home, she sees a black and white horse with a skinny 10-year-old girl with brown hair riding on the horse bareback. Claudia strikes up a conversation with the girl, Jena.

Betty, the cleaning lady, arrives to clean Mrs. Pomeroy's house, whom she calls Mrs. P. While she used to clean daily, now she only cleans two days a week. When she's putting out the trash, she finds a broken gin bottle wrapped in newspaper. Mrs. P comes through the kitchen dragging mud all over the clean floor. Betty asks what happened to Mrs. P's hand. Mrs. P says she cut it on glass. She thinks about how she woke up with the cut but doesn't remember how it happened.

Mrs. P. goes up to her study to write. Claudia mentions Mrs. P's new neighbor when she works her way to cleaning upstairs. Betty tells Mrs. P. about Claudia's car accident. When Betty moves on to another room, Valerie has a fleeting memory of Claudia crying in her lap, but finds it strange because she thinks she's never met Claudia.

Anthony Brewer calls to tell Claudia he has an extra car she can borrow. When they hang up, Claudia calls her sister-in-law Minna to arrange lunch for the following day because Claudia plans to go into town to buy paint. Claudia starts to clean up the cottage and unpack her boxes. Julia catches Claudia throwing out some expensive china. Julia insists Claudia try to sell the china rather than just throw it away. Julia also invites Claudia to dinner on Saturday at eight o'clock. Julia offers to help Claudia finish cleaning up, but Claudia declines. Later, Claudia thinks that she might be able to sell the china for enough money to buy a new car.

Anthony's brother insists he must be loaning Claudia a car because she's good looking. Anthony confirms that Claudia "isn't bad at all."



Chapter 3 Analysis

Peter is interested in finding a date for the dinner party because he knows that his intriguing neighbor will be one of the dinner guests. It seems as if Anthony Brewer is interested in pursuing more than a friendly relationship with Claudia. Claudia fights the urge to succumb to the help of a man, while playing the damsel in distress, even though it would be so much easier for her to act this way and let someone else take care of everything.

Mrs. P places herself and Betty in the same category. Both women are alone, but strong women. Claudia thinks she will take Anthony's help for now and then get her own car when she gets a job and the insurance check from the car. It foreshadows that she'll become involved with and dependent on Anthony Brewer instead.

Minna has news about Roger that she is going to have to tell Claudia. Claudia recalls some of her own furniture that went to auction from their home in London. This suggests that Roger has to pay restitution to his victims so their belongings had to be sold.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Star Bishop sees Jena riding her horse when she should be at school. She thinks about how Rosco always gets in trouble for being truant but this Jena girl doesn't. Star also thinks about how Rosco only has a couple more weeks before he finishes high school. She remembers when she had been between 14 and 16, she had changed her name from Stella to Star and then she had gotten pregnant with Rosco. Star had been living in a home provided by the state when she requested a housing transfer to a place in the country. Star had moved with Rosco, but Rosco's father, Billy, hadn't liked it. Now, Star has nine of her own cleaning clients and her own car. One of her cleaning clients is Julia Durnford.

Star complains to Monica about Jena skipping school. Monica tries to explain to Star that the traveling people, of whom Jena is one, are not as bad as some of the previous ones they've had living in town. Monica passes Star a cup of coffee and gives Star some out of date crisps to give to Rosco.

Claudia is painting the cottage walls when the phone rings. It's Mrs. Peck from the primary school responding to Claudia's application for the cook's position. She's letting Claudia know they've filled the position. Claudia asks if there is anything else she can do and Mrs. Peck says not at this time, but says she'll keep Claudia's information on file.

Claudia drives up in the truck Anthony has loaned her to meet Minna for lunch. Minna asks about Anthony and Claudia tells her about him. Claudia admits she finds him relatively attractive. Claudia tells Minna that Anthony is a bachelor who lives with his brother. Minna suggests that they are homosexuals, but when Claudia insists they are not, Minna says Claudia is lucky to have two bachelors of their caliber available to her. Minna tells Claudia that a newspaper wants to chronicle Roger's story and Roger wants to cooperate with the story. Part of the story will be about their marriage and the children.

Claudia goes home and cuts off her hair. Anthony asks about it the next morning when he shows up at her house. He says he likes it and that it suits her. Anthony tells her he'll see her on Saturday at the Durnford dinner party. Mrs. Pomeroy pulls up in Claudia's driveway. During a break from painting, Claudia takes a walk. She thinks she sees a man in the bushes.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Claudia getting turned down for the job turns Claudia's hopeful outlook into disappointment. Claudia thinks of Minna and Roger as polar opposites, even though they are flesh and blood. Claudia would trust Minna with her life but she doesn't trust Roger at all. When Roger does the story, it will end up outing Claudia's true identity to



the villagers in the town where she now lives. Minna reveals that Knight is Claudia's maiden name, so it isn't really a fake identity but her identity prior to marrying Roger. The man Claudia thinks she sees is a reporter trying to spy on Claudia for Roger's story that is about to break in the newspaper.

Apparently, the bachelor Peter invites to dinner with Claudia is Anthony Brewer.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Lila Barron often walks to her job as a financial investment banker at First City. Lila uses power walking to work as a way to burn off all of the energy she has. She is very competitive. She prefers to go au natural, and rebuffs designer name brands, manicures and facials, but she's also pursued by some of the most popular men at work. While she is very strong and independent, she is also very sensitive when it comes to what people think of her.

She shares a flat with two other English girls, even though they live in New York. Her strength and her weakness is her very emotional state and public display of these emotions. Lila finds out that her mother has filed for divorce, which she detests because she thinks her mother should have waited until her father was out of prison. Lila is very selfish about her mother's decision, only thinking of how it will affect Lila and her brother, Jerome.

Lila knows of her father's infidelities. Her father had even moved in with his mistress, Carla, before going away to prison. Even though her father going to prison is shocking to Lila, her loyalty to her father is unwavering.

When Lila gets to work, she talks to her boss, Marianne, about her mother filing for divorce. She also says she has found out that her mother has gotten a job picking mushrooms. Lila insists that one of her father's friends could have gotten her a better job. She also says that Claudia had been offered free places to live in London, but instead chose to move to the country. Marianne suggests Lila book a flight home to see her mother.

Claudia is torn between driving to work and catching the bus with the rest of the women who pick mushrooms. She decides to spend the money on gas to avoid talking to the women who'll want to know about her past and her life. When Claudia drives up in the truck, the women know that Claudia is the one who had an accident with the tractor and that Anthony Brewer has loaned her the truck.

