

# **Martyn Pig Study Guide**

**Martyn Pig by Kevin Brooks (writer)**

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# Plot Summary

Fourteen-year-old Martyn Pig is faced with some difficult choices in the aftermath of his brutal father's accidental death. While he is relieved at being free from Dad's tyranny, Marty also feels a degree of guilt over that relief and conflicting emotions about the the flirtatious and mysterious quality of the girl next door; the blackmailing machinations of her repulsive boyfriend; and the sudden appearance of a large sum of money. As the narrative explores the moral ambiguities associated with both Martyn's situation and his decisions, it also explores issues related to becoming an adult and the allure of freedom.

Martyn begins the first-person narrative of his story with a description of some of the difficulties that he has faced, including having a drunken and violent father; a mother who disappeared from his life early on because of that father; and a name that has triggered series of taunts and endless bullying. He also sets the stage for the story that follows, describing the events that occur within the week before Christmas Day and an important participant in those events - Alex, the girl next door that Martyn has a crush on.

The actual story begins one night a week before Christmas. During a violent confrontation with Martyn, his drunken father accidentally falls and hits his head. Instead of calling the police, Martyn, afraid that he will be believed to be responsible for his father's death and sent to prison, leaves the body where it fell. Later that night, when Alex comes by for one of her regular nightly visits, Martyn tells her what happened. Alex tries to convince him to call the police, but he refuses. The next day, Martyn discovers that his father has inherited sixty thousand dollars. He tells Alex, suggesting that if he goes to the police, there will be no way that he can collect any of the money and telling her that now she is as "guilty" as he is. Still convinced Martyn should call the police, Alex leaves, but returns later that day with her slimy boyfriend Dean, who reveals that he knows everything that happened and that he wants the entire sum of money in order to stay quiet. Martyn agrees to have the money for Dean by the following Monday, but concocts a plan to prevent that from actually happening.

After convincing Martyn's nosy Auntie Jean that Dad is still alive, on the Saturday before Christmas, Martyn and Alex manage to dispose of Dad's body, putting it into a sleeping bag along with bits of hair and cigarette butts left behind by Dean and dumping the whole load into an abandoned quarry. The following Monday, Martyn is visited again by Dean, but tells him that if Dean makes any attempt to tell the police what he knows about what Alex and Martyn, he (Martyn) will tell the police where to find Dad's body and the evidence that Dean was involved in his (Dad's) death. Dean leaves, defeated.

The next day (Christmas Eve), shortly after discovering that Alex has disappeared, Martyn is visited by the police, who tell him that Dean has been killed in a motorcycle accident, and that there's evidence that Martyn was involved in the death. After taking him to the police station to answer some questions and leaving him alone for the night, Martyn is able to think through everything that's happened, and comes to realize that



Alex has betrayed him, and has also stolen the money. He manages to convince the police that he is innocent of everything they suspect him of, although the chief detective seems to harbor lingering doubts, at one point asking Martyn what it feels like to have gotten away with murder. Eventually, Martyn is released into the custody of his aunt.

A year later, Martyn writes that he has received a letter from Alex who is now living in America and beginning a career as an actress. On his end, Martyn seems willing to finally move on with his life.



# Part 1, Wednesday, Section 1, p. 1-20

## Part 1, Wednesday, Section 1, p. 1-20 Summary

Fourteen-year-old Martyn Pig is faced with some difficult choices in the aftermath of his brutal father's accidental death. Those choices are complicated by, among other things, relief at being free from Dad's tyranny, a degree of guilt over that relief, the flirty mysteriousness of the girl next door, the blackmailing machinations of her repulsive boyfriend, and the sudden appearance of a large sum of money. As the narrative explores the moral ambiguities associated with both Martyn's situation and his decisions, it also explores issues related to becoming an adult and the allure of freedom.

The narrative begins with Martyn's comment that he doesn't really want to start his story from the very beginning, since he doesn't really remember much about his life before his mother left. He describes the difficulties of living with his name (Martyn Pig), and his eventual realization of how to cope with it. He also describes life with his drunken father, and sets the beginning of the story a week before Christmas, a couple of days before the annual arrival of his hated, judgmental Aunty Jean. She attempted to gain custody of him when his mother left, but his father cleaned up his act just long enough to retain custody.

Two days before Jean's arrival, Dad sends Martyn to do the shopping for Christmas dinner. Out in the shops, Martyn becomes overwhelmed by the many sounds he hears and has to stop for a moment. Eventually, he completes his shopping and heads for home. At a bus stop a short distance from his house, Martyn meets Alex, who teases him about accidentally buying a chicken instead of a turkey and arranges to meet him later. As he watches her catch her bus, Martyn thinks about how much he likes her, narration revealing that as the bus drives away, Alex doesn't look back at him. Martyn then describes how he came to know her. He also describes, with some resentment, her boyfriend Dean, who works in an electronics shop and with whom Martyn had an embarrassing encounter at a drugstore. Martyn then describes his return home with the groceries and yet another encounter with his drunken dad, admitting in narration that he hated his dad but "never meant to kill him."

## Part 1, Wednesday, Section 1, p. 1-20 Analysis

This first section introduces several important elements - the central character (Martyn), his situation (his essential unhappiness), his key relationships (with his destructive Dad, the intriguing Alex, and the disgusting Dean) and, in the very intriguing line at the section's end, the novel's key element of narrative tension (i.e Dad's death). This section also introduces several key motifs, or repeated images, all of which reappear, sometimes with variations, throughout the narrative. These include Martyn's reaction to sound (which can be seen as metaphorically representing his reaction to the "noisy"



emotions at home) and his parallel longing for silence. Another important motif is Martyn's reference to Alex not looking back at him as she moves away.

Other important foreshadowings include the reference to Aunty Jean, the reference to Dean and in particular, the reference to Martyn's encounter with him at the drugstore. This reference foreshadows events in "Part 7 - Tuesday," in which a reference to this encounter forms an important part of Martyn's conversation with the police officer investigating Dad's death.



## Part 1, Wednesday, Section 2, p. 20 - 42

### Part 1, Wednesday, Section 2, p. 20 - 42 Summary

Martyn's sudden comment about killing his father leads to a reference to how nothing ever happens in isolation, which leads to a discussion of the chain of events (including being a fan of literary detective Sherlock Holmes) that led to Dad's death. Martyn then describes how his attempts to read another of his beloved murder mysteries was interrupted by thoughts of Alex - of her regular friendly evening visits, of her mum (a former "semi-famous" television star), and his experiences of Alex's own, considerable acting ability. This, in turn, leads to a discussion of their respective ambitions - Alex's to become an actress, Martyn's to become a mystery writer. Eventually, Martyn comes out of his reverie and goes downstairs, discovers that his father is again drunk, and attempts to watch his favorite television series, a murder mystery featuring Inspector Morse. His father's constant drunken heckling eventually gets Martyn so angry that he loses his temper, shouting at his dad to be quiet. Dad loses his temper and tries to hit him (as, narration reveals, he had done in the past). Martyn lightly pushes him aside and ducks out of his way. Dad loses his balance and falls, striking his head on the hearth. Martyn can tell immediately that he's dead. "I could feel it. The air, the flatness, the lifelessness." He also comments that, following through on his argument that everything that happens is the result of a chain of events and it was his father's own fault that he died.

