

# **Innocent Blood Study Guide**

**Innocent Blood by P. D. James**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| <a href="#">Innocent Blood Study Guide.....</a>  | <a href="#">1</a>  |
| <a href="#">Contents.....</a>  | <a href="#">2</a>  |
| <a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>  | <a href="#">3</a>  |
| <a href="#">Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chapters 1-3.....</a>   | <a href="#">5</a>  |
| <a href="#">Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chapters 4-9.....</a>   | <a href="#">7</a>  |
| <a href="#">Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chapters 10-16.....</a>                                       | <a href="#">9</a>  |
| <a href="#">Book 2, An Order of Release: Chapters 1-7.....</a>                                       | <a href="#">11</a> |
| <a href="#">Book 2, An Order of Release: Chapters 8-19.....</a>                                      | <a href="#">13</a> |
| <a href="#">Book 3, Act of Violence: Chapters 1-6.....</a>   | <a href="#">15</a> |
| <a href="#">Book 3, Act of Violence: Chapters 7-11.....</a>  | <a href="#">17</a> |
| <a href="#">Book 3, Act of Violence: Chapter 12 and Book 4, Epilogue at Evensong: Chapter 1.....</a> | <a href="#">19</a> |
| <a href="#">Characters.....</a>  | <a href="#">21</a> |
| <a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>  | <a href="#">25</a> |
| <a href="#">Themes.....</a>  | <a href="#">27</a> |
| <a href="#">Style.....</a>   | <a href="#">30</a> |
| <a href="#">Quotes.....</a>  | <a href="#">32</a> |
| <a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>   | <a href="#">34</a> |



# Plot Summary

Innocent Blood is a novel by the author P.D. James. In this novel, Philippa Palfrey has learned that her biological mother is Mary Ducton, a murderess who is about to be released from prison. In an attempt to learn more about her biological mother, and perhaps to help her figure out her own identity, Philippa arranges to share a flat with her mother for a few months. At the same time, the father of the young child Mary Ducton murdered is planning to exact revenge for his child's death. Norman Scase follows Mary Ducton out of prison and learns of her relationship with Philippa. Norman uses this relationship to find where Mary Ducton is living and to kill her. Innocent Blood is a novel about revenge, about family, and about learning one's own identity. Innocent Blood is both tragic and inspiring, a novel that will entertain readers of all genres.

Philippa Palfrey has filed under a new law to get her original birth certificate and learn the identities of her birth parents. Philippa has been told that her mother died when she was born, but she hopes to use the information to find her biological father. When the birth certificate comes, Philippa is shocked to find out that her parents are notorious child killers and that her mother is still alive, set to be released from prison within a few weeks. Philippa confronts her adoptive parents with this news, accusing them of lying to her since her adoption. They try to explain that they only wanted to protect Philippa, but she refuses to listen.

Philippa writes to her biological mother, Mary Ducton, and visits her in prison. Philippa decides she wants to share a flat with her mother for a few months in order to get to know her before she goes up to Cambridge. Philippa's adoptive father, Maurice, is dead set against this, insistent that Philippa will only be hurt. However, Philippa remains defiant and begins searching for a flat with the money she has saved for a trip abroad. Philippa finally finds a place, above a green grocer, that she spends a great deal of time fixing up for her mother.

At the same time, Norman Scase has just retired from his job and places his home on the market in order to free him to devote all his time to a plan of revenge. Norman's daughter was killed ten years ago while on her way home from a scouting meeting. Norman's wife had always wanted to kill their daughter's murderess upon her release from prison, but died of cancer before she could. Norman promised he would fulfill her dream of revenge when the time came. Mary Ducton is to be released from prison in a few weeks.

The day Mary Ducton leaves prison, Philippa is there to meet her and take her home. Norman follows at a short distance, watching the two together as they ride the train to London. Norman manages to see Philippa's name on a tag attached to her bag as they disembark in London, but loses the ladies as they go to board another train. Norman concentrates on finding Philippa, finally locating her through a few phone calls to multiple Palfrey households. Norman then sets up watch in a hotel across the street to watch Philippa's adoptive mother and to hopefully learn where Philippa and Mary Ducton are living.



Philippa and Mary Ducton settle into life together. Mary Ducton refuses to talk about the past and Philippa convinces herself that Mary Ducton's crime is not important. However, Philippa cannot keep from reading a manuscript about the crime that Mary Ducton has written. Philippa feels empathy for Mary Ducton and decides that the past does not matter. Together Philippa and Mary Ducton face the future, working side by side and hoping to build an affectionate relationship. At the same time, Philippa's adoptive mother feels pushed out, neglected, and through these feelings accidentally takes Norman straight to Philippa's front door.

Norman watches Mary Ducton closely and schemes to get into her apartment and kill her. Norman steals keys to get into the house, but cannot find a way to enter the flat itself. A few days later, Philippa herself breaks the lock on the front door in order to keep a reporter from harassing them. Afterward, Philippa visits her adoptive parents' home to get some money for an escape, but instead learns the truth about her adoption. Philippa had assumed Mary Ducton gave her up when she went to prison, but Philippa learns that Mary Ducton gave her up more than a year previous to her crime.

Philippa argues with Mary Ducton and leaves her alone in the flat. When Philippa returns late that night she finds Norman in Mary Ducton's room. Mary Ducton is dead, having taken an overdose of pills. Philippa sends Norman away and calls Maurice, her adoptive father, to deal with the death. Philippa returns to her adoptive parents and resumes the life she had before Mary Ducton. Eventually Philippa goes to college and writes a novel. Norman falls in love and marries, hoping for children and a second chance at a happy life.



# Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chapters 1-3

## Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chapters 1-3 Summary

Philippa Palfrey was adopted when she was eight. Philippa has few memories of the time before her adoption. Philippa has often fantasized about her biological parents' love affair and finding her biological father.

In chapter one, Philippa visits a social worker and arranges to file under a new law to get her original birth certificate in order to learn the identity of her birth parents. Philippa was adopted at the age of eight, but she is not close to her adoptive parents. In fact, Philippa often feels like a burden to her adoptive parents, especially her adoptive father—a brilliant sociologist who often makes Philippa feel like a social experiment. The social worker approves Philippa's petition for the birth certificate and explains how she can go about receiving it. Philippa quickly sends off for the birth certificate and is shocked to discover that her parents were married at the time of her birth. Philippa had always been told that her mother was a servant at Pennington, an estate belonging to the family of her adoptive father's first wife, and that she had died during or shortly after her birth. Philippa had also believed her mother to be unmarried and had, in fact, created fantasies based on this fact.

In chapter two, Philippa travels to the address on her birth certificate, a poorer section of London where she seems to recognize some of the landmarks. Philippa has little to no memory of her life before she was eight, therefore she is surprised to remember brief snatches of a life lived on these streets. When Philippa arrives at the address on the birth certificate she finds no one home. However, a neighbor is kind enough to tell her that the Ductons no longer live at that address. In fact, Philippa learns that Martin Ducton died in prison and that his wife, Mary, is still serving a life sentence for the rape and murder of Julia Scase.