Monica and Greg, who is the farmer driving the tractor with which Claudia collided, gossip about Claudia working at the mushroom farm. Greg leaves to hoe in the Durnford garden. Valerie and Betty are also gossiping about Claudia getting work at the mushroom farm.

Claudia returns home dirty and exhausted. She's having a hard time keeping up with the other women, no matter how hard she tries. She takes her lunch in the cab of her truck. What she likes about the work is that she can work at her own pace. Claudia finds some eggs on her front door. She finds a letter from Julia shoved into the letter slot telling her



about the china man and the china she wants to sell. Claudia assumes it is Julia who left the eggs.

When Claudia contacts Julia about the eggs, she says it wasn't her. She suggests it might have been Claudia's other neighbor, Valerie Pomeroy. Julia confirms Claudia will be attending the dinner on Saturday.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Even though Lila is living in America, she continues to embrace her English roots. Lila is a very black and white person. She believes what she believes and doesn't think of anyone else, or listen to what anyone else has to say. It seems as if Lila got her job because a family friend knows the vice president of the bank. Claudia has chosen to break free of Roger and all ties to him by moving to the country and trying to make it on her own. Claudia continues to want to provide for herself and fend on her own by landing the job at the mushroom farm. Everyone finds it ironic that Claudia is alone but doesn't really talk to anyone in the village or at her job. The villagers also find it ironic that the only person to whom Claudia talks is Julia, and Julia's class of people and status don't work at mushroom farms.

It will turn out that someone else left the eggs for Claudia, not Julia.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Peter Durnford is annoyed that Anthony Brewer has been invited to dinner. Peter thinks Anthony is a threat to Peter's claim on Claudia. Peter prepares for the dinner party by picking out a tie from his extensive collection. Peter's cat gets into the trash and drags out pieces of fish, so Claudia calls for Peter to get her a drink, while she kicks the cat out the back door. Victoria, Peter and Julia's daughter, dreams of talking with Anthony Brewer when he comes for dinner.

The dinner party commences at about 8:15. Anthony Brewer is the last to arrive. Julia questions Claudia about her new job. Claudia mentions that she's taking the following week off because Lila, her daughter, is coming for a visit from New York. Claudia asks about the girl riding the black and white horse. Julia says she's a girl from the railway line. Julia rambles on and on complaining about the girl and the travelers, but Peter tells her to shut up.

Claudia asks for them to tell her about Valerie Pomeroy, but Peter suggests Claudia not ask Julia about her. Julia and Valerie had gotten into a debate about a construction project about which they don't see eye to eye. Peter tells her that Valerie and her husband were academics. Her husband died of cancer. After he died, she had become a recluse and wanted to build in the garden because she was short of cash. She has a son who comes for a visit occasionally from Hong Kong and he has a bunch of kids. Valerie is an expert on Indian culture and art. Julia mentions that Valerie is a drinker.

Victoria comes in and Claudia introduces herself. Victoria asks about seeing Lila in Claudia's yard. Claudia says it's her daughter visiting from New York. Claudia offers Lila's help to Victoria with riding her horse.

When Claudia comes home, Lila tells her that Jerome has been in an accident.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Victoria seems to be having some trouble with the boys at school. Victoria also has a crush on Anthony Brewer. Julia is investigating, amateurishly, to find out exactly what Claudia's story is. Claudia is uncovering information about the villagers while the dinner party guests are trying to uncover information on Claudia. It foreshadows that Jerome is seriously injured and killed in the accident.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Victoria is working her horse over hurdles. Victoria is sure that Lila isn't going to come to help her practice, when Lila shows up. Lila tells Victoria her brother broke his leg in a bus crash so she had some phone calls to make before coming. Lila and Victoria trade places so Lila can see what the horse, Vinnie, can do. Anthony Brewer shows up and seems taken with Lila.

Claudia and Minna have a discussion on how Jerome is going to get stateside. When Lila arrives home, she asks Claudia if there is any more news on Jerome. Lila confronts her mother about not talking to Roger about Jerome and then bursts into tears. Lila tells Claudia she's going to ride the horse again in the morning and that the farmer who gave Claudia the truck is going to give her a lift to London. Claudia worries that Lila might reveal too much information to Anthony Brewer. Later, at dinner, Claudia discusses not revealing too much information during her trip.

Claudia and Lila speak to Jerome on the phone. The next day, Lila is working with the horse in the paddock. Betty and Valerie have a discussion about Lila. Betty also tells Valerie that Rosco got in trouble on Saturday night for breaking into a building.

Lila returns safely home to Claudia's cottage. Lila tells her mother she met up with the gypsy kid and they jumped their horses together. Lila tells Julia that Victoria needs more riding lessons, but Julia says they can't afford any more lessons, that it's the horse's fault. Lila tells Claudia there is an ambulance outside of Valerie's house. When Claudia goes to Valerie's house she sees paramedics working on Valerie, who is on the floor. Betty tells Claudia that Valerie had a heart attack.

When Star doesn't show up on Monday, Julia finds out it is because Rosco got in trouble. She drives Victoria back to boarding school on Sunday.

Chapter 7 Analysis

It's ironic that Claudia is taken with Anthony Brewer, but Anthony Brewer seems to be interested in Lila. Greg drives by on the tractor and notices how beautiful Lila is and they wave at each other. Betty also notices Lila riding the horse and notes how tall and big Lila is. Someone has been stealing the eggs from Valerie's chickens, so whoever delivered the eggs to Claudia probably wasn't Valerie.

With Valerie's health deteriorating, it foreshadows Valerie will die before the novel ends.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Rosco and Star get in a verbal and a physical altercation after he gets in trouble with the police. Star had believed that Rosco had been at Sean's house when he was really breaking into the building and then spending time in jail. The garage owner promises to keep the job open for Rosco, even though he has gotten into trouble. Anthony Brewer's Mercedes pulls out in front of Star and Rosco when they are returning from his parole officer. Star sees a blonde girl in the passenger seat.

When Anthony picks Lila up for the ride to London, Anthony asks about Claudia and Jerome. Lila says Claudia went with Valerie in the ambulance. Lila suggests that Claudia is interested more in needy people than those who fend for themselves.

When Claudia gets to the hospital with Valerie, the doctors take Valerie away. Claudia calls Valerie's son, Christopher, in Hong Kong with the phone number Betty had given her. Claudia slips and says she's Claudia Barron, but then corrects herself. While visiting Mrs. Pomeroy, Claudia sees the newspaper story about Jerome's accident and Roger's incarceration in the newspaper, so she leaves the hospital.