Martyn stands still and quiet, suddenly aware of a difference between reality and television. He checks to make sure his father is truly dead, reveals that he didn't call 911 to try and revive him, and then comments that he doesn't really know why. He then sits in his dad's chair for the first time in his life, and stays there thinking for a long time. Suddenly he realizes it's raining, and that he's in "a sweet mess." His further thoughts are interrupted by the arrival of Alex, to whom he reveals what happened. She holds him for a moment, and then spends the rest of the evening struggling to convince him to call the police. Martyn repeatedly refuses, insisting the police won't believe his story and send him to jail. He also says that if the police DID believe him, and that if they found out he's essentially an orphan, he'll be sent to live with Aunt Jean, which he refuses to do. He eventually convinces Alex to go home and let him sleep on it. Alex agrees and leaves without looking back.

### Part 1, Wednesday, Section 2, p. 20 - 42 Analysis

This section contains what is often described, in narrative analysis, as "the inciting incident," the event that triggers the rest of the action in the story. In this case, that incident / trigger is the death of Dad. Martyn makes it clear, in his narration, that when he pushed Dad very lightly, but here the reader must remember that Martyn is speaking in his own defense, seemingly attempting to justify and/or rationalize his actions. This can be seen as the intention underlying his comments in this section, and at several



other times throughout the narrative at which he defends his actions and choices where every event is, in fact, the result of several other events. It must be noted, at this point, that this makes Martyn an unreliable narrator. At the same time, however, it's also important to note that the implied ambiguity of Martyn's narration, and therefore of his intention, is an important aspect of the novel's central theme. This is the work's consideration of moral ambiguity in terms of whether Martyn's actions in the moments and days following Dad's death (not to mention Alex's actions later in the narrative) are right or wrong.

Other important elements in this section include the reference to rain, the first of several references throughout the narrative to the weather, each of which has metaphorical implications. Also in this section, there are important developments in Martyn's relationship with Alex, including her holding him, the beginnings of her becoming a conspirator with Martyn in terms of what to do about Dad's death, and a repetition of the "not looking back" motif. Foreshadowing occurs in the reference to the acting talent that apparently runs in Alex's family. This aspect of Alex's life that plays a vital role in the resolution of both the narrative and of the dilemma in which Martyn finds himself.





## Part 2, Thursday

### Part 2, Thursday Summary

Martyn awakes very early in the morning from a dream in which he is being interrogated by Sherlock Holmes and Inspector Morse. He takes a long bath and has a quiet breakfast, the whole while contemplating what he can do with Dad's body. He then comments in narration on how a situation can change in a moment - in this case, the arrival of that morning's mail.

Going through the post, Martyn discovers a letter from a lawyer revealing that recently, Dad had been told he had inherited sixty thousand dollars, and that the day before, the money had been deposited into his checking account. Noting that Dad had never told him, and realizing that he (Dad) probably never intended to, Martyn searches his dad's room. He finds several important things - the correspondence between Dad and the lawyer (from which Martyn learns that the money came from a long-estranged relative in Australia), Dad's checkbook, and Dad's bank card, with the PIN number scrawled on the back. Shortly afterwards Alex arrives, and they again discuss the situation, Alex continuing to insist that Martyn call the police and Martyn continuing to insist that it's both too late and too dangerous. He also comments that Alex is now involved, having known about the body and not calling the police herself. Justifying himself in narration, he also shows her the letter and tells her he has a plan - get rid of Dad's body in an abandoned quarry near a pub (so searchers would believe he stumbled into the quarry drunk). When he suggests they borrow Alex's mum's car, Alex says it's going to be in the shop for a couple of days, leading Martyn to remember that Aunty Jean is due to visit and further leading him to comment that he's never going to live with her.

After Alex leaves, Martyn realizes that Dad is starting to smell and sprays some air freshener. That only makes the air worse. To escape that smell, Martyn goes upstairs and again looks at Dad's bank card, but puts it aside when the rain begins again, heavy and insistent and maddening. He then lies down to think. A few hours later, Martyn is surprised when he hears what believes to be Alex ringing the doorbell - and is even more surprised when it turns out Dean is with her. He is still more surprised when Dean reveals that he knows everything about the situation - jealous of Alex's frequent evening visits to Martyn, he had used recording equipment from the electronics store in which he works to record all their conversations, including the one the night before about Dad. He demands to see the body and Martyn shows him, realizing as he does so the similarity between Dad and Dean. Back in the kitchen, Dean reveals that he wants all of Dad's money, or else he'll release the tape. Martyn asks about the copies of the tape he realizes Dean must have made. Dean, who is leaving bits of hair and cigarette butts on the floor, says he (Martyn) will just have to trust that when Martyn delivers the cash (which they agree will happen on the following Monday), he will also receive all the tapes. Dean then leaves. Alex is worried, but Martyn tells her he has a plan (narration keeps the plan secret). After Alex goes, Martyn uses a pair of tweezers to collect Dean's



s hair and cigarette butts, and put them in an envelope. That night, he sleeps "a long and dreamless sleep."

## Part 2, Thursday Analysis

Martyn's situation becomes exponentially more complicated in this section, what with the discovery of Dad's secret inheritance and the involvement of Dean. Meanwhile, and with the ending of the narrative in mind (i.e. Alex's killing/framing of Dean and her disappearance with Martyn's money), it's important to note that somewhere in this section is the point at which she begins formulating her own plans. In any case, it's also important to note that when Martyn refers to how life can change in a moment, there is particular irony in the fact that life is suddenly about to change for Alex as well (i.e. she realizes she has an opportunity to make/create a new life for herself). It could even be argued that her decision to take Martyn's money is, to some degree, a response to his perhaps unsavory choice to blackmail her into helping him. In any case, it could also be argued that this is the point in the novel in which its consideration of its second sub-theme of the allure of freedom kicks in.