In chapter three, Maurice Palfrey, Philippa's adoptive father, is at work and thinking about his past. Maurice was once married to Helena, the daughter of a nobleman, who seduced and married him while aware that she was pregnant with another man's child. After her death, Maurice married a secretary, Hilda, who cried for his child with him. It was after this marriage and the attempts at having a child of their own that Maurice learned he was never capable of fathering a child.

## Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chapters 1-3 Analysis

These early chapters introduce Philippa Palfrey. The reader's first impression of Philippa is that she is bitter and ungrateful toward her adoptive parents. Philippa seems to feel as though her adoptive father only adopted her as an experiment in his career as a sociologist. Philippa does not even seem to think about her adoptive mother, except perhaps as a timid, insignificant woman who shares their home. This does not leave the



reader with a good impression of Philippa, even when Maurice Palfrey is introduced and he comes off as a cold sociologist who fits well the description Philippa gives of him. The reader can understand Maurice's behavior to some point, however, when they learn that Maurice was badly treated by his first wife.

Philippa files to learn the identity of her birth parents in the first chapter. Philippa has grown up with the idea that her mother was a servant at the estate of Maurice's first wife's family, and that she died when Philippa died. Philippa has developed a fantasy about her father—that he was a wealthy visitor to the estate and that he was deeply in love with Philippa's mother, but could not marry her for societal reasons. Philippa hopes to meet her father, but when she gets the birth certificate she learns that everything she believed is not true. Philippa's mother was married to her father and she is still alive. Not only this, but Philippa's biological parents were convicted of raping and killing a young girl. This leads the reader to wonder if perhaps Philippa is better off where she is and if she will finally leave this situation alone.



# Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chapters 4-9

## Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chapters 4-9 Summary

In chapter four, Philippa returns home and confronts her adoptive mother with the truth about her biological parents. Hilda takes terrible verbal abuse from Philippa, but fails to answer her questions with any forcefulness. When Maurice returns home from work, he tells Philippa that they knew who her biological parents were but that they did not tell her to protect her from the truth. When Maurice tells her that Mary Ducton will be released from prison in a few weeks, Philippa announces that she will take a flat in London and spend a few months with her birth mother before going to Cambridge. In chapter five, Philippa dresses for dinner with a colleague of Maurice's, his wife, and Philippa's boyfriend. Philippa looks around her room, but does not feel as though it is hers, but that it belongs to some unknown and unseen girl.

In chapter six, Philippa watches the interactions of the couples at dinner. Hilda has made a wonderful dinner, as she often does, but she is too timid to enjoy it and too anxious for anyone else to enjoy it. The conversation turns to politics, which Philippa finds boring. Philippa is bored and anxious to leave, but it seems like a lifetime before the guests finally leave. In chapter seven, Philippa writes a letter to her biological mother, asking to visit and offering to share a flat with her for a few months. Maurice and Hilda come to her room and try to talk to her out of seeing her biological mother. Maurice urges Philippa to look into her mother's conviction, but Philippa insists she knows all she needs to know about the crime.

In chapter eight, Norman Scase is celebrating his retirement from his job as a government clerk. The head secretary has arranged a card and a party for him. Norman is retiring early, meaning he will not receive a pension for three years, but no one has the nerve to ask how he can afford to do this. Norman accepts the donation given to him and promises to use it to buy something useful, such as binoculars. In chapter nine, Norman Scase goes home the usual way, but stops to sit in the park before returning to his empty house. Norman sat on this same bench nearly a year ago when his wife died of cancer. Norman thinks of her now, of the promise she made him make. Since the conviction of their daughter's killer, Mavis had planned to kill Mary Ducton the same way she killed their daughter. They had planned to beat her to death, but when Mavis became ill she realized a weapon would be necessary and encouraged Norman to buy a knife. Mavis then wrote a letter of forgiveness for Mary Ducton, instructing Norman to use it as an excuse to get close to her. Mavis planned it all out and today, his retirement, is Norman's first step in revenge.

## Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chapters 4-9 Analysis

Philippa reveals more of her disdain toward her adoptive parents when she confronts her adoptive mother about the truth regarding her biological parents. Philippa heaps



abuse on Hilda, accusing her of lying and of being committed to a loveless marriage. Hilda takes the abuse, refusing to allow Philippa to bait her. Later, Philippa watches Hilda at dinner and is angry with her for being timid and inconsequential. Philippa clearly does not dislike Hilda. The reader, through Philippa's eyes, gets the impression that Hilda is simply an unhappy woman who feels that she is not smart enough and not sophisticated enough to compete with her husband and daughter. The reader has more sympathy for Hilda than for Philippa at this point.

Philippa announces that she plans to live with her biological mother for a few months before going to Cambridge. Maurice is upset by this idea, but is unable to talk Philippa out of it. By talking to her, however, Maurice and Hilda seem to prove that they are concerned about Philippa to a degree, but Philippa manages to make it appear that their concern is based on what the neighbors might think than real concern. The reader is slowly getting the impression that Philippa simply feels as though by being adopted, she is not truly a part of the family and truly loved as she ought to be.

These chapters also introduce Norman Scase. Norman is the father of Julie Scase, the little girl raped and murdered by Mary and Martin Ducton, Philippa's biological parents. Norman has retired early from his job and plans to work full time on a scheme to get revenge against Mary Ducton when she is released from prison. Tensions begin to build with these scenes as the reader imagines what might happen to Philippa should her mother get killed while in her company.





# Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chapters 10-16

## Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chapters 10-16 Summary

In chapter ten, Philippa travels to Melcombe to visit her mother, taking a full day and exploring York on the way. Philippa watches the others on the bus and discovers that many of them have brought gifts for the inmates, but she has nothing. Upon arriving at the prison, Philippa is shown into a lounge to wait and finds herself waiting a long time. Just as Philippa is convinced that her mother has decided not to see her, she walks in. Mary Ducton is a slight woman with hair the same color as Philippa's. They go outside and walk as they talk. Mary Ducton asks Philippa if she knows about her adoption and Philippa says she does, assuming Mary Ducton is referring to the murder. They discuss the flat and Mary Ducton agrees to go, but asks Philippa that they not talk about the past. In chapter eleven, Philippa returns home and tells Maurice that she plans to look for a flat the following day.

In chapter twelve, Norman Scase goes to the office of the private detective he and his wife hired eight years ago to keep tabs on Mary Ducton for him. The detective is dying, so he has packed up his office. Norman is his final case. The detective gives Norman the date of Mary Ducton's release and warns him that killing someone is not as easy as he might think. At home, Norman meets with a real estate agent and arranges to sell his house. In chapter thirteen, Philippa is having difficulty finding a flat to rent that is not too dirty or expensive. After several weeks of searching, Philippa happens on a real estate office on Edgware Road. When Philippa offers to pay three months up front, the agent tells her about a small flat nearby that has been rented to a young couple, but that they have not taken possession yet. Philippa feels guilty and hesitates to accept it. In chapter fourteen, Philippa goes to see the flat, which is in a house above a green grocer, and knows that she will take it despite her guilt.