Victoria is back at boarding school. Victoria feels as if she is invisible or without an identity when she is at school. She feels as if she has an identity, however, when she is at home. The girls at school make Victoria feel immature.

Lila tells Anthony where he can drop her off. Anthony gives her his London number in case Lila needs to reach him.

Julia phones Claudia to check on Jerome. Julia also asks about Valerie. When she hangs up, Julia tells Peter that there is something odd about Claudia because Claudia is not forthcoming.

Lila is led into a meeting room. Her father is escorted into the room as well. Lila finds her father is jaunty. Claudia goes to the airport to meet Jerome's plane, where the ambulance is to pick him up and take him to the hospital. It's been a year since Claudia and Jerome have seen each other. Claudia finds Jerome to be extremely thin and his skin dark brown.

Chapter 8 Analysis

When Lila changes the subject when Anthony asks about her father, he realizes Lila and Claudia both seem to be secretive. While each of the characters has their own trials and tribulations in life, what happens to them individually overlaps and affects the other characters in the novel. By the end of the novel, their lives will be fully intertwined. Once

Julia reads about Jerome's bus accident and Roger's story in the newspaper, she will put two and two together and figure out Claudia's true identity.

The calm gaze Claudia sees in Jerome's eyes suggests that he is altered by witnessing the deaths of the 25 people who were on the bus with him.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Jerome yells his throat hoarse calling for the puppy Finn that Lila bought for their mother. On top of it, Jerome is having a hard time walking around with his crutches to try to find the dog. Claudia is now working at the primary school as the cook because the cook they had hired wasn't a success. Jerome hears a tractor, sheep and an airplane, but nothing else as he hobbles down the alley looking for Finn. Jerome realizes he misses India, which is brilliant compared to the blandness of the countryside where he is now. He hears birds squawking, which leads him to Valerie Pomeroy's house, where Finn is chasing Valerie's chicken. Jerome uses his crutch to stop the puppy and he is able to grab Finn. Another dog is there with one of the chickens in its mouth. Jerome gets the chicken away from the dog with his crutch, but the chicken is dead.

Valerie is trying to stay healthy since her trip to the hospital. When she runs into Jerome, she can't remember where she was going. Valerie comes out of her house and sees Jerome with a puppy in his arms, another dog and one of her chickens at his feet. Valerie gets angry and demands an explanation. Jerome apologizes profusely. Valerie recognizes the terrier at Jerome's feet, which is the neighbor's dog. Valerie shuts the terrier in an outhouse and invites Jerome inside with the puppy. Jerome says Valerie knows his mother. She says she knows about his leg and Jerome says he knows about her heart.

Victoria answers the phone when Valerie calls for Victoria to get her dog that has slaughtered one of Valerie's chickens. Victoria tries to call her mother's cell or her father at his office, but can't get in touch with either one of them. Victoria heads toward Valerie's house to get the terrier, Skye, who is deaf. Victoria meets Jerome and learns that Skye has been shut up in the outhouse as punishment. After apologizing, Valerie invites Victoria to join them for a cup of hot chocolate and a discussion about India. Victoria asks for Lila. When Jerome finds out Victoria and her family aren't going away for the summer, he invites her to come and visit him.

Valerie and Jerome discuss the grandiose parts of India that are a drastic contrast to the poor living conditions there. In a family picture, Valerie points herself out, which baffles Victoria because Valerie is the prettiest one, but ironically has turned into the direct opposite as an old woman.

When Victoria says she has to go, Valerie tells her to come back in an hour to pick up Skye. Jerome decides to leave with Victoria. Victoria takes Finn from Jerome and says goodbye to Valerie. Valerie invites them to visit her again. Valerie wants a drink but Betty got rid of all of the bottles except the Sloe Gin in the back of the pantry. Valerie remember how it had not been easy to be a girl, remembering her father's friend's knee across her back.



Claudia is leaving work at 3. She's totally exhausted. While the work is tiring, Claudia is finding satisfaction in feeding other people's children, just as she once fed her own children. Claudia thinks about how she had been prepared for Jerome's injury but not for his gaunt look. Claudia picks up Jena on the way and tells Jena she wants to talk about Jerome to see if Jena can help Claudia with how Jerome is feeling. They find Victoria and Jerome in the living room. Claudia realizes that Jerome sounds almost normal. Claudia has some concern that Jerome doesn't seem to remember what happened in the accident. He remembers catching the bus and then waking up in the hospital.

Later, as Victoria writes in her diary, she realizes she is in love with Jerome.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Jerome is affected by the tragedy of his accident because he starts to think of all of the horrible things that could happen to the puppy that has run away. Valerie insinuates the terrier that killed her chicken is Julia's dog. Jerome and Valerie have common ground because they are both injured, sick, and not what they once had been. They understand and appreciate each other. Victoria is going to develop a crush on Jerome. The memory Valerie has suggests that her father's friend raped her when she was 16.

Working at the school makes Claudia feel needed again. Claudia also finds comfort in the routine of the food schedule.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Lila loves visiting Paris. Lila also has positive associations with the city, from the time she spent there with one of her friends. Her first love affair had been with a boy in Paris. Lila is revisiting four years later. Lila meets another man while visiting Paris.

Lila's boss asks one of Lila's co-workers about her visit to Paris and her visit to her father in London. The co-worker tells Lila's boss that Lila's father is better than she had expected. The co-worker also brings up Jerome's accident.

Jerome is starting to feel more at peace in the countryside where his mother lives. Jerome often sees Jena's father during his early morning strolls with Finn. Jena's father is always heading into the woods. One morning, Jerome runs into Jena and he is amazed at how well her horse, Jigsaw, jumps. Jena admits to Jerome that she doesn't like school because some of the kids pick on her for being little and the fact that her family members are travelers. Jena asks if Jerome has friends, but he says they're all over the place, but not here.

After, Jerome starts thinking about his girlfriend. He remembers touching her on the bus right before the petrol tanker sideswiped the bus.

Claudia goes to her boss to talk about the problems Jena is having in school. Mrs. Peck, Claudia's boss, admits to knowing that they are aware of the problems Jena is having. Claudia asks if there is anything she can do to help Jena. Mrs. Peck says Jena doesn't try to make friends and that she is intelligent. Mrs. Peck suggests taking an interest in Jena, which will do more good than anything else. Mrs. Peck also says that her father is self-educated and knows more about flowers and fauna than anyone she knows.

Claudia wonders why Jerome can't talk with her but seems to be close to Valerie Pomeroy.