Other important points in this section include Martyn once again attempting to justify his actions and the reference to Dad's body beginning to smell (which foreshadows later sections in which the smelly decay of Dad's body adds further complications to Martyn's already complicated situation). Other important foreshadowings include the references to the hair and the cigarette butts, which play important roles in Martyn's plans for the disposal of Dad's body and the interrogation that, later in the narrative, Martyn undergoes at the hands of the police. Then there is the appearance of the tapes, which functions on two levels - again, to add complication to Martyn's situation, and to follow through on the earlier reference to Dean's job in an electronics store. Finally, there is the appearance of the check-book and the bank card, both of which play important roles in several sections of the upcoming narrative.



## Part 3, Friday

### Part 3, Friday Summary

Martyn and Alex struggle to get Dad upstairs into his bed. Afterwards, they replenish their energy with a cup of tea, filling the time with small talk about fish and with weightier conversations about whether they're bad people because they're breaking the law. "What's the law?" Martyn comments. "It's only someone's opinion." Conversation also reveals that Alex won't be able to borrow her mum's car until late on Saturday night. There are also comfortable silences between the two, time that Martyn uses to enjoy the quiet, to look at Alex, to wonder what she's thinking, and to muse on the prospect of ever knowing what anybody is thinking.

Aware that Aunty Jean is going to arrive for her visit soon, Martyn and Alex go back up to Dad's room and get him ready - putting a bandage on the wound in his head, applying some makeup, closing his eyes, disguising the smell of decay, and preparing a taped recording of Dad "snoring" (Alex supplies the sounds). Meanwhile, Martyn realizes how ridiculous the situation is, remembers games he used to play as a child, and muses on when the capacity to play went away and he became an "adult." When all the preparations are complete, Alex says she's going to be sick, and hurries into the bathroom. Meanwhile, Martyn hurries downstairs and continues tidying up the house, ready for Aunty Jean. As the time for her arrival comes closer, Martyn worries that Alex isn't yet out of the bathroom. Just as he's checking with her (she says she's cleaning some vomit off her shirt), Aunty Jean arrives.

The bossy, nasty Jean (Dad's sister) inspects the house, demanding to know how Dad is. When Martyn explains that Dad is sick and in bed, Jean insists upon going up to see him. Martyn nervously lets her into Dad's room, where she's taken in by all the preparations Martyn and Alex have made. Later, over tea and biscuits, Jean "jabbers" on about what a nasty boy Dad was in his childhood, leading Martyn to muse on human nature. As Jean is preparing to go, she says she has to use the bathroom. Martyn tries to talk her out of it, but she insists, much to his barely concealed dismay (he's worried about Alex being trapped in the bathroom). Jean uses the toilet without consequences, however, and soon leaves. Martyn instantly races upstairs, where he discovers that Alex hid in the shower while Jean was using the toilet. Soon afterwards, Alex returns home, leaving Martyn alone with his thoughts as he stares out the window and reflects on how pathetic and squalid his life is. He fantasizes about what he and Alex could do with Dad's sixty thousand dollars, imagining them setting up their own detective agency, or buying an island, or moving to Australia or America. He drifts into a short uneasy sleep, wakes for a while and watches some television. After his program is finished he sits quietly, "listening for the hidden sounds that tell the story of this house ... in the walls, in the bricks, under the floor. Memories.. But he hears nothing. He returns to bed, "another day gone."



## Part 3, Friday Analysis

The novel takes occasional breaks, in this section, from narrations of the physical events of the plot to explore, in what might seem a somewhat heavy-handed fashion, its central thematic consideration - specifically, the question of moral ambiguity, of what's right and what's wrong. What's particularly interesting to note about this section is the irony of Alex engaging in this conversation with Martyn when she is already, in all likelihood, making plans to, in very blunt terms, screw him over. This raises an interesting question - is Alex, in the conversation she has with him at the beginning of the section, talking about what she is doing with Martyn or what she is planning to do to him? Meanwhile, there is similar irony in Martyn's narrative comments about no-one ever being able to know what another person is thinking - he clearly, at this point, has no idea what Alex is planning and/or about to do.

The entire sequence with Martyn and Alex preparing Dad for viewing by Aunty Jean functions on two levels. First, it comes across as clever but risky, and draws the reader into the suspense-building situation of wondering whether the plan is going to work. Perhaps more importantly, this is the section in which Alex, as the narrative later suggests ("Part 7 - Tuesday"), takes action to defraud Martyn of Dad's money (i.e. stealing the papers from the bureau while apparently "recovering" from the nausea of working on Dad, using her time in the bathroom while "being sick" to conceal them). In hindsight, the question becomes whether Martyn is really so preoccupied in this scene as to not notice what she's doing. In other words, is the truth of what actually happens in this scene actually credible, particularly when he so often finds it difficult to not look at her?

Meanwhile, one of the novel's secondary themes, exploring the nature of reality, is again referred to in this section (specifically, in Martyn's musings on how his perceptions have changed from childhood fantasy to adult reality). Finally, it's important to note the reference to silence in this section's final moments. Martyn has finally managed to clear away some of the previously discussed "emotional noise" of his life, but at this moment, he is uncomfortably discovering that this particular silence, for which he seems to have longed quite desperately, is not as peaceful as he imagined.



## Part 4, Saturday, Section 1, p. 100 - 114

### Part 4, Saturday, Section 1, p. 100 - 114 Summary

Martyn wakes to a cold grey morning, noisy neighbors, and the suddenly jarring sound of the phone - Alex, calling to say she's on her way out and that it will probably be all right for them to borrow the car that night. After she hangs up, Martyn realizes he needs to get out of the house for a while, and decides to go down to a nearby beach. He gets some change out of Dad's room (which is really starting to smell bad) and catches a bus down to the beach - in fact, a small spit of land which becomes an island when the tide comes in. On the bus ride, Martyn catches glimpses of abandoned farms, piles of garbage, and destroyed equipment and vehicles - all images of decay and deterioration.

When the bus lets Martyn off, he has to walk through a small, mostly empty village to get to the beach. He walks through the windless air, kicking aside bits of beached garbage and, at one point, becoming saddened by the sight of a gutted porpoise, imagining it "thrashing helplessly in the sea, screaming unintelligible screams". As he walks, the cold deepens, and soon it starts to snow, his thoughts wandering from subject to subject - good and bad, the nature of snow flakes, what he wants to be when he grows up, dying by freezing to death. When he reaches the end of the beach he sits and looks out at the snow and the sea, all melding together into a greyish whiteness. He imagines what God might see if He was looking down and as he drifts into semi-consciousness, hallucinates a vision of Alex. Narration slips into present tense as Martyn describes Alex, all in white, coming towards him with her arms open, enchanting and beautiful. The image, however, morphs into one of a staggering, drunken Dad. Martyn shakes himself back into awareness and, as narration shifts back into past tense he runs, hard and fast, back down the beach, after a while forgetting why he's running. "Was I running away from something or running to something?" He makes it back to the bus stop, looking back over his shoulder at the sky and the snow, which are now just that - sky and snow.