In chapter fifteen, Norman travels to Brighton to buy the knife he hopes to kill Mary Ducton with. After purchasing a kitchen knife, mackintosh, gloves, and a rucksack to carry it all in, Norman visits the bar in Brighton where he was raised. Norman thinks of his unhappy childhood with his mother, aunt, and uncle, and the two things that saved his life. The first was his foray into crime picking pockets for spending money. The second was chess, a game that gave him confidence and helped elevate him in the eyes of those around him. In chapter sixteen, Philippa spends the few weeks before her mother's release cleaning and preparing the flat. A social worker comes to check the flat to be sure it is appropriate for Mary Ducton's release. Philippa is not impressed with this woman and imagines her own description in her report.

## Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chapters 10-16 Analysis

Mary Ducton is introduced in these chapters. Mary Ducton is a murderess, a woman capable of killing a young girl. However, to Philippa she seems harmless, a woman who



has survived terrible circumstances and who deserves a second chance. Philippa has little sympathy for Mary Ducton and she has wasted no time thinking about her crime, or her young victim. Philippa seems only interested in the history Mary Ducton can share with her, a history that Mary Ducton has requested they never speak about. Philippa still wants to be with her, however, hoping to get from her birth mother the love she feels she never got from her adoptive parents. Therefore, Philippa has continued with her plan despite Maurice's warnings and has found a flat she is able to clean and to be somewhat proud to bring her mother to. The reader has to wonder, however, why Mary Ducton is so reluctant to talk about the past and what this reluctance will mean to Philippa in the future. The reader must also note that Mary Ducton asked if Philippa knew about the circumstances of her adoption. Philippa assumes she is referring to the murder, but the reader must wonder if there might not be more to the adoption than anyone is talking about at this point.

Norman Scase continues to prepare for his revenge. The reader learns more about him in these chapters, specifically about his unhappy childhood and his skills at pick pocketing. These skills could come in handy as Norman continues to plot to kill Mary Ducton. The reader also realizes that Norman's wife has planned this revenge for many years, based on the fact that they hired a private detective eight years ago to keep tabs on Mary Ducton and the fact that they discussed selling their house, a house purchased after Julie's death, as part of their plan of revenge. The plan seems clearly to be Mavis' plan, but Norman is determined to go through with it even though the reader gets the impression he is not happy about these circumstances.



# Book 2, An Order of Release: Chapters 1-7

## Book 2, An Order of Release: Chapters 1-7 Summary

In chapter one, Norman travels to York station to watch for Mary Ducton. When she appears, Norman is shocked to find someone waiting for her. Norman follows them onto the train to London and tries to stay inconspicuous as he attempts to figure out the relationship between the two women. It seems clear to them, based on their appearance, that they are related. Norman realizes the new woman must be Mary Ducton's daughter, even though a child was never mentioned in all the publicity surrounding her trial. Norman manages to read a name on the woman's bag before she disembarks from the train. Norman attempts to follow them through King's Station, but loses them when they board another train. In chapter two, Norman goes home and traces the subway routes on a map. Norman narrows Mary Ducton's destination to four districts, assuming she has not left London. Then Norman thinks of a scheme to find Mary Ducton.

In chapter three, Philippa is pleased that her mother likes their flat. They decide to take ten days off, beginning their time together by buying Mary Ducton new clothes and toiletries to replace those she has brought from prison. Mary Ducton also gives Philippa a manuscript she wrote of her crime, but asks her not to read it right away and to not tell her when she has read it. In chapter four, Norman learns that his house has sold and he must move immediately. Norman plans to only take a single suitcase and sell the rest of his belongings. Norman then goes to a bookstore where he buys an expensive book before he begins calling every Palfrey in the phonebook, using the book as an excuse to ask for Philippa. On the sixth call, Norman speaks to Hilda. Norman knows this is the right number and now he has an address to go on. In chapter five, Norman goes to Caldecote Terrace and checks out the neighborhood. Norman decides to take a room in the Hotel Casablanca, a nearby hotel from which he can watch the Palfrey home.

In chapter six, Philippa finds herself falling into a comfortable companionship with her biological mother. Philippa feels that they connected on the day they threw all of Mary Ducton's prison belongings in the river. It felt like a new beginning. In chapter seven, Philippa reads the manuscript about Mary Ducton's crime the same night they threw her prison possessions in the river. In the manuscript, Mary Ducton talks about her abusive childhood at the hands of her father and how it led her to dislike children crying. Mary Ducton writes how she came home from work and found the child crying in her room and her husband distraught. Mary Ducton claims to have no memory of killing Julie Scase. However, Mary Ducton clearly describes wrapping the child in plastic and placing her in the trunk of her car. Then Mary Ducton took her husband and began creating an alibi by going to the library and the movies. However, while they were in the theater, their car was stolen. Mary Ducton and her husband walked to the woods, but Mary Ducton refused to sleep among the trees, insisting they go home. In retrospect,



Mary Ducton believes that this is what led to her husband's death in prison. Philippa refuses to think too hard on this story or wonder how much of it she believes.

## **Book 2, An Order of Release: Chapters 1-7 Analysis**

Mary Ducton is released from prison in these chapters. While Philippa is excited and happy to get to know her, Norman Scase is determined to find where she lives and discover some way in which he can get her alone long enough to kill her. Norman loses them in the train station, but he quickly finds another way to track them down, through Philippa's adoptive parents. This shows the reader how intelligent Norman is and how determined he is to see this scheme through even though he has doubts and it was never really his desire to begin with.

Philippa reads Mary Ducton's version of the events, a manuscript that Mary Ducton claims to have written many years before. In Mary Ducton's version, she claims to have been badly abused by her father as a child, an experience that made her intolerant of children crying. This is what Mary Ducton implies caused her to kill Julie Scase, even though she claims to not remember the experience. Mary Ducton then admits to planning the disposal of Julie's body out of love and concern for her husband, turning a murder confession into a love story. It is clearly a whitewashed version of the events and Philippa is intelligent enough to see that, but she chooses not to realize it because she wants so desperately to love and be loved by her mother, touching on a theme of the novel. This story is the backbone of the novel, Norman's motivation for killing Mary Ducton and what kept Philippa from being raised by her biological parents.



# Book 2, An Order of Release: Chapters 8-19

## Book 2, An Order of Release: Chapters 8-19 Summary

In chapter eight, Norman begins watching the house on Caldecote Terrace. Norman learns exactly when Maurice leaves each morning for work and when the maid leaves to shop. It is three days before Norman decides to follow the maid in an attempt to learn something about the family. It is during this time that Norman realizes the maid is not a maid, but Hilda. Norman follows Hilda for the next ten days, but all she does is shop for food and tour a few landmarks. In chapter nine, Philippa and Mary Ducton get a job at a fish and chips shop. They get to know the other employees, mostly welfare women who are working off the books to keep their benefits. In chapter ten, Philippa and her mother move into a routine, spending their mornings exploring London and their nights working. They shop at discount markets and find fascinating objects, such as two coffee cups that are miraculously unchipped, expensive china. They never talk about the past, but Philippa believes they have the rest of their lives to worry about that.