Rosco has been staying out of trouble. He realizes that he has a very good memory. He digs out the newspaper from the trash for a story about the fraudster's son being in a bus accident. Up in his room, he pulls out the postcard he stole from the woman's car from the accident. He sees the postcard is addressed to Claudia Barron. When he asks his mother, she says the Claudia woman is working at the primary school.

Christopher, Valerie's son, decides that he is going to visit his mother for the summer without his kids. Valerie is happy to see her son, but it's the children whom she truly enjoys during their visit. Valerie tells Betty that the children aren't coming for summer vacation. Betty is also disappointed because she looks forward to seeing the children every year too. Betty tells Valerie that Monica said there a newspaper man had been down at the station asking for Jerome.



Chapter 10 Analysis

Jena and Jerome relate over her loss of her grandmother and his loss of his girlfriend in the bus crash. Jerome does remember the bus crash and who he was with, but for some reason is keeping it a secret from his mother, sister and everyone else. The only person in whom he has confided is Jena because he feels they have a connection with their grief over losing someone.

It seems it will be Rosco who breaks the story on Claudia's real identity.

Valerie thinks of Jerome on the same level as she does her son, Christopher. She enjoys Jerome's company and always looks forward to her visits with him.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Jerome talks to Claudia about how long she plans on keeping her past a secret. Claudia alludes to the fact that Roger swindled and cheated people. Jerome admits that he's been corresponding with his father. Claudia asks Jerome if Roger plans on going through with the newspaper article.

Later, Claudia is getting ready for her first date—her first date since Roger and her first date with Anthony Brewer.

Jerome feels as if he can share his grief with Valerie. He doesn't feel he can share this with his mother because his mother cares too much. Jerome feels Claudia would simply want him to deal with and get over his grief, while Valerie allows him to experience it.

Julia discusses getting the garden ready with Peter. After Julia goes into the garden, Peter calls for Victoria to help them in the garden. Peter talks to his daughter about her more cheerful mood lately. She admits she has been but won't tell him why. Victoria mentions that Jim, her brother, thinks Jerome is too old for her. Peter says that four years difference might seem like a lot now, but it's not so much later.

Anthony picks Claudia up for their date. When Peter sees them drive off, he feels sad and his heart plummets. Anthony and Claudia talk about Jerome's recovery. They also talk about Valerie, her living alone, her drinking, and about her son sorting things out when he visits.

Rosco is thinking about how eccentric his mother is. Star wants to go on holiday with him, but Rosco thinks that kids his age don't go on holiday with their moms.

When Claudia and Anthony return from their date, they see a crowd huddled around a body on the ground. On the faces of the crowd members is anger and fear. One of the people is Jerome.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The reason Victoria is so much more cheerful is because of Jerome. Peter's falling for Claudia is more out of a loss of something between him and Julia than what he truly feels for Claudia. After all, he barely knows Claudia or anything about her. The body is one of the newspaper reporters spying on and trying to get a story about Jerome and Claudia.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

The man on the ground gets up, shakes Finn off his pant leg and runs away. Victoria is screaming about how she hit the man. Peter Durnford says the man is a prowler whom Victoria spotted and that Victoria hit him with her stick. As they all start to dissipate, Peter assures Claudia that he is only next store if she needs him. When they arrive home, Peter suggests they not tell Julia what happened. Claudia admits to Jerome that the man's name is Freddy and that he's a freelance photojournalist. This is when Jerome realizes what his mother has had to deal with during the time his father has been in trouble.

Jena, Victoria, Jerome and the dogs all meet up to ride together. Claudia leaves a message for Anthony to let him know that she's not going to report the prowler to the police. Later, Anthony tries to convince Claudia otherwise, but Claudia admits that she knows the man. She admits the man is a journalist and asks Anthony not to say anything else to anyone. Claudia calls David Roundtree, Roger's lawyer.

Julia asks Peter what he was doing at Julia's that morning. He says he was dropping off a letter delivered to his house by mistake.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Anthony is going to figure out who Claudia really is. Slowly, the clues to Claudia's true identity are unraveling. It won't be long before everyone in the village knows who she is.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Lila is in love. She's flown to Paris for a long weekend and he's flown to New York twice. Lila's boss and coworker are talking about how secretive Lila is being about her new boyfriend.

Julia is focusing on getting the garden in shape for the people who will come on the tour that contributes to the church fund. Claudia discusses his father's appeal with Jerome. She says that David isn't sure about his grounds for appeal. Claudia asks Jerome to contact his sister and warn her. That night Jerome has a nightmare about the bus crash.

Julia is having a fit because Greg knocks something down when they are all trying to set up for the garden tour. Victoria and Star try to calm her down. Julia admires what a great job Star has done in cleaning the house for preparation of the tour. Julia and Victoria agree that Victoria's grandmother would be pleased with the look of the garden. Victoria thinks how she would like to live in Jena's bus, and that she plans not to have a garden when she has a home of her own.

On Friday morning, Valerie is awaiting the arrival of her son, Christopher. She discovers an email Jerome sent to his sister from her computer a few days before. She thinks that everything makes sense now that she's read it. She feels compassion for Jerome and Claudia. Valerie recalls Claudia breaking down in tears when she had come to check on Valerie that first night when she had been drunk. Valerie vows to provide her support to Jerome and Claudia.

Jerome tells Claudia that Roger's right to appeal has been denied by the judge. Roger has made a statement for the press. Jerome says he spoke to Lila at work but it had probably been hard for her to speak in front of everyone at her office. Claudia reads the notes Jerome took from his father's statement. Jerome also tells Claudia that Roger is being moved to a different prison.

Victoria notices a crowd of men standing outside the garden. She notices they all have cameras around their neck. Then she realizes that their interest is on Claudia's house. Julia asks the men what's happening. They all start asking Julia questions. They tell Victoria that Claudia's husband is in prison. Victoria flees to her home. Victoria calls Jerome to warn him about the men with cameras who want a story. He asks Victoria to get Anthony Brewer to bring up some kind of tractor to drive right through the crowd so he can escape. He tells Victoria to let his cell phone ring twice as the signal. He packs for him and his mother to last them for a few weeks.



Chapter 13 Analysis

Victoria is just biding her time with her parents. She's looking forward to a time when she can live her life the way she chooses, rather than always having to live life according to her parents' guidelines. Valerie starts to think of Claudia as she would one of her own granddaughters.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Christopher is cooking in Valerie's kitchen when Jerome flings himself into the kitchen. Christopher points a knife at Jerome until he identifies himself. Valerie walks into the kitchen. Jerome explains what's going on. Valerie calls Anthony and he agrees to help.