Back at home, Martyn (who feels like he's been gone a long time) is relieved to discover it is still early afternoon. He makes himself some tea, has a bath, and thinks of what it means to be at home.

### Part 4, Saturday, Section 1, p. 100 - 114 Analysis

There are several intriguing elements in this section. Among them are the reappearance of the "noise" motif at the beginning of the section (again, triggering Martyn's longing for silence) and the various images of decay through which Martyn travels (evoking the "decayed" life, including his decaying Dad, he is trying to escape). There is also the image of the dolphin (which, as described, might be seen as a metaphoric representation of Martyn's own situation) and the appearance of the snow. Here it's interesting to note how the image morphs, or transforms. When it first appears here,



and as it appears throughout the narrative, it is an image of purity, freedom and peace. What's particularly interesting about its manifestation here, though, is that it morphs into a terrifying image of Dad, an image of an aspect of Martyn's life that has, to all intents and purposes, prevented him from experiencing more than a bare minimum of peace and, in fact, has destroyed what little peace he does find. It may be, in fact, that the transformation of the image from dream (of Alex) into nightmare (of Dad) is a kind of foreshadowing - of the fact that Alex does a kind of moral and/or financial violence to Martyn that is similar, in its self-centeredness, to Dad's physical and emotional violence. At the same time, it's also interesting to consider the metaphorical aspect of snow in the context of the novel's conclusion (in which the final image is of snow starting to fall) in the context of the work's thematic interest in issues of freedom. In short, while the image of snow is, for most of its appearances in the novel, associated with positive elements, here the image takes on a dark, shaded ambivalence that adds an intriguing texture to the narrative's repertoire of metaphor.

Other intriguing elements include the brief shift into present tense (occurring here at the only point in the narrative, emphasizing the immediacy and intensity of Martyn's experience) and the passing, and somewhat ironic, contemplation of "home (which, given what Martyn's experience of home actually is, is more than slightly unexpected, perhaps even unlikely). Finally, there is Martyn's question of whether he is running from something or running to something, the clear answer appearing to be "both."



## Part 4, Saturday, Section 2, p. 114 - 139

### Part 4, Saturday, Section 2, p. 114 - 139 Summary

When Alex arrives, she catches Martyn fresh from the bathtub. He dresses hurriedly, and he and Alex put the next phase of their plan into action. They get Dad dressed (arguing briefly over which jacket he was wearing when he died), wipe the makeup off his face, and staple him into a sleeping bag for easier transport (but not before Martyn puts some of Dean's hairs under Dad's fingernails and dumped the rest of the hairs, and the cigarette butts, into the sleeping bag as well). They shove the bag downstairs and wait for Alex's mum first to return with the car, and then go out so they can use the car to transport the body. As they wait, Martyn wonders what's going to happen with Dean, but then realizes that he should only be worrying about one thing at a time.

After Alex's mum leaves, Alex gets the car (which is noisy and difficult to start) and pulls it up to the house. Keeping an eye open for anyone who might be watching, Martyn and Alex load Dad into the back of the car and prepare to go, Martyn calming the slightly panicky Alex. They make their way out of town through steadily thickening snow and, after making an initial wrong turn, find their way to the gravel pit where they plan to dump the body. In the pitch darkness (the moon is shrouded by clouds), they break the ice on the lake in the middle of the pit with rocks, and then load more rocks into the sleeping bag to weigh down the body. Before they shove the body into the lake, the moon comes out, and Martyn realizes that in the midst of the garbage surrounding the pit, plant life is returning. The moon soon goes back behind the clouds, giving Martyn and Alex the opportunity to shove Dad into the lake. Martyn hears a gurgling sound as water fills the bag, and he imagines the bag sinking into the other garbage littering the lake-bottom. He and Alex then make their way home, Martyn feeling "a warm glow of comfort. Satisfied, happy, secure. We were going home."

In narration, Martyn justifies what he did, insisting that while it may seem wrong, he actually and determinedly did not hurt anyone.

On the drive home, Martyn asks Alex how she feels about Dean (she angrily tells him she hates him) and why she went out with him (she can't explain, but Martyn thinks he knows). He also asks whether she thinks Dean is going to get the money, and she quite sharply (and, to Martyn, almost viciously) says he won't. For the rest of the drive, Martyn says nothing, chasing away unhappy memories of the walk on the beach and his hallucination of Dad. He resolves to spend the next day, Sunday, just thinking. "On my own. In my house, on my own. Nobody but me. No body. Just me." He suggests that Alex drop him off a few blocks away, trying to ensure that no-one see them together in the car. She agrees, lets him off, and drives away.

As he walks home, Martyn contemplates what happened. "Everything is determined," he thinks, "the beginning as well as the end, by forces over which we have no control."





## Part 4, Saturday, Section 2, p. 114 - 139 Analysis

Again, there are several important points to this section. Narratively, this is clearly intended to be perceived as a turning point in the narrative, with Martyn and Alex taking decisive, if somewhat troubling, action to get them out of the situation in which they've found themselves. But as was the case in "Part 3, Friday," it's important to look at some of the events in this chapter in hindsight - specifically, what happens in the bedroom when Martyn and Alex are preparing Dad for burial (for lack of a better phrase). Later in the narrative, when Martyn is analyzing events in an effort to determine how Alex was able to do what she did, he theorizes that the moment of their argument over the coat Dad was wearing was also the moment when Alex stole one of Dad's coats to help complete her Mum's disguise. And again, as was the case in "Part 3, Friday", the reader has to wonder, again in hindsight, whether this is completely credible (i.e. is Martyn so dense, or so inattentive, to the girl that he both loves and is conspiring with, to NOT have an idea what she's really doing?)

Meanwhile, the snow motif / image returns in this section, here juxtaposed with the images of living plants breaking through the debris and ruin of the quarry. Here again, there is the sense that imagery is metaphorically related to Martyn's situation - specifically, that he is finding his OWN nature, breaking through the debris of his life. Other returning motifs include the images of home (an echo of the ironic, home-related imagery found in "Part 4, Saturday, Section 1"), and yet another attempt by Martyn to justify his actions. Then there is the reference to Dean and finally, the reference at the end of the chapter to events being defined by, and taking place because of, circumstances outside of his control. The obvious irony here is that he has no idea whatsoever that he is about to be messed about by just such a set of circumstances - specifically, Alex and her plans to both avenge herself on Dean and defraud her "friend" of his money.