In chapter eleven, Mary Ducton's probation officer comes for a visit. Philippa feels his visit is an intrusion and is rude to him, but he takes it calmly and refuses to be baited. In chapter twelve, Philippa and Mary Ducton are watching television when they happen on a show in which Maurice is debating religion with a bishop. This inspires a conversation between Philippa and Mary Ducton in which Philippa learns her birth name was Rose, causing her to wonder why her mother has never slipped and called her by that name before. In chapter thirteen, Norman becomes lonely and has asked Violet Tetley, the telephone operator at the hotel, to go to lunch and for a walk with him. In chapter fourteen, Philippa and Mary Ducton go to church. Afterward they go to Regent's Park to enjoy the mild afternoon. Philippa sees a man stop and stare at her and her mother, a man she feels she should recognize but does not. In chapter fifteen, Norman spots Mary Ducton in Regent's Park and immediately turns Violet around. This ruins their afternoon out, which has been good up to that point, and leaves Norman frustrated that his one chance to get Mary Ducton is ruined by Violet's presence.

In chapter sixteen, Norman follows Hilda to Marylebone Road where she goes inside the Inner London Juvenile Court building. Norman has no clue why she is there, but assumes she works there. Norman decides to return in the evening and follow her home. In chapter seventeen, Hilda takes her seat on the juvenile bench, a job she has never wanted and does not enjoy. Hilda finds herself feeling too much compassion for the juveniles. Today Hilda wishes she could invite an unfit mother to move into Philippa's room where she could care for her and her baby. Hilda fights the decision to keep the woman from her baby, but loses. Afterward, Hilda thinks of Philippa and decides to walk past her flat, if only to catch a glimpse of her. In chapter eighteen, Norman realizes that Hilda has led him to Mary Ducton. Norman stops following Hilda and instead finds a secure place to watch Mary Ducton's flat from a wasteland beside a



pub. Norman stays in his hiding place and watches the flat even as it begins to rain. In chapter nineteen, Maurice comes home from work to find Hilda destroying a flower arrangement. Maurice criticizes her and they argue. During the argument, Maurice admits that it is his fault they could not have children. Bolstered by this knowledge, Hilda announces that she plans to quit the juvenile court and that she wants to get a dog.

## **Book 2, An Order of Release: Chapters 8-19 Analysis**

Norman seems to be determined to go through with his plan of revenge. The reader has thought for a while that Norman was only going through the motions in order to fulfill a promise to his deceased wife. However, now Norman has really sold his house and moved into a hotel with the express purpose of watching the Palfrey house. This suggests to the reader that he is serious about this plan, but still does not guarantee that he will go through with it, leaving the reader anxious to see what will happen when he finally does find Mary Ducton, which takes place at the end of this group of chapters. Norman is watching them, but the reader is still not sure he will really kill Mary Ducton. Norman seems like such a gentle, caring man. Then again, Norman loved his daughter deeply, so perhaps his grief will help him carry through on his plan.

Philippa and Mary Ducton have settled into a routine and seem happy. Philippa wants to know who she is, where she came from, but all Mary Ducton wants to focus on is the future. This should cause Philippa some frustration, but instead it helps her both to ignore the fact that her mother is a convicted killer and to focus on the mother-daughter relationship. Philippa has a false sense of security, leaving the reader wondering how she will react when this bubble is popped. Norman's arrival at their flat could signal the beginning of the end. Finally, Philippa's adoptive mother reveals to the reader that her timidity and inadequacy is based on the fact that she could not give Maurice the child he so desperately wanted. When Hilda finds out that it was his fault, not hers, that they could not have children she suddenly becomes more forceful, deciding to quit the juvenile courts and to buy a dog. This is a new side of Hilda, a blooming, that could affect her future with both Maurice and Philippa.



# Book 3, Act of Violence: Chapters 1-6

## Book 3, Act of Violence: Chapters 1-6 Summary

In chapter one, Norman spends a week following Philippa and Mary Ducton before he discovers the restaurant where they work in the evenings. This knowledge gives Norman the advantage of knowing in which hours their flat will be vacant. Norman's hatred of Mary Ducton grows as he watches her, as he sees her laugh and talk with her daughter, while his daughter lies dead in her grave. Norman thinks through the possibilities of attack and decides he must gain access to the flat. In chapter two, Philippa and Mary Ducton spend a great deal of time talking about literature. One of these discussions inspires Philippa to take her mother to Royal Academy to view the Victorian paintings. While they are there, they run into Gabriel Lomas, Philippa's boyfriend. Philippa introduces her mother, but refuses to tell Gabriel anything about her. In chapter three, Gabriel calls Hilda and lies to her, telling her he is supposed to have dinner with Philippa but lost her address. Hilda falls for his charm and tells him not only where Philippa is living, but confirms that her mother was incarcerated.

In chapter four, Norman has decided he will steal the greengrocer's keys, replace them with a temporary ring, then return them after he has copied them. This requires that Norman get a good look at the keys in order to come up with a suitable replacement, something that takes several days to accomplish without the greengrocer noticing. Finally, after creating a replacement set of keys, Norman begins preparing for the actual theft. In chapter five, Norman hangs out at the Laundromat down the street until he sees a moment when the greengrocer is alone in the shop. Norman goes in and buys some fruit, stealing the keys as the man reaches for a bunch of bananas. Norman has two sets of keys made from the two Yale keys on the greengrocer's ring, then replaces them while the man is getting his afternoon beer.

In chapter six, Norman waits until Philippa and her mother go to work before attempting to let himself into their house. At first the keys do not work, but finally Norman is able to slip into the hallway between the greengrocers and the stairway to the flat above. Norman goes up to the flat door and is disappointed to find it locked. Norman knows there is no way he can get a key to this door. Instead, Norman lets himself into the greengrocers and listens as the women return home from work. The bathroom is on a landing on the staircase. Norman wonders if the women leave the flat door open when they use the bathroom at night and if this could be a way for him to get to Mary Ducton. Norman listens until there is silence from the flat above, then dozes for a short time before letting himself out of the building. Norman returns to the hotel to finalize his plans.





## Book 3, Act of Violence: Chapters 1-6 Analysis

Philippa runs into her boyfriend, someone she knows is infinitely curious and petty, and introduces him to her mother. Philippa comes from a different world from the one she is currently living in and has been frightened of running into someone she knows. When she does, Philippa can see trouble coming, but is helpless to stop it. This leaves both the reader and Philippa waiting anxiously for the other shoe to drop.

Norman spends more than a week following Philippa and Mary Ducton, thinking of his daughter and allowing her memory to increase the hatred he has always felt for Mary Ducton. Then Norman, using his past pick pocketing skills, steals the keys to the house Philippa's flat shares with a greengrocer. Norman is determined to follow through with his plan despite the uncertainty of a future for him when it is done. The reader finds themselves unsure if they should be rooting for this gentle, kind man who is so much more likeable than Philippa and her murderess mother, or if they should be rooting for Philippa. It is a complicated situation in which the line between right and wrong is not as clear as it should be, leaving the reader with a moral dilemma that can only bring pain for one side or the other.