Julia is complaining that the photojournalists are ruining her garden. She can't believe that she's been living next to the wife of a notorious criminal and that Claudia never confided in her. Star enjoys taking care of all of the reporters who have taken over the tables set up in Julia's garden. When it starts to rain, the visitors start to leave. Peter thinks it's maddening that Anthony Brewer is the one who saved the day by clearing the lane with a tractor.

A party-like atmosphere is unfolding at Valerie's house. Claudia arrives and Christopher hugs Claudia as if she is an old friend. Claudia and Jerome stay at Valerie's house. Valerie and Anthony talk about the well-being of Claudia and Jerome. Valerie assures him that she will take care of them. Anthony doesn't like the thought of leaving Claudia alone with Christopher.

Jerome calls Lila to tell her where they are hiding. When Jerome says their father is being moved, Lila says she spoke to him yesterday, and that their father speaks in a really upbeat way about the appeal. When they start talking about the Durnfords, Jerome tells Lila that Peter is bonkers about Claudia.

As Claudia sits in the room where she is staying in Valerie's house, she feels the kindness of strangers that surrounds her. Anthony Brewer has just left from telling her that he is there for her. Claudia and Anthony had kissed. Jerome calls Victoria and gives her a hint on where they are staying. Victoria asks why Jerome hadn't told her about his father. Jerome tells Victoria he lost Finn. Victoria says they lost Skye too and that they are going out to look for the dog now. It's Jena, however, who finds the dogs.

Chapter 14 Analysis

While Claudia had thought all of the villagers would shun her if they found out her identity, ironically, some are embracing her and feel compassion for her. Jerome and Victoria are getting closer.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The summer turns into fall. The great weather is promising better yields in the field. Victoria isn't dreading returning to school for a new year as much as she thought she would. She feels a lot older because she's in love with Jerome. Victoria still feels guilty about Skye, who must have gotten out during the commotion of the garden party and was hit by a car. After the garden party, Jerome tells Victoria about his girlfriend who was killed in the bus accident. For a time after Skye's death, Julia doesn't even speak to Peter.

A rumor spreads around the village that Claudia has money from her husband's criminal activity stashed away. It starts when Claudia is spotted at a salon in London getting her hair done. Claudia isn't aware of the rumors because she is so busy working. What Claudia does notice is that Julia is cutting Claudia out of her life. Claudia thinks it's because Julia blames Claudia for Skye's death.

Christopher and Claudia grow very close. Christopher even says he would marry Claudia if he thought she would accept. He says it's because they get along so well and she would be a great mother to the girls, rather than the fact that they are in love. Valerie notices that Claudia and Christopher seem to be taken with one another as well.

Claudia also thinks how great Anthony Brewer is with planning and strategy. Claudia recognizes that Anthony's interest in her increases when he realizes the connection Claudia and Christopher have. After Claudia moves back into her own cottage, she goes on another date with Anthony, and they make love when they return to her cottage. When Claudia realizes that she and Anthony want two different things, she confides in Minna.

Jena is preparing to go to her new school. She's not dreading it too much because she's going into high school, where the kids are more spread out. Even the kids who used to give Jena a hard time are being picked on by the older kids.

Chapter 15 Analysis

It seems as if Julia and Peter are heading for divorce. Julia is really mad at Claudia because Julia senses that Peter is in love with Claudia.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Christopher discusses with Valerie that she needs to move somewhere smaller where she can have help, especially in light of her recent health scare. Christopher suggests they divide Valerie's home into three dwellings with three separate entrances. The largest apartment would be where he and the girls live when they are home from boarding school. The second would be for Valerie and the third for someone to take care of Valerie. Christopher admits that he asked Claudia to marry him, which shocks her slightly.

Claudia finds herself thinking more about Roger. She thinks it's because Jerome is gone and she is alone again. Claudia finds out that Christopher's youngest daughter, Rosie, was born with brain damage. Claudia says Roger will only have to serve half of his time if he behaves. Claudia says one of the reasons Roger is behaving is because Carla is expecting his baby. Carla has returned to the states to have the baby there. She confides this information to Valerie.

Star enjoys her holiday with Rosco on a Spanish beach. She returns to the village with a dark tan. When Star gets back, she heads to the Durnfords to clean before they return from their holiday. Star tells Monica that Rosco fell in love with a girl while they were on vacation.

The Durnfords don't enjoy their holiday as much. Peter stays in their hotel room reading all day instead of venturing out sightseeing. Even the sex is routine. Peter even tells Julia that he doesn't know if he can go on living with her.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Claudia finds it ironic that Roger left her for Carla, who is much more selfish and demanding than Claudia is. Rosco and Star are forming a closer relationship. Part of this is Rosco staying out of trouble. They also bond a bit more while they are on holiday. Peter infers that he wants a divorce.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Lila calls Claudia to tell her Carla had a baby girl. Lila is excited to have a half-sister, but Claudia is slightly disappointed. Lila's going to visit the baby because she was born in New York. Lila tells her mom that she's flying to London to visit her father and for business. Lila says she'll visit her mother at Christmas with Jerome.

Julia is taking a stand that her marriage to Peter mustn't end. When Peter picks up Victoria from the station, he realizes Victoria looks so happy because she's in love. Peter slips his arms around Julia, apologizes and tells her he loves her very much.

Rosco is thinking of how he can save up enough money to visit his girlfriend, Susie, especially, since he has loaned his mother some of the money he had saved. Rosco is Susie's first boyfriend. Rosco and Sean go banging on Jena's door while Jena is working on inputting data into the computer for her dad. As Sean starts to make an advance on Jena, Rosco says he hears someone coming. Sean throws something flammable that causes Jena's horse to run away and Rosco bangs on the bus door where Jena lives to tell her.

Claudia is soaking in a bath and can hear noises that must be coming from the bonfire she had seen the village children building. Rosco bangs on Claudia's door beckoning her to come help because something is wrong with Jena. Claudia sees Rosco is covered in brown smears and has blood on his hand. Rosco tells Claudia it's Jena's horse. They jump into Claudia's car with Finn, rushing toward Jena. They see Jigsaw lying in the lane with Jena cradling his head in her lap. Jena's face is streaked with tears and blood. Claudia realizes that the barbed wire fence cut through Jigsaw and Claudia sets to work trying to stop the bleeding, while she tells Rosco to call Anthony Brewer to get a vet to help them. The vet arrives and so does Julia. The vet says they've stopped the bleeding but he's worried about the trauma of moving the horse. Julia also arrives to help with the horse.