## Part 5, Sunday

### Part 5, Sunday Summary

Martyn wakes up to the sound of church bells, describing in his narration how the church from which they're rung is actually empty and derelict. He describes having left his window open all night, having enjoyed the cold air while he slept, and looking out to see a new, clean, white carpet of snow all over the town - snow he knows will be shoveled away and dirtied soon enough. He goes downstairs, makes himself a large, leisurely breakfast, and then goes into the living room. He senses there is something different about it, and looks around at the furniture, the walls and the floors. He remembers the sound his father's head made when it cracked on the fireplace surround, and realizes that what's different about the room, and the whole house, is that it's really empty - that Dad is really gone. He repeatedly tries to get hold of Alex, but she's unavailable, her mum telling her on his first try that Alex is out and later getting no answer at all. Between calls, Martyn thinks through his plans, commenting in narration that one plan is never enough - there has to be "a Plan B, a Plan C, a Plan D, E, F, G - you need a whole alphabet of plans. You've got to be ready." His plans seem to involve Dean, the sixty thousand dollars, and the next day's deadline (in narration Martyn refers to wondering what Dean is up to). He also comments on how he emptied his room of all the things he enjoyed and played with when he was younger. Finally, when he is just about asleep, Alex calls, saying she's been out with her mom all day. This, Martyn knows, is a lie, because he spoke with Alex's mum earlier in the day. Alex comments that her mum knows something happened with the car the night before, since the seat was moved, adding that she should probably stay home so that her mum will think things are normal. With that, she and Martyn hang up. "You wait all day for something," Martyn comments, "then when it finally comes you wish you hadn't bothered." He then reads himself to sleep with a mystery novel.

### Part 5, Sunday Analysis

This section is relatively short and relatively light on plot and/or narrative action, but there are nevertheless several points to note. The first is the image of the church and the bells, a variation on the noise/silence motif that appears throughout the narrative. In this case, the noise (i.e. the bells) is connected to an image of decay and emptiness (i.e. the church), the two of them together echoing images of other sources of noise that distract Martyn (and, he seems to be implying, the world as a whole) from peace, simplicity, and truth. This, in turn, is also ironic, given that another component of the image, the church, is in theory at least also associated with those qualities. The second point to note is the reappearance of the snow motif, again associated with purity, hope and possibility. Then there are the developments in Alex's plot to defraud Martyn of his money - specifically, her lying about what she was doing. At first, it seems strange that Martyn doesn't find this more unusual than he does, but it must be remembered that throughout the narrative to this point, it's been made quite clear that Martyn has feelings



for Alex, feelings which, it seems here, lead him to a lack of suspicion that eventually turns out to be both foolish and dangerous..

On a narrative level, there is the creation of suspense by Martyn referring to his plan without suggesting what that plan is (a technique applied earlier in "Part 2, Tuesday"). Finally, there is and Martyn's reference to having cleared out his room. This image, like many other images in the work, suggests that Martyn is metaphorically clearing out both the emotional (i.e. his feelings about Dad) and physical (i.e. his experiences of Dad's violence) debris of his childhood, and preparing to move into his new (pure as fresh snow?) and better life.



# Part 6, Monday

## Part 6, Monday Summary

When Martyn wakes up, he looks out the world outside his window. His contemplations of a pigeon with half its tail missing lead him to recall the circumstances of his killing a small bird, and how he felt both bad and powerful. A short time later Alex arrives, and they go over their plan for the day. Martyn attempts to persuade Alex that they can start writing checks off the account with the money in it, showing her on a piece of paper how well he can forge his father's signature. Alex convinces him to wait, and then takes the sheet of signatures and the bank card upstairs, telling Martyn she'll flush the signatures down the toilet. Later, as they're preparing to leave, conversation reveals that Alex has talked Dean into giving her a key to his apartment (apparently, this is part of their plan). Alex and Martyn then wait for the bus Alex is to take, and Martyn remembers it's the same bus stop where they met a couple of days before. His narration of Alex getting on the bus on this occasion is similar in tone, structure and word usage as the language he used on the previous occasion, and concludes with the same image - once again, she doesn't look back as she leaves.

Shortly after Alex goes, Dean arrives on his motorcycle. Martyn describes him as attempting to be intimidating, but Martyn makes some sharp comments and Dean doesn't respond, which suggests to Martyn that he (Dean) is not really as "hard" as he seems to want to be. Sitting him down in the living room, Martyn tells Dean that he's not going to be getting any money. When he and Alex disposed of the body, Martyn says, they put Dean's hairs and cigarette butts with it. If Dean releases the tapes, Martyn adds, he (Martyn) and Alex will tell the police where to find Dad's body. He also tells the increasingly silent Dean that Alex is at that moment searching his apartment, looking for the extra tapes. While Dean is absorbing all this information, Martyn looks out the window, and watches the snow fall. He watches one flake in particular, and suddenly, somewhat strangely, identifies with it. He also notices a pair of footprints going to and from Dean's motorcycle. When he turns back into the room, he tells Dean to go. Dean does, quietly and defeatedly. Martyn listens to the sound of Dean's motorcycle disappear into the distance, and comments in narration that Plan A went perfectly. Now it's just him and Alex left with sixty thousand dollars.

A few minutes later Alex arrives, nervous and edgy. Martyn notices some black marks on her hands, which are gone after she goes upstairs to wash up. So is her nervousness as she explains to Martyn that everything in the apartment went smoothly - she has the tapes. When Martyn wonders whether either of them will ever hear from Dean again, Alex gets what he describes as a strange smile on her face, and says that they won't. Meanwhile, Martyn hears an ambulance siren in the distance, but thinks nothing of it.

After he and Alex burn the tapes, and after Martyn has put the ashy remains into a garbage bin a couple of blocks away, they settle down to a game of Scrabble. As they



play, Martyn contemplates his plans for the money, imagining the possibility of taking Alex on a long, perhaps permanent, trip. He speaks his plans out loud, saying that they can go anywhere they want. It takes Alex a few minutes to respond, but she eventually says she'll talk about it with him the next day - Christmas Eve. She goes, and once again Martyn watches her, and once again she doesn't look back. That, Martyn comments in narration, was the last time he ever saw her.

## Part 6, Monday Analysis

The chapter opens with a symbolic contemplation of the narrative's primary theme, as Martyn's contemplation of his killing of the bird echoes the book's overall examination of relative morality. It's interesting to note, at this point, how this contemplation is followed by a more active, but much subtler, enacting of that same theme, as Alex persuades Martyn, for morally ambiguous reasons of her own (i.e. her own need for the money) to not start writing checks on the sixty thousand dollars right away. Meanwhile, her taking of the sheet of signatures and the bank card play important roles in the furthering of her plans for both revenge on Dean and taking the money, as Martyn eventually deduces in the following sections.