## Book 3, Act of Violence: Chapters 7-11

### Book 3, Act of Violence: Chapters 7-11 Summary

In chapter seven, Mary Ducton gives Philippa a tunic she knitted for her herself. Philippa is very excited over the gift, feeling as though this is something normal mothers and daughters do together. As they talk about the tunic, the doorbell rings. Philippa answers it and finds a reporter standing at the door. The man forces his way inside, threatening to publish their address and Mary Ducton's name if she does not agree to an interview. Philippa takes a chisel and breaks the lock on the flat door, claiming that if the man writes about them in his paper she will call the police and claim he broke in to their apartment. Mary Ducton is frightened when he leaves and suggests they leave town. Philippa agrees and decides to go to Caldecote Terrace to get money for the trip.

In chapter eight, Philippa arrives at Caldecote Terrace with the intention of stealing some silver caddy spoons from Maurice's collection. Instead, Philippa walks in on Maurice in bed with one of his students. After the girl leaves, Philippa and Maurice get into a discussion about Hilda and love that turns into a discussion about Mary Ducton. Maurice tells Philippa that Mary Ducton could not handle Philippa as a child, that Philippa was a difficult child. Mary Ducton would often beat Philippa, so she put her into foster care during the week to protect them both. That was how Maurice met Philippa, when her foster mother took her to Pennington on a day Maurice and Hilda had gone there to take care of some of Helena's business. Maurice learned later that Mary Ducton had thrown Philippa down some stairs and cracked her skull, which is why she cannot remember anything before her eighth birthday. Maurice and Hilda took Philippa on then, fostering her for six months and then adopting her. All this took place months before the murder of Julie Scase.

In chapter nine, Maurice thinks about the child Philippa was and how she got under his skin after that first meeting. Only twice did that happen to Maurice, once with Helena and once with Philippa. Maurice remembers how awkward the child was and how intelligent. Maurice could not let that intelligence go to waste. In chapter ten, Philippa returns to the flat in a daze. Philippa confronts Mary Ducton who does not deny the truth, but asserts that she thought Philippa knew. Philippa leaves the flat, telling Mary Ducton she wished she had hung as she leaves. In chapter eleven, Philippa walks through the city, thinking about everything. Philippa regrets letting go of her fantasies in exchange for the truth. However, Philippa slowly comes to realize that Mary Ducton is her mother, for good or bad, and she must return to the flat.

### Book 3, Act of Violence: Chapters 7-11 Analysis

Gabriel sends a reporter to Philippa, as she suspected he would. The reporter threatens Philippa's anonymity and her newfound relationship with her mother, so she breaks the lock on the door to blackmail the man into leaving them alone. This leaves the flat



vulnerable to a break-in, specifically to Norman Scase. Afterward, Philippa learns the truth about her adoption, that her mother was abusive toward her and that she gave her up months before the murder of Julie Scase. This leaves Philippa feeling unwanted and unloved, something she takes out on both Maurice, whose lack of morality is shown in his affair with a student. At the same time, however, the reader sees that Philippa's adoption was Maurice's idea, not Hilda's, as Philippa always believed. The reader realizes that Maurice loved Philippa in his own way, he simply could not show it in a way that Philippa could understand.

Philippa goes away from the flat in a moment of despair to walk around in an attempt to reconcile the situation in her own mind, to accept the truth of her past. Finally Philippa realizes that a person cannot love without pain, so she decides to forgive her mother and give her another chance. Philippa so desperately wants to be loved, a theme of the novel, that she will accept anything from her mother. Interesting to the reader, however, is the fact that she is unwilling to offer Maurice and Hilda, who loved her despite everything, the same deal. This shows a deeper insight into Philippa, into her belief that blood is stronger than anything, even unconditional love.



# **Book 3, Act of Violence: Chapter 12 and Book 4, Epilogue at Evensong: Chapter 1**

## **Book 3, Act of Violence: Chapter 12 and Book 4, Epilogue at Evensong: Chapter 1 Summary**

In chapter twelve, Philippa walks into the flat to find Norman sitting beside her mother. Mary Ducton's throat has been slashed, but there is no blood. Philippa realizes her mother took an overdose of drugs. There is a suicide note in which she tells Philippa she loves her. Philippa takes Norman into the kitchen where he is sick. Philippa then tells him to leave, that she will take the blame for the cuts on her mother's throat. Philippa then calls Maurice, who deals with the police and then removes all evidence of Mary Ducton and the flat, minus the Henry Walton painting, from Philippa's life.

In the epilogue, a year has past and Philippa is now a student at King's. Norman Scase has come to see her. They talk for a minute about Philippa's first novel, which she published under the name of Philippa Ducton, a name she has taken as her own. Norman tells her that he is going to marry Violet Tetley and he hopes they might have a child someday, a chance at a second chance. Norman thanks Philippa for her help the night of Mary Ducton's death and wishes her well in her future.

## **Book 3, Act of Violence: Chapter 12 and Book 4, Epilogue at Evensong: Chapter 1 Analysis**

Philippa returns home to find Norman sitting by her mother's bed. Norman has done what he set out to do. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, Mary Ducton took her death out of his hands when she took an overdose of pills. No one knows how Mary Ducton got the pills or why, but it is a fact. Philippa feels both guilt and relief at her mother's death. The reaction of all these characters to Mary Ducton's death gives the impression of a tragic sort of justice. It is clear from Mary Ducton's own account of her crime and her behavior toward Philippa when she was a child that she was not a good person, a person worthy of compassion. However, the reader and Philippa do feel compassion for the tragedy of this wasted life.

Norman visits Philippa a year later and tells her how his life has changed since he began plotting his revenge. Norman has been able to break out of the dull routine of life, to begin focusing on something other than Julie's death or Mavis's pain. Norman is getting married and hopes to have a second chance at life. All this is possible because Philippa made the humane gesture in taking responsibility for the cuts to Mary Ducton's throat. If she had not, Norman might have gone to jail. This causes the reader to look at

Philippa in a new way, a more compassionate way. Philippa is still an unlikable character, but at least she did the right thing when it mattered most, showing that perhaps she is not as much like Maurice as she has appeared throughout the novel.



# Characters

## Philippa Rose Palfrey

Philippa Palfrey is an eighteen-year-old girl who was adopted when she was eight years old. Philippa has no memory of her life before the adoption, therefore she has created a fantasy about her birth parents based on the thin amount of information she has been offered by her adoptive parents. However, when Philippa files with the courts to get her original birth certificate, she learns that everything she was told and has come to believe was not true. Philippa is the daughter of a couple who were convicted ten years previously of raping and killing a twelve year old girl. Philippa's biological mother is about to be released from prison and Philippa decides she wants to meet her and to share a flat for a few months in order to get some idea of where she came from and who she is.

Philippa has never felt loved by her adoptive parents. Philippa's adoptive father is overbearing and controlling, a man who does not share his emotions easily. Philippa's adoptive mother is timid, inadequate, and is often fearful of sharing her opinions, let alone her emotions. For these reasons, Philippa has always felt like more of an obligation than a loved child with these parents. Philippa hopes to find unconditional love with her mother despite her terrible crime. All seems to go well for a while and Philippa feels as though her plan is working. However, when Philippa learns the truth about her adoption, that she was given away for no other reason than that she was unwanted, Philippa lashes out at her biological mother. Philippa is confused, unsure what the truth means about who she is as a person. In the aftermath of her mother's death, however, Philippa begins to discover that she is a product of both sets of parents, a person unique unto herself.