Later, Claudia tells Lila what happened, and how much help Julia had been in getting Jigsaw ready for transport. Julia even invites everyone in for sausages and coffee after the horrible ordeal.

Chapter 17 Analysis

While Claudia is jealous of Carla having Roger's baby, Claudia is also relating to Carla. Claudia understands how horrible Carla must feel having Roger's baby and having to raise her alone, without Roger being around.

Rosco is maturing because of the love he feels for Susie. He is being patient with her and not rushing her because he cares for her so much. Sean gives Jena an uneasy



feeling foreshadowing that Sean might do something to harm Jena. It appears as if Rosco makes up hearing someone coming to save Jena from being raped by Sean. If Jigsaw dies, it will set Jena back in her progress of getting over her self-consciousness and the kids picking on her at school.

Julia and Claudia might make up from working together to save Jigsaw. Peter is just pretending in order to put his marriage back together. His feelings for Claudia have not changed at all.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

When Claudia arrives the next morning, she finds Jena with the horse, but looks terrible. Jena's father had slept on the straw beside Jena and the horse. Julia says the horse drank water a few times, which is a good sign. Julia tells Claudia that Jena's father found a firecracker near where the horse had been tethered—saying it had been an attack. Julia also says that Rosco is involved. Claudia finds this odd because Rosco had been trying to help. When Claudia returns from work, she is happy to see the horse standing in his stable. Jena is happy because he drank two buckets of water, even though the horse hasn't eaten yet. When Claudia hugs Jena, Jena starts to cry. Claudia takes Jena to the bungalow to bathe and rest.

Claudia calls Julia to tell her where Jena is. Claudia also offers to donate the stuff Julia wanted in Claudia's garage for the church fair. Julia insinuates she doesn't want the stuff in case it's stolen, but Claudia reassures her that none of it is stolen. Claudia calls Valerie, who is away, to bring Valerie up-to-date on everything.

Claudia talks with Jena's father, who is worrying about how to pay for the horse's care. Claudia tells him not to worry about it. Monica suggests that someone had thrown a firework that caused the horse to bolt and be injured. Monica says Rosco had been there and fills Star in on the details. Star also discusses the situation with Julia. Star drives to the primary school where Claudia works and confronts Claudia. Claudia makes Star stop short when Claudia says she's willing to give a statement on how helpful Rosco had been.

Later, Star asks Rosco about what happened. She tells Rosco that Claudia says Star should be proud of Rosco. Star asks if it had been Sean who threw the firecracker but Rosco says he doesn't want to talk about it and that she should stop listening to what the villagers are saying. He just wants to forget the whole incident.

Claudia visits Jerome in Cambridge one weekend. She finds his apartment sparse, but he's gained some weight and looks much better. Jerome intends on returning to India. They talk about Jena and Jigsaw. She says Jena is exercising Julia's horse, Vinnie, in exchange for the vet fees. Claudia tells Jerome that Rosco had given Jena some money to help with the vet bills one day when he came to visit Jena and Jigsaw with his girlfriend.

The week before Christmas, Jerome comes to Claudia's. He also drives to pick up his grandmother from the station. Claudia offers to cook while Julia offers to supply all of the food for the festivities. Julia says next year that she will invite Christopher and the girls for the meal. While cooking in Anthony's kitchen, Claudia sees a photo of Lila with Ivo and Anthony Brewer.



Chapter 18 Analysis

Julia assumes Rosco is involved because he had been there, and because he has been in trouble before, because of the people who are his friends. More and more of the villagers are seeing Claudia for who she is rather than for the man to whom she was married to at one time. Rosco is also showing his maturity level by giving the money he's been saving to visit his girlfriend to Jena to help her pay the vet bills. A photograph suggests that Lila's secret lover is Anthony Brewer.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Claudia leaves Anthony a note before she leaves. When she heads home, she realizes that she forgot her coat back on the kitchen chair in Anthony's kitchen. Claudia decides she has to hide the truth from everyone, including Lila.

Lila flies in on Friday. After spending some time with her family, she goes off with Jena to visit Jigsaw. When Anthony calls later, Lila speaks with him in a normal voice. Claudia says she can't come to the phone and Lila tells him. Claudia teases that somebody else asked her to marry him. On Saturday, at the hunting meet, Claudia is relatively cold toward Anthony. She overhears Anthony on the phone calling someone darling.

Lila bursts in the door from the hunt at 6 that evening. Lila says she's going out, but will be back in time for them to go to service together as a family the following afternoon. Sunday is Christmas Eve. Claudia shuffles around in the cottage while her mother sleeps, Jerome is at Valerie's and Lila is still out.

At the church service, Lila comes in with Anthony toward the seats Ivo was saving for them. Jerome points this out to Claudia. After the service, Lila says she has something to tell them and she's sporting a huge diamond ring on her left hand. She says he asked her last night and hooked her hand into Ivo's hand. The news spreads throughout the church crowd. Anthony whispers into Claudia's ear, asking her what this means for them.

Three months later, Valerie is talking about the construction on her home. Valerie asks Claudia if she ever considered Christopher's offer of marriage. Claudia admits she did, but couldn't have possibly said yes. Valerie tells Claudia that Christopher settled Jigsaw's vet bill and in return Jena is going to teach the girls how to ride and take care of a horse. Claudia thanks Valerie for being there for Jerome. She tells Valerie that Jerome had told her about his girlfriend who died in the bus crash when he had been home for Christmas.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Lila's normal behavior toward Anthony suggests that it isn't Anthony, but Ivo, who is Lila's lover. Claudia finally feels at home in the village. She feels like she belongs. Each of the villagers has come around to Claudia as well.



Characters

Claudia Knight

Claudia Knight is the wife of Roger. When Roger is sent to prison for his criminal activities, Claudia changes her name from her married name, Claudia Barron, back to her maiden name Claudia Knight. Claudia moves from their home in London to a cottage in the countryside.

Claudia is in her 50s and she has two grown children—Jerome and Lila. For the first time in her life, Claudia is learning how to do things on her own and to depend on herself. She gets a job picking mushrooms at first because she is turned down for the cook job at a local primary school. When the cook they hire doesn't work out, they ask Claudia to fill in on a temporary to permanent basis.

Claudia also meets a man and starts a love affair for the first time since she left her husband. At the start of the novel, Claudia wrecks her car in an accident with a farm tractor. It is the owner of the tractor with whom Claudia eventually starts a relationship, Anthony Brewer. Even though Claudia is in her 50s, she is really experiencing coming of age rites of passage while living in the country. She's learning how to trust again and how to make friends in the face of adversity, such as having a husband who is a criminal and in prison.