Related elements, in that they also represent part of Alex's plan and the eventual revelation of what that plan is, are the references to the sound of Dean's motorcycle suddenly disappearing, to the footprints, to the black marks on Alex's hands, to the smile on her face, and to the sirens. All foreshadow the references to Dean's death in the following section and Martyn's eventual deduction of how that death came about.

Then there is the repetition (twice in one section) of the "Alex not looking back" motif, which here as elsewhere, foreshadows her eventual disappearance from Martyn's life. Another interesting, and quite ironic, piece of foreshadowing is the reference to Alex and Martyn going on a long trip, the irony being that while Martyn doesn't go on such a trip, Alex does (i.e. to America) while using his money. Finally, there is the suspense-building reference to Alex's ultimate disappearance, a further reiteration of the technique used previously, perhaps most notably in "Part 5, Tuesday." Finally, there is the return of the snow motif, this time establishing the connection between Martyn and snow more clearly and thoroughly than ever. .



# Part 7, Tuesday

## Part 7, Tuesday Summary

The next morning, Christmas Eve, Martyn starts to worry when Alex hasn't shown up when she said she would. He becomes even more worried the later it gets, and eventually goes over to Alex's house. He sees that the car isn't there and the snow hasn't been disturbed - the car has evidently been gone for some time. He also sees that the house is empty, and makes his way home, a frightening idea forming in his head. He goes up to Dad's room and searches it, discovering that all the lawyer letters, the checkbook, the bank card, and some of Dad's clothes are gone. The idea growing in his head becomes clearer. Alex and her mum (the two actresses) have somehow, he thinks, defrauded him of the entire sixty thousand dollars. At first he can't believe this might be true, but sits and thinks, and eventually, in true Sherlock Holmes form ("when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth"), realizes that it's the only possibility. He goes back over everything that happened, realizes that Alex must have used all the time she was ostensibly being sick (see "Part 3, Friday"), she was stealing clothes and putting them in her holdall, and wonders whether it was part of her plan right from the beginning of her involvement. He also wonders where Alex went, whether he ever really meant anything to her... and worries, all the way until midnight, whether there's anything he can do.

Martyn's wonderings are interrupted by the arrival of the police (Detective Inspector Breece and Detective Sergeant Finlay) looking for Dad. Finlay goes upstairs while

Breece interviews Martyn, who says that Dad isn't there, that he's been gone since Saturday, and that he often disappears for days at a time because he drinks. As Martyn makes tea, Breece is called out of the room by Finlay. The two have a murmured conversation, and then Breece comes back in, asking whether Martyn knows Dean. Martyn says he knows Dean only slightly, having met him in passing at a drugstore. Breece explains that Dean was killed the afternoon before, that the brake lines on his motorcycle were cut, and that evidence was found in Dean's apartment (the sheet of signatures, the letters from the lawyers) that suggests a connection between Dean and Dad. At that, Breece then produces a facecloth with oil on it that he (Breece) says Finlay just found in Martyn's bathroom. As the shocked Martyn realizes that Alex has both set Dean up and killed him, Breece tells him to prepare to come down to the police station for questioning, and then tells Finlay to call someone from Social Services.

Martyn accompanies Breece and Finlay down to the police station. At one point Martyn looks at the car's dashboard clock, sees that it's one a.m. and realizes that it's Christmas Day. When they get to the station, Martyn is first shown into an office, where he is watched over by a stern female police officer. After a few minutes wait, Breece comes in and says there's been some difficulty getting someone to come in from Social Services, and that Martyn will have to spend the night. Instead of being shown to a cell, Martyn is shown into a windowless room with a bed. Left alone, he realizes the depths



of what Alex has done - snuck back after visiting Dean's apartment, cut the brake lines on his bike, watched and listened as he died, came back to the house, and while upstairs washing the oil off her hands, stole the checks and the bank card. As the fullness of Alex's actions kicks in, Martyn vomits violently, wondering how and why she felt the drive to react so violently.

As Martyn calms down, he realizes how perfectly Alex and her mum had planned everything. He still wonders about one thing - why did Alex leave the signatures and the lawyer's letters in Dean's apartment? He realizes he can't know the answer, and that he has some serious thinking to do ...

## Part 7, Tuesday Analysis

If Dad's death in "Part 1, Wednesday" could be described as the "inciting incident" or "trigger" for the rest of the action, the events of this section could be described, in similar conventional terms, as the "crisis", or point of most significant difficulty for the protagonist, Martyn. Here he not only faces the consequences of his actions in disposing of his father's body, but also discovers that someone whom he had considered to be an ally and friend has, in fact, betrayed him. In spite of his shock, however, he is able to keep his wits about him throughout the entire chain of events, not giving away too much information at the same time putting together the pieces of what information he DOES have to arrive at his interpretation of the truth. The next section contains the work's climax, or point of highest emotional/situational intensity, the point at which the protagonist's choices and/or actions are the most significant and determine the conclusion of the narrative.

The character of Breece is an intriguing one, portrayed in this section as being world weary and cynical, but in the following section as also having a sharp, somewhat cold, analytical mind. In both sections, interestingly enough, Martyn also comments on Breece's having the smell of alcohol on his breath - he is, it seems, intended to be portrayed in at least a somewhat similar way as Dad (i.e. as a bully and a danger to Martyn). He is, arguably, far more clever than Dad, but ultimately similarly determined to see Martyn punished. Also arguably, he comes to this determination from the same place as Dad came to his - from a belief, rather than proof, that Martyn is guilty of something and should be punished. Martyn, however, is as determined to escape Breece's control as he was to escape his Dad's - only when it comes to Breece he (Martyn) needs to use his wits much more than he ever had to do with Dad, as the narrative reveals in the following section.

Finally, the section ends as did many previous sections - with an indication of action being taken, but no indication of what that action actually is.



## Part 8, Christmas Day

### Part 8, Christmas Day Summary

The next day, Christmas Day, Martyn believes he's ready for whatever Breece has to say, but is surprised when Breece (accompanied by the sympathetic and pretty Officer Sanders) tells him that Dad's body has been found. Martyn breaks down in tears, but when Breece says his (Martyn's) aunt is there to see him, Martyn is able to insist that he doesn't want to see her. He later reveals in narration that his tears were a performance, acted using a technique Alex taught him - to think of something sad, in this case the loss of a beloved puppy sold by Dad without Martyn's knowing. After Sanders brings him a cup of tea, Martyn cries again, for real this time - and then does some more thinking. He goes through everything he's learned about his situation and all the questions he has, commenting in narration on how complicated the whole experience has gotten - far more complicated in reality than similar situations in books.