## Maurice Palfrey

Maurice Palfrey is a sociology professor at a local London university. At one time, Maurice was married to a beautiful noblewoman, a woman he loved deeply and believed loved him. After his first wife's death in a car accident, however, Maurice learned that he could not have possibly fathered his wife's child. This leaves Maurice bitter toward women and unable to trust those closest to him. As a result, Maurice is a distant, controlling father to his adopted daughter, Philippa, and an unfaithful husband to his second wife, Hilda.

Maurice is highly educated and he recognizes in Philippa a deep intelligence that he believes needs to be nurtured and brought out into the forefront. Maurice works tirelessly with Philippa, pushing her to work at her studies. Eventually Philippa comes to resent this pressure and she rebels against Maurice, eventually going to look for her biological parents in an attempt to form an identity separate from Maurice. This injures



Maurice, who lashes out by telling Philippa the truth about her adoption, then coming to her rescue when it all explodes in her face.

## Hilda Palfrey

Hilda Palfrey is a timid young woman who once worked for Maurice as a secretary. Maurice married Hilda because she cried with him over the death of his small son. However, Hilda is not intelligent, not articulate like the people Maurice often surrounds himself with. As a result, Hilda often feels inadequate around Maurice and his friends. This impression of being inadequate also causes Philippa to look down on her adoptive mother, making her disrespectful and unable to feel love for Hilda.

Hilda attempts to make up for her inadequacies by cooking. Hilda is an expert, gourmet cook, but she often frets so much over her own concoctions that she rarely eats them. This adds to Philippa's impression that Hilda is weak and unworthy of respect. Hilda hates her job and only does it for her husband's sake. However, upon learning that it is not her fault that she and Maurice could not have children of their own, Hilda quits her job and adopts a puppy, showing some forcefulness for the first time in their marriage.

## Mary Ducton

Mary Ducton is Philippa's biological mother. Mary Ducton claims to have been physically abused by her father when she was a child. Mary Ducton blames this abuse on her inability to stand the sound of a child crying and is why she murdered Julie Scase after her husband brutally raped her. Mary Ducton then took control of the situation and devised a way of disposing of the body as well as concocting an alibi for their actions that night. However, the car they stowed the body in is stolen and reveals their crime.

Mary Ducton had a difficult pregnancy and her baby girl, Rose, was a difficult child. Rose cried often and was difficult to feed. Mary Ducton kept Rose as long as she could, but eventually had to put her in foster care to protect her from her own anger. Mary Ducton would often beat the child when left alone with her. When Rose was eight, Mary Ducton beat her so badly that she had a fractured skull. This caused Rose to lose all her memories up to that point. Rose was then adopted by the Palfrey's and her name changed to Philippa. When Philippa learns this, she confronts Mary Ducton who reacts by committing suicide.

## Martin Ducton

Martin Ducton is Mary Ducton's husband. Martin is a meek, docile man. However, Martin also has an affection for young girls. One night Martin invited a young girl, Julie Scase, into his home to help him make tea and he raped her. Martin left the injured girl on his bed, frustrated with his inability to stop her crying. When Martin's wife came home, she took control of the situation, killing the little girl and arranging an alibi and a way of disposing of the body. The body would be found, however, and Martin would go



to jail with a life sentence. Martin would not survive this sentence and would die in prison just a short time into his sentence.

## **Norman Scase**

Norman Scase is a docile man who has always worked hard and lived an honest life. Believing himself to be ugly, Norman is surprised when a young woman, Mavis, shows interested in him. They soon marry and have a daughter named Julie. When Julie is twelve, she is brutally raped and murdered, changing Norman's life forever. Mavis begins plotting revenge against Mary Ducton, almost from the moment she is arrested. However, Mavis becomes ill and dies before Mary Ducton is released from prison. On her death bed, Mavis makes Norman promise to go through with their plan of revenge.

Norman quits his job and sells his house, determined to keep his promise to Mavis even though revenge has never been something he has dwelled on. However, planning and executing his plan gives Norman something to live for, a reason to get out of bed each morning. Norman feels alive again for the first time in many years as he hunts down Julie's killer. Norman nearly goes through with his plan, but Mary Ducton takes even that pleasure out of his hands. In the end, Norman finds himself making a new life with a new woman and the hope of more children.

## **Julia Mavis Scase**

Julie Scase is Norman Scase's child. Julie was on her way home from a scouting meeting. Afraid to walk through a short cut, Julie walks through the Ductons' neighborhood and out of a sense of compassion, agrees to help Martin Ducton make his tea because he has an injured hand. While in the home, Martin rapes Julie, leaving her bleeding and crying on his bed. When Mary Ducton comes home, she kills the girl because it is the only way to make her stop crying. Julie's death changes the lives of her parents, the Ductons, and will come to affect the life of Philippa Palfrey as well.

## **Helena Palfrey and Orlando**

Helena Palfrey is Maurice's first wife. Helena seduced Maurice and convinced him to marry her, all the while aware that she was already pregnant with another man's child. Maurice never suspected this truth, even after little Orlando was born. However, after Helena's death, Maurice married again and learned that he was unable to father children. Helena's deceit causes Maurice to be unable to trust the people closest to him and to show his affection for those he loves.

## **Violet Tetley**

Violet Tetley is the young blind girl who works the telephones at the Casablanca Hotel. Violet is an attractive young woman except for the cataracts and movement of her eyes.



Norman Scase meets her when he takes a room at the hotel and begins speaking to her everyday. One day, Norman takes Violet for a walk in the park to head off his sense of loneliness and sees Mary Ducton, causing him to abruptly end the walk. Later, however, Norman begins dating Violet and they eventually become engaged to marry. Norman finds himself hoping that one day Violet will give him more children and a second chance at happiness.

## **Eli Watkin**

Eli Watkin is a private detective in London. Two years after Mary Ducton's conviction, the Scases hired Eli to keep them informed on Mary Ducton's movements in prison. When Mary Ducton is due to be released, Eli calls Norman Scase into his office for the last time. Eli is dying now, closing up his business and moving to enjoy the final few months of his life. Eli gives Norman the information he has requested and advises him to be careful in his attempt to exact revenge on Mary Ducton.





# Objects/Places

## Knife

Scase buys a kitchen knife that he plans to use to kill Mary Ducton, the woman who killed his daughter.

## Tunic

Mary Ducton knits a tunic for Philippa that she is extremely proud of until she learns the truth of her adoption.

## Manuscript

Mary Ducton has written a manuscript about the murder of Julie Scase that she presents to Philippa, claiming she wrote it in prison years before to right the misconceptions of the murder. However, Maurice points out to Philippa that the envelope and paper on which the manuscript is written is new.

## Canvas Rucksack

Scase has bought a canvas rucksack in which he keeps his kill kit. Inside is the knife, an oversized mackintosh, and gloves to be used when Scase gets the opportunity to kill Mary Ducton.

## Henry Walton Painting

Philippa has hung in her mother's bedroom a painting by Henry Walton that was a gift to Philippa from Maurice on her eighteenth birthday. After Mary Ducton's death, Philippa can never again look at the painting in the same way.

## Mini

The Ductons loaded the body of Julie Scase into the trunk of their mini in order to dispose of the body. However, the car is stolen before they can establish their alibi and dispose of the body, according to the manuscript Mary Ducton has written for Philippa.