Julia Durnford

Julia Durnford is Claudia's neighbor. She was born and raised in the countryside village in which they all live and the novel takes place. Julia comes from a prominent family, so she is very involved in civic duties of the community. When Julia first learns of Claudia moving next store, she plans to introduce Claudia to society.

Julia has two children and is married to Peter Durnford. One of Julia's favorite pastimes is gardening, so she has a garden in her yard that she takes pride in tending. In order to introduce Claudia to one of the single men in the countryside, Julia plans a dinner party to which she invites Claudia.

When Julia first finds out that Claudia's husband is in prison, Julia pulls back from their friendship. Eventually though, Julia sees Claudia for the person she is rather than to whom she is married, so they rekindle their friendship.

Star Bishop

Star Bishop is a cleaning woman. One of her clients is Julia Durnford. Star has bright red hair. She also has tattoos all over her shoulders, and a couple more in intimate places. She has a son whose name is Rosco.



Betty

Betty is in her late 60s or early 70s. She helps to clean and take care of Valerie Pomeroy. When Valerie's son and grandchildren come to visit, Betty enjoys taking care of them as well. When Betty cleans Valerie's house, she also brings news and gossip to Valerie about what is taking place around the village.

Valerie Pomeroy

Valerie Pomeroy is in her 70s. She is a widow and originally from India. She lives on the other side of Claudia. Ever since her husband died, Valerie is known to drink until she is drunk. Claudia first meets Valerie when Claudia hears glass breaking in Valerie's house. Claudia finds Valerie passed out drunk on the floor bleeding. Valerie and Claudia become good friends after Valerie befriends Claudia's son, Jerome, when he is recovering from an accident.

Rosco

Rosco is Star's son. He is a senior in high school and a juvenile delinquent. He has a job waiting for him in a nearby garage when he graduates from high school. Rosco befriends one of the gypsy girls in the village, Jena. Rosco's best friend, however, throws a firecracker at Jena's horse one night causing the horse to flee and sustain injuries. Rosco starts to learn how to do the right thing. He protects Jena from harm by Sean. He runs to get Claudia's help in saving Jena's horse. In the end, he also lands a girlfriend for whom he truly cares, Susie.

Sean

Sean is Rosco's best friend. He is a delinquent as well. Sean is the one who throws the firecracker that startles Jena's horse and causes the horse to get cut on barbed wire.

Jena

Jena is one of the daughters of the gypsy travelers who are staying in the countryside. She lives in a bus with her father, who is a flower and fauna expert. Jena befriends Claudia, Lila, Jerome and Victoria. She loves to ride her black and white horse, Jigsaw.

Lila Barron

Lila Barron is Claudia's daughter. She works at an investment bank in New York City. Lila is very tall and sturdy. She doesn't shave her legs and she isn't concerned with fashion. At first, Lila is angry with Claudia for turning her back on her father. Eventually,



Lila and Claudia work through this. While traveling in London, Lila meets Ivo Brewer. They fall in love and get engaged by the end of the novel.

Jerome Barron

Jerome Barron is Claudia's son. When the novel opens, he is working in India. A bad bus crash breaks his leg, kills his girlfriend, and kills and injures many of the other passengers. Jerome comes to stay with Claudia to recover. Jerome ends up befriendng Valerie Pomeroy and Victoria. These two are the only ones he can tell about the death of his girlfriend. Eventually, he is also able to share this news with his mother.

Christopher Pomeroy

Christopher Pomeroy is Valerie's son. He lives abroad, but visits his mother with his children often. He is a widower. When he meets Claudia, he thinks she's great and he asks her to marry him and be a mother to his girls. Eventually, Christopher arranges for Valerie's home to be divided into three units, so Valerie can live in one unit, he can use one unit as a country home for him and the girls and someone to take care of his mother can live in the third unit.

Ivo Brewer

Ivo Brewer is Anthony's younger brother. He is not a huge part of the novel, but ends up becoming engaged to Lila by the end of it.



Objects/Places

Garden Cottage

The garden cottage is the home Claudia moves into when she moves to the countryside. The cottage was previously owned by a military gentleman who was old and retired. As Claudia starts to settle in to the garden cottage, she paints some of the walls and adds some new décor to make the home more her own.

Car

The car Claudia is driving at the beginning of the novel is the one in which she has an accident. She accidentally runs her car into a tractor—a tractor owned by Anthony Brewer. The car is left abandoned by the side of the road, so Rosco and his friend break into the car to see if there is anything worth stealing.

Truck

Anthony Brewer goes by Claudia's house after the accident and agrees to loan her one of his trucks. This is so she can get around town and back and forth to her new job picking mushrooms. Claudia agrees to borrow and drive the truck until she can save enough money to replace her old car.

Bus

The local gypsies, Jena and her father, live inside of an old school bus. The bus has been redone to act as a home for them. It is parked in the woods in the village. Jena is on the bus when Jigsaw is scared by the firecracker that Sean throws.

New York City

Lila lives and works for investment bank in New York City. She travels back and forth from the city to London to visit her father and her secret lover. She also comes back and forth from the city to visit her mother.

India

Jerome is living and working in India. It is also where he is in a bus accident that breaks his leg and kills his girlfriend. Valerie Pomeroy is originally from India. The country, its politics, and classes are all talking points that help Jerome and Valerie to bond.



Mushroom Farm

Claudia's first job is on the mushroom farm. She is one of the mushroom pickers. It is the first exposure she has to some of the villagers who also work picking, cutting and packaging mushrooms.

Primary School

Before landing the mushroom picking job, Claudia applies for a cook position at the primary school in town. Eventually, she lands the job as a temporary cook who could possibly turn into a full-time position. This is the same primary school where Jena attends school.

Julia's Garden

Julia's garden is part of the annual tour that the villagers buy tickets to see. Julia spends a lot of time in her garden, as a stress reliever, but also to get it ready each year for the tour. When the reporters invade the village, they use the garden as their respite while trying to get pictures of Claudia and her family.

Church

At the end of the novel, the villagers are attending church for Christmas. The church is where Claudia finds out that Lila is in love with and engaged to Ivo Brewer, not Anthony Brewer.



Themes

Good versus Evil

The primary plot throughout the entire novel is that of good versus evil. Each of the characters experiences an inner struggle with good versus evil. For example, Claudia struggles with the evil things her husband did that landed him in jail. While she doesn't think of Roger as an evil person, she wishes to hide her relation to him so that the villagers in the countryside do not equate Claudia with his evil doing.