When Martyn is interrogated by Breece and Sanders, he is advised and supported by Peter Bennett, brought in from Social Services. Breece begins by asking when Martyn last saw Dad (Saturday, the day after Aunty Jean came - he was feeling better and went out), and then asks whether Martyn or his father had a sleeping bag, explaining (when Martyn appears confused at the question) that Dad's body was found in a sleeping bag. Martyn says they didn't have one, but adds that Dad might have had one hidden somewhere. Breece then talks forcefully about where Dad's body was found, leading Bennett to intervene in an effort to get him to calm down. Breece changes the subject, asking how Martyn knew Dean. Martyn "confesses" that he had gotten into trouble with Dean after speaking with his girlfriend, that Dean had threatened to "get" him, and that one day after Dad left, Dean came over, bullied him, searched the house, found the papers from the lawyers, and tried to extort the money from Martyn. He said, Martyn reveals, that he would be back that night, but never showed up. Breece wonders whether Dean might have been hiding a sleeping bag in his pack. Martyn says he might have. Bennett again intervenes, saying Martyn has been interviewed long enough. He also says Martyn has to go with Aunty Jean. Martyn tries to refuse, but realizes he has no option. As Breece is leaving, Martyn realizes that he (Breece) doesn't believe his story, but also realizes there's nothing more he (Breece) can do at this point. He then asks how Breece knew where to find Dad. Breece says the police received an anonymous phone call from a gruff-voiced man using a stolen mobile phone giving the exact location of the body. Allowed to go free, Martyn can only think of Alex, and how she seems to have thought of everything.

### Part 8, Christmas Day Analysis

There are several key points in this section. The first is structural, in that the events of this section mark the work's climax, or point of highest intensity or confrontation - in this case, the confrontation between Martyn and Breece over Martyn's relationship with the





deaths of Dad and Dean. The second is related, in that this section, and indeed this particular moment / confrontation also marks the book's thematic climax, the point of most vivid development of one of the work's themes - again in this case, the nature of adult reality (here commented upon in Martyn's narration).

The third point to note about this section is the clever way Martyn integrates facts (i.e. his relationship with Dean) with fiction (i.e. the nature and origins of that relationship) with outright lies (i.e. the sleeping bag). What's perhaps even more noteworthy is the way he is able to think so quickly and effectively on his feet (i.e. when confronted with sudden, shifting awareness of what Breece both knows and suspects).

Finally, there is the revelation at the end of this section that either Alex or her mother (Alex is the only other person who knew where Dad was) called the police station to tell them about the body. The novel never actually comes out and says it, but it seems that Alex's intention was/is to complete the case against Dean and to keep Martyn in the clear - in other words, to focus attention on Dean and take attention away from Martyn. Reading between the lines, there is the sense that Alex seems to have faith that Martyn will be intelligent enough to think his way out of any difficulties that may arise from this particular situation. This sense is borne out by the content of Alex's final letter to Martyn (revealed in the following section) in which she hints that he has faith that he will be able to do exactly that.





## Part 9, Epilogue

### Part 9, Epilogue Summary

Almost a year later, Martyn is living at Auntie Jean's. It's not all that bad, he says, in spite of her few annoying habits (one of which is drinking - not as much as Dad, but enough to make things uncomfortable at times). Breece, Martyn says, continued his investigation for a while, but in spite of there being lots of pieces to the puzzle available, he hasn't been able to put it all together - Martyn guesses that Breece thinks Dean killed Dad, and that Martyn killed Dean, but can't prove it. Martyn then reveals what happened to the money - bank security camera footage shows a "a blurred figure cashing a check for sixty thousand dollars on the Tuesday morning", a figure that bears "a passing resemblance to Mr. William Pig." Everyone now knows, Martyn comments, that Dad was dead by then, and the figure is too short to be Martyn, so what happened to the money remains a mystery (although Martyn remains convinced it was probably Alex's mum). At one point, Breece asks Martyn about Alex, and Martyn says he didn't know her all that well. When Breece asks about all the phone calls that, according to records, Alex made to Martyn the week of Dad's death, Martyn says they were working on a project for school together. Breece then asks Martyn what it feels like to get away with murder, and Martyn says he has no idea ...

Martyn also describes having to attend Dad's funeral, which he says was horrible - a gathering of mostly strangers, there to listen to a minister say good, comforting things about Dad, all of which Martyn knew weren't true.

Martyn concludes his story with the news that Breece let the matter just slip away into oblivion, and then offers the revelation that he's had a letter from Alex, now in America. He hides in his room at Auntie Jean's to read it privately. Alex says she hopes he's all right, and reminds him of what he said earlier about "something's only wrong if you think it's wrong. That if you think it's right, and others think it's wrong, then it's only wrong if you get caught". She says she understands what he meant now, and hopes he understands her. She comments that she's gotten her first real acting job, and hopes he'll write a script for her. She suggests that it be a murder mystery, adding that she thinks he probably knows one. As he puts the letter down, Martyn looks down the window, and sees that it's starting to snow.

### Part 9, Epilogue Analysis

This section of the novel ties several of its dangling loose ends together, offering information about what happened to Martyn in the aftermath of Dad's death and the investigation, and also about what happened to Alex. What's interesting about this section, and perhaps a little surprising, is that Martyn, in his narration, never offers any theories or beliefs about why Alex did what she did. The implication, reading between the lines of Alex's letter, is that she and her mum saw the situation as an opportunity to



get some money so they could pursue their dreams of acting careers in America. Again, however, this is implied, never discussed outright. What's even more interesting is the fact that Martyn expresses no anger towards Alex, no desire for revenge. Is this because he cares so much for her that he's glad she's having a chance to live her dreams, no matter that she screwed him over to do it? The narrative doesn't say, but it is a possibility. In any case, there is yet another significant irony here, in that she's realizing the dreams she had while removing the means (i.e. the sixty thousand dollars) for Martyn to do the same. This, in turn, could be seen as adding yet another interesting level of irony to her urging Martyn to write his murder mystery. One final level of irony to the letter is the sense that in spite of being referred to several times throughout the narrative as "not looking back" at Martin, in writing and sending the letter, Alex actually IS looking back, albeit metaphorically.

Another possibility for explaining Martyn's lack of anger seems to be not so much that he has forgiven her, but that he is more focused on moving ahead with his life on whatever terms he can. This premise is supported first by his relatively sanguine attitude towards the drinking of Aunt Jean (i.e. she is what she is, it doesn't really harm him in the way Dad's drinking in) but more importantly in the conclusion of the narrative with images of snow. In other words, Martyn Pig has moved out of the sty of his past (so to speak), and into a future where, perhaps for the first time in his life, he can be free to be who he wants to be, can be, and dreams of being. In his moving on, he is enacting the novel's theme of freedom, in that he is now free not only of the suffering imposed by Dad, but by the potential suffering imposed by his reaction to Alex's betrayal.