## **Greengrocer**

There is a greengrocer who has his shop in the bottom half of the home in which Philippa's Marylebon flat is located. It is through the theft of the green grocer's keys that Scase gets access to the flat.

## **Flat on Delaney Street**

Philippa takes a flat on Delaney Street in the Marylebone district of London to share with her mother before going to Cambridge.

## **Caldecote Terrace**

Caldecote Terrace is the exclusive neighborhood where Philippa lives with her adoptive parents, Maurice and Hilda.

## **Goat and Compasses**

Goat and Compasses is the name of the bar where Scase grew up with his aunt, uncle, and mother. Scase returns to visit this bar when he travels to Brighton in order to buy the items for his kill kit.

## **Hotel Casablanca**

Scase stays in the Hotel Casablanca for several weeks in order to watch the Palfrey home which is located across the street. It is here that Scase meets Violet, the woman he will eventually marry.

## **Pennington**

Pennington is the estate home of Helena Palfrey's family, whose father was titled, and is the place where Philippa and Maurice met for the first time. Throughout her childhood Philippa has fantasies about her birth parents that take place on the grounds of Pennington.



# Themes

## Revenge

Norman Scase lost his daughter ten years ago when she innocently attempted to help an injured man make his tea. This injured man was a child rapist who took advantage of the young girl's trust and used her in the most horrific way. When this man's wife came home, instead of calling the police, she killed the tiny victim. This crime rippled out from the man and the wife to affect many people, but most especially Norman Scase and his wife, Mavis. For years, Norman and his wife discussed their revenge against their daughter's killer, their desire to make her suffer the same fate as their child. However, Mavis died of cancer and has left Norman alone to keep his promise to both Mavis and Julie, to seek his revenge.

Norman struggles with the idea of murder, concerned that this makes him no better than the woman who killed his daughter. However, Norman cannot let his wife down, cannot go back on the promise he has made her. Norman retires early from his job and sells his house, all in an effort to finance his new, full time job, the murder of Mary Ducton. When Mary is released from prison, Norman follows her, learning about her newfound daughter and her decision to live in the city. From there, Norman follows Philippa's adoptive mother until he discovers where Mary Ducton is living. Norman grows nervous and frightened at the idea of what he must do, but he knows it is the right thing.

Revenge is a theme of this novel because it is the one motivating factor that drives Norman Scase. Norman does not want to become a murderer, nor does he feel the need to exact revenge on his daughter's killer. However, his wife was obsessed with the idea that Mary Ducton must pay with her own life for what she has done to theirs. Upon her death, Norman made a promise that he has discovered gives purpose to his life, that has given him a reason to face each day, a purpose that disappeared upon his daughter's death. Norman feels alive again.

## Identity

Philippa Palfrey has no memories of her life before she was eight years old and came to live with Maurice and Hilda Palfrey. There are flashes of memory, but nothing concrete that Philippa can hold on to. For this reason, Philippa has made up fantasies in her mind of her biological parents. Having been told that her mother was a servant at Pennington, the large estate belonging to the family of Maurice's first wife, Philippa imagines that her father was a duke or lord who came to Pennington for a visit and fell madly in love with her mother. Philippa imagines a great love story and hopes to one day meet her father, perhaps to bring him some of the happiness missing from his life since the death of her mother.



When Philippa learns the real truth behind the lives of her birth parents, she is shocked and reluctant to let her fantasy go. Philippa learns that her mother is still alive and it is her father who has died. Philippa's parents were convicted ten years ago for the rape and murder of twelve-year-old Julie Scase. Philippa, however, so desperate to find some romance in her mother's story, to find some connection that will help her understand who she is, decides to move in with her mother for a few months upon her release from prison.

Mary Ducton refuses to talk about the past, feeling as though there is no point in dwelling on the unpleasantness of that time. However, Mary Ducton gives her daughter a manuscript that explains what happened the night of Julie Scase's murder, giving a testimony that makes it all seem like an innocent mistake. Philippa accepts this and her mother, relishing the idea of being loved unconditionally by the woman who brought her into the world. However, when Philippa learns that Mary Ducton gave her up long before the murder of Julie Scase, she once again begins to feel like an unwanted possession. Philippa learns then that she cannot find herself in someone else.

## Need to be Loved

It seems that all anyone wants is to be loved. In this novel, the need to be loved begins with Maurice Palfrey. Maurice fell head over heels in love with his first wife, Helena. Maurice felt special when Helena, the daughter of a titled nobleman, agreed to marry him. It was a marriage that seemed made in heaven and Maurice was happy beyond words. However, after Helena's death in a car accident that also killed their son, Orlando, Maurice learned that he was incapable of having children. It was then that it became clear to him that Helena married him only to hide her indiscretion in getting pregnant out of wedlock. Maurice became incapable of showing his love then, of trusting those closest to him.

Philippa Palfrey cannot remember anything before she was eight years old and before she came to live with Maurice and Hilda Palfrey. Therefore, Philippa cannot remember her birth parents and whether or not they loved her. Being raised by a cold, controlling man like Maurice Palfrey has left Philippa looking for people to love her unconditionally, the way a parent should. Philippa first turns to a boyfriend, but his sexual orientation causes an obstacle between them that cannot be overcome. Philippa turns to her adoptive mother, but finds her timid, unworthy of her respect. Finally, when she is eighteen and is allowed to learn the identity of her parents, Philippa turns to her birth mother for love. Despite her mother's conviction for murder, Philippa still hopes to find in her the relationship she has always desired. Unfortunately, Philippa is to learn that her mother never knew how to deal with her and was often abusive, leading her to give Philippa away long before the night Julie Scase was murdered by her own hands.

Norman Scase grew up the child of an unwed mother, unwanted by his mother and her relatives. Norman was told he was ugly, incapable of inspiring love in others. However, Norman found love in his wife Mavis and their timid little girl, Julie. All of that was taken from him when Julie was murdered. Norman has lived the last ten years of his life in a



sort of limbo, incapable of finding joy in life. Norman's wife aches for revenge and makes him promise to take it upon her death. As Norman plots this revenge, he discovers a purpose in his life, a reason to get up every morning. However, it is not revenge that Norman eventually finds that will make his life worth living again. Norman finds love and a second chance at the family he once lost.

# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view. The writer has used the omniscient point of view to allow the reader to not only see the action of the plot through her characters' eyes, but to also allow the reader to hear their thoughts and feel their emotions. The point of view of this novel is often that of the two main characters, Philippa Palfrey and Norman Scase. On occasion, the narration is seen through the eyes of Philippa's adoptive parents, Maurice and Hilda Palfrey. On these occasions, the author writes through these two characters to give the reader a better sense of how they feel about Philippa and her recent actions as well as to allow some insight into the reason Philippa feels as she does about her adoptive parents and her biological mother.

The point of view of this novel works well because the author allows the reader to see the thoughts and feelings of the main characters, something that adds to the tension and the comprehension of the overall plot. The point of view also works well in this novel because the author controls it well and only makes shifts between narrating characters after a break in the writing, either by separating paragraphs between switches or by starting the switch at the beginning of a chapter. In this way, the reader benefits both from the point of view and is able to read the novel without unnecessary confusion.