When Julia and Peter find out Claudia's true identity, they struggle with whether Claudia is a good person or an evil one. When Claudia donates goods out of her garage to the church project, Julia hesitates in taking them. Julia is worried that the items might be stolen or bought from the bad deeds in which Claudia's husband had partaken.

Jerome struggles with the fact that his life was spared in the bus crash. He is also having a hard time dealing with the fact that his girlfriend lost her life in the same crash. He questions whether he should be happy, carefree and able to go on with his life, when his girlfriend is dead. While Rosco has always been a delinquent, when Rosco thinks Sean is trying to rape Jena, Rosco does the right thing and stops Sean. Finally, Rosco struggles with the evil deed Sean does when he throws the firecracker and it sends Jigsaw into a barbed wire fence.

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that runs throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as losing a parent to prison or a loved one to death. Even though Claudia is an adult, she is experiencing a coming age of her own. She has always had a husband to provide for her and her children, but now she is alone. For the first time in her life, Claudia has to make her own money and take care of herself. This forces her to find a job, renovate her home and pay for her own purchases.

Jena and Rosco also experience a coming of age. They learn the difference between doing what is right and doing what is wrong. Jena also has to deal with bullying and adversity at school because of the alternative lifestyle she and her father live as gypsies. Finally, Victoria experiences her first true love when she falls in love with Jerome.

Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of this family—the Barrons. While every family has their trials and tribulations, the Barron family has its own family dynamics that are the same and that

are different from those of other families. In the end though, they are a family and they will get through it together, one way or the other.

At first, Lila takes her father's side. Lila thinks that Claudia should stand by Roger while he is in prison, even though Roger had left Claudia for his mistress before going to prison. At first, Jerome takes his mother's side, but then chooses to make contact with his father when Jerome returns from India. It shows that even in a family, the relationship that one member has with another is different from that of other members, even when they are all experiencing the same things.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view, from the perspective of the author. The novel swings back and forth between the present and the past. The present represents the time after Roger Barron goes to prison and Claudia moves to the countryside. The past represents the time leading up to Claudia moving to the countryside.

The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with each of the characters. This style of writing allows the reader to get inside the head, thoughts and inner struggles that each of the characters is experiencing as it pertains to the plot. The reader cares what happens to each of the characters. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters and the occurrences taking place.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in the countryside, in the village of Dorset during the 21st century. The novel covers the one year after Claudia moves into her cottage. The main characters are involved in the aftermath of Claudia's husband going away to prison and Claudia starting a new life.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that Claudia has changed her name and is starting her life over again. However, as events unfold, Claudia's identity is a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The language is from the 21st century, which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand.

Structure

The novel is divided into 19 chapters. Each chapter is approximately 20 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and some dialogue. The narrator injects her own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing her opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is the struggle of human beings in choosing between good and evil. One subplot is the coming of age of each of the characters. Another subplot is the relationships that form in a family.



Quotes

"Was it my fault? I don't know what happened. Was it my fault?"
Chap. 1, p. 2

"She's rather attractive, actually. About my age, I should think. Divorced with two children. Nineteen and twenty-two, I think she said, but they're both abroad."
Chap. 2, p. 23

"Oh, dropped a glass. Last night. Nothing serious. Only a scratch."
Chap. 3, p. 42

"It seems that Roger has been contacted by a Sunday newspaper which wants to serialise his life story."
Chap. 4, p. 63

"It's the job she's got. She said she had to work, that she had no money and it is the only thing she could find."
Chap. 5, p. 77

"Wrote my car off, I'm afraid, and I was totally stuck without transport, and Anthony very kindly lent me his pick-up. It's meant I can get to work and—"
Chap. 6, p. 96

"My brother. He's had an accident in India. Broken his leg quite badly in a bus crash. Eventually we got through on the telephone and he's all right. He's being flown home. There was quite a bit to organise."
Chap. 7, p. 109

"Take my London number. You never know. You might need it."
Chap. 8, p. 138

"Without wishing to sound melodramatic, it is in my soul. Written on my heart. I was born and grew up there."
Chap. 9, p. 151

"This guy of Lila's, is he important, do you think?"
Chap. 10, p. 169

"Just an observation. You're not at all like Lila, are you? In some ways it's hard to believe she's your daughter."
Chap. 11, p. 202

"Actually, he decided to withdraw his co-operation. Not go through with the deal."
Chap. 12, p. 217



"I was in the lane. Those men, they're all there, with cameras, wanting photographs they said. Or a story. I ran away. I'm OK, are you OK?"

Chap. 13, p. 239

"Bloody jackals, aren't they? What a miserable, bloody occupation, hounding innocent people like this."

Chap. 14, p. 243

"Who'd work like she does if they has any money stashed away? You'd go off to Spain or somewhere, wouldn't you? Costa del Bankrobba. Not come down here and pick bleeding mushrooms."

Chap. 15, p. 265

"The main reason for Roger keeping his head down and going quietly is that Carla is expecting his baby."

Chap. 16, p. 283

"Mum, it's been born. Dad's just sent me an email. She's had a baby girl."

Chap. 17, p. 295

"Seems the horse was frightened by a firework. Someone threw a firework at it. Bolted it."

Chap. 18, p. 319

"The blackthorn's out. Have you noticed?"

Chap. 19, p. 345



Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Claudia? Why has she chosen to move out of London and into the countryside? Do you believe Claudia knew what Roger was doing when he was doing it? What do you think happens to Claudia after the novel ends?

Discuss the relationship between Claudia and her children. Why do you think Lila takes her father's side in the split-up of her parents? Does Jerome take his mother's side? Why does Jerome feel he should make contact with his father? How do Lila's feelings change after she realizes what her mother has been going through? What does she do about it?

Who is Peter Durnford? Why does he obsess over Claudia? Why does he then choose to make it work with his marriage to Julia? Do you think his feelings for Claudia are true or just an excuse because he is in an unhappy marriage?

Why does Victoria Durnford enroll in boarding school? What makes Victoria realize that she wants to go home? What do you think happens with the relationship between Victoria and Jerome?

Discuss the imprisonment of Roger Barron. What impact does it have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?

What do you think happens to Lila after her engagement to Ivo? Do you think she moves from New York to the countryside? Why do you think she kept her relationship with Ivo a secret?

What do you think happens with Claudia and Anthony? Will the marriage between his brother and her daughter change the relationship that Claudia and Anthony have with each other? Do you think Anthony accepting Claudia helped the other villagers to accept her after they find out the truth, or do you think it is Claudia who convinces them she is a nice and good person on her own?