# Characters

## Martyn Pig

Martyn is this novel's fifteen year old protagonist and narrator. Since he is an unreliable narrator, much of what he says about himself, his experiences and perspectives needs to be considered with at least some degree of skepticism, but there are some things he says that can be regarded as grounded in, again, some degree of truth. For example, there can be little doubt in the reader's mind that he, as he suggests, has suffered a great deal in school, and perhaps in the rest of his life, because of his name. There can also be little doubt that his mother left the family when he was too young to remember much about her, and similarly little doubt that she did so because her husband was a drunken brute. How much of a brute he was, however, must be considered carefully, given that Martyn is, on some level, determined to convince the reader that his choices were justified - in other words, was Dad as much of a monster as Martyn portrays him? Or is Martyn portraying him as worse than he was in order to more thoroughly justify his Martyn's actions? Ultimately, it's up to the reader to decide. Meanwhile, another important aspect to Martyn's character that seems to be accurately portrayed is his devotion to mystery novels (the thoughtful, detailed crafting of which gives him clues about how to concoct his plans and the stories he tells the police). On the other hand, the portrayal of his physical appearance may again be shaped by his intention to portray himself as a victim struggling to survive a difficult lot in life.

How much of Martyn's story and self-portrait a reader believes is ultimately less relevant than the fact he does have an unpleasant life, and that his actions throughout the narrative are taken with the intention of making that life better. The imagery of snow seem to suggest that Martyn succeeds in realizing this intention.

## Alex(andra)

If this novel were a film noir and if sixteen year old Alex was a few years older, she would be described the same way as such women in such films are - as a "femme fatale". This is a woman (or in Alex's case, a young woman) who knows she's in trouble or attractive, often both, and uses a hapless, well-meaning man to achieve her often murderous ends. Calculating and self-centered, the femme fatale is a user, a liar, and a temptress, someone with drive and determination but whose intentions and actions are defined more by selfishness than compassion or affection. Alex is all these things - at least, as the narrative unfolds. The question of whether she does what she does solely in response to the situation at hand or whether she's a user at the core of her nature is unclear - can one answer this question by looking at her relationship with Dean? She says she's never been happy with him, but because she's so devious about so many other things, one might very well wonder. Her later actions certainly seem to suggest that she and Dean are more alike than she and Martyn, which is maybe why she decides to get rid of him (Dean) - she feared being used by him as much as he might



end up being used by her. In any case it's all speculation, albeit of the intriguing sort. The bottom line is Alex uses and discards Martyn with no regard whatsoever for his dreams, feelings, goals and values, and for that she more than earns the sobriquet "femme fatale."

It's interesting to note, however, that Martyn's portrayal of her is, to some degree, colored by what appears to be lingering affection for her.

## **Dad (William)**

Dad is portrayed as a drunken, violent, abusive lout who is selfish and manipulative. However, Martyn is to some degree, an unreliable narrator. Is Dad as much of a beast and a loser as Martyn portrays him? The evidence seems to suggest that Dad is at least to some degree significantly unpleasant, but there is a lingering sense that all in the Pig household might not be as awful as Martyn wants the reader to believe.

## **Aunty Jean**

Jean is Dad's older sister. She is portrayed as bossy, judgmental, negative, nosy, and controlling. Later in the narrative, after Martyn has gone to live with her, she is portrayed as having more compassion than Martyn initially believed, but also as being a drunk like Dad, albeit a less violent and dangerous one. Her presence in the narrative serves primarily to raise the tension and/or the stakes for Martyn.

## **Dean**

Dean is Alex's boyfriend, described by Martyn in terms that boil down to Dean being physically and morally repulsive. Dean's attempts to blackmail Martyn and Alex into giving him Dad's inheritance are an important catalyst for key events in the plot.

## **Detective Inspector Breece**

Breece is the police detective assigned to investigate Dad's disappearance. He is portrayed as being somewhat uninterested in the case, as though he's merely going through the motions. Martyn, and therefore the reader, soon realize, however, that Breece is both determined and intelligent, striving to put the pieces of the puzzle about Dad's and Dean's deaths together to come up with a solution to the crime. Interestingly, Martyn makes a particular point of describing Breece as having the smell of whiskey on his breath. The question of whether Breece actually does drink or whether Martyn is trying to gain sympathy for himself by once again portraying himself as victimized by a drunk comes into play.



## **Finlay, Sanders**

These two police officers assist Breece in his inquiries. Finlay is portrayed as being somewhat bored and a bit of a dogsbody for Breece, something of an errand boy or gofer. The female Sanders is portrayed as being more sympathetic, and somewhat warmer. There is the sense that she is the so-called "good cop" to Breece's so-called "bad cop."

## **Peter Bennett**

Peter Bennett is the social worker brought in by Breece, apparently according to regulations, to keep an eye on Martyn while Martyn is being interrogated about Dad. Bennett is portrayed by Martyn as being officious and ineffectual, well-intentioned but ultimately irrelevant, both to Martyn and to Breece.

## **Alex's Mum**

Alex's mum actually appears both infrequently and briefly in the narrative, but nonetheless plays a very important role in the action in the resolution. She is a former actress, once successful in a regular role on a television series, and has passed both her talents and her ambition onto her daughter. It is she, Martyn comes to believe, who posed as Dad in order to withdraw his Dad's sixty thousand dollar inheritance from the bank. How much of a role she played in other aspects of Alex's plans, or for that matter Alex's plans with Martyn, is unclear - did Mum, for example, know what the car was being used for, and was her playing dumb therefore a lying component of Alex's overall plan? The novel never makes that point entirely clear, but it is one worth considering.

## **Inspector Morse, Sherlock Holmes**

These two fictional detectives are Martyn's idols. Their adventures provide both escapism (from his life with Dad) and inspiration for both his future and his present-day plotting about what to do with Dad's body.



# Objects/Places

## England

The novel is set in an unidentified community in England, in a city that is also unidentified but which seems to be mostly blue collar and within relatively easy reach of the sea.

## Martyn's House

Martyn and Dad live in a somewhat decrepit and neglected home in what seems to be a slightly lower class area of their home city. It is there that Dad dies, and it is there that Martyn keeps Dad's body while Martyn tries to figure a way out of the circumstances triggered by Dad's death.

## Rain

Rain is used throughout the narrative as a metaphoric representation of trouble and/or difficulty for Martyn. The connection is established in "Part 1, Wednesday, Section 2" when Martyn's realization that he is in "a sweet mess" is juxtaposed with the beginnings of a rainstorm. Here it's interesting to note that within moments of this juxtaposition, Alex arrives, the narrative eventually revealing that she is an unexpected source of even more trouble for Martyn.

## Snow

In the same way as rain as used as a symbol of trouble, snow