## Setting

The novel is set in London, England. The novel moves from a more prosperous side of London to another, less prosperous side, exploring the idea of poverty on a character. For Philippa, the novel begins in Caldecote Terrace, a prosperous part of town where families with good incomes tend to live. In a desire to be alone with her mother, who is about to be released from prison, Philippa rents a small flat in the Marylebone section of London, a less prosperous area where working class people live. For Norman Scase, the novel begins in Seven Kings Station, another section of London where his daughter was brutally murdered one night. Scase moves to a nicer section of the city, but his story takes him back to the poverty stricken parts of London as he searches for the woman responsible for his daughter's death.

The setting of the novel becomes something of a silent character in the novel. The setting is all one city, but the characters move among its different sections, interacting with a multitude of characters in these areas that range from the highly educated, influential types to the welfare mothers who populate a great many of the less prosperous sections of the city. The setting is as different as the characters, defining these characters and introducing them to a world some of them never imagined existed. In this way, the setting becomes diverse, adding a tone to the novel that might otherwise be missing if the author had been less attentive to her setting.



## Language and Meaning

The novel is set in England and written by an English author, therefore much of the language in this novel is filled with the unique slang and speech patterns of England. Some of the speech written as dialogue in this novel can be confusing based on the unique grammar patterns of English slang, but it is not difficult for a reader to understand even if that reader might not be familiar with these grammar patterns. The novel also includes some foreign phrases that are not often readily explained in the text, but the comprehension of these phrases is not vital to the overall plot of the novel and therefore do not affect the reader's comprehension of the novel.

The language of this novel works because it reflects the backgrounds and culture of the characters who populate the novel. If the writer had attempted to change the natural pattern of speech of her characters, she would have taken away the authenticity with which these characters are presented in their setting. The foreign phrases which are rarely explained in the text are presented to show the level of education Maurice and Philippa share. Therefore, these phrases are necessary to the overall plot of the novel, especially in the depiction of these two important characters, but not necessary to the comprehension of the themes presented in this novel. Therefore, the language of this novel works well within its plot and with its characters.

## Structure

The novel is divided into three parts as well as an epilogue and each of these parts is titled by an action or place that will be important as the part develops. Each part contains a set number of chapters whose numbers begin and end with their specific part. The novel is told in both exposition and dialogue, with much of the story being told in a linear fashion, but a linear design that includes several episodes of flashback in order to share with the reader a backstory that is important to the overall plot of the novel.

The novel is written with two major story lines and several, smaller subplots. The first story line follows Philippa Palfrey, a girl who was adopted as a small child, as she searches for and finds her birth mother. The second story line revolves around Norman Scase, the father of a young murdered girl, who plans to murder the woman who killed his daughter when she is released from prison. These main plots are enhanced by the subplots that revolve around the adoptive parents who have cared for Philippa for more than ten years and the young blind woman with whom Norman Scase falls in love. All these story lines intersect at the end of the novel, bringing each to a satisfying conclusion.

## Quotes

"Philippa nearly replied: 'Philippa Rose Palfrey is what I'm called. I'm here to find out who I am,' but checked herself in time, sensing that such an affectation would be an unpropitious beginning to the interview." Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chap. 1, p. 3

"Now, when he had long ago worked through his grief—and how accurately some of his colleagues had described that interestingly painful psychological process—when he could distance himself even from humiliation and pain, he was intrigued by the moral eccentricity which could, apparently without compunction, father on him another man's child, yet which was outraged by the thought of abortion." Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chap. 3, p. 23

"'You make a baby sound like an orgasm. And if that's all he married you for—and I can't think why else—it's a pity he didn't send you to a gynecologist for a certificate of fertility before you went off together to the registry office.'" Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chap. 4, p. 37

"It was astonishing that a short passage of English prose should take so long to compose, that even the most ordinary words should carry such a charge of innuendo, condescension, or crass insensitivity." Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chap. 7, p. 51

"She had nourished grief and revenge like a monstrous fetus, ever growing but never delivered." Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chap. 9, p. 65

"He made it sound, thought Philippa, as if he were dismissing a recalcitrant paying guest. But that was how he had intended it to sound." Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chap. 11, p. 85

"Then she placed the bowl precisely in the middle of the kitchen table. It seemed to her that with this action she took possession of the flat." Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chap. 14, p. 108

"The clothes were right, the naked knife showed the keen edge of fear; but the eyes which met his with their look of mild, almost painful resolution were the eyes not of an executioner but of the victim." Book 1, Proof of Identity: Chap. 15, p. 116

"No one was going to challenge him, no one would check up on his story, or demand confirmation, yet he was compelled to act, as if by meticulous attention to every small part he could somehow confer the authority of truth on the whole." Book 2, An Order of Release: Chap. 4, p. 140

"And it was true that she took the lead. She always took the lead, even in their joint destruction." Book 2, An Order of Release: Chap. 7, p. 155





"Loneliness was a state he had got used to since Mavis's death, and he hadn't expected to feel it again as a positive emotion, nor to be visited by its sad aftermath of restlessness and boredom." Book 2, An Order of Release: Chap. 13, p. 189

"'Tis a fine deceit to pass away in a dream." Book 3, Act of Violence: Chap. 12, p. 292



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Philippa? Why does she want to find out who her birth parents were? What does she believe is her birth parents' story? Why does Philippa believe this? What is the truth? How does Philippa learn the truth? Why? What is Philippa's main focus when she learns this truth? Why does Philippa choose not to focus on the unfortunate parts of her mother's story?

Who is Maurice? Why does Maurice lie to his wife about his ability to have children? Why does he finally tell her the truth? How does his wife take this truth? How has Maurice's learning about his inability to have children affected his life? How has this affected his ability to deal with the people closest to him? Why?

Who is Hilda? Why does she love to cook so much? Why does she dislike her job working in the juvenile courts? Why does Hilda stay with her husband? Does she love him? Why does Hilda feel inadequate around her husband's friends? Is she? What does Philippa think of Hilda? Why? How does this affect their relationship? Why?

Who is Norman Scase? What happened to Scase's daughter? What happened to his wife? Why is Norman attempting to kill the woman who harmed his child? Does Scase really want to commit this crime? Why has he dedicated his life to this crime? Will he go through with it? Explain. How does planning and executing this crime change Scase's life?

Who is Mary Ducton? What crime has she committed? For what reason? What affect did Mary Ducton's childhood have on her crime? Is this a good excuse for what she has done? Why did Mary Ducton give up her only child? How does this affect Philippa when she learns the truth? Why? What does Mary Ducton do as a result of Philippa's reaction? Why?

Discuss the theme of revenge. Why do some people seek revenge? Does revenge ever do anything for these people? If so, what? Who plots revenge in this novel? For what crime? What is the hoped for result? What result does this person eventually receive? Is it worth it?

Discuss identity. Why does Philippa feel as though she can only define her own identity through knowing who her mother and father were? Why can Philippa not define herself through her own achievements or those of her adoptive parents? Why does Philippa rebel so much against her adoptive parents? How does Philippa react when she finally learns the truth? How do these events change Philippa's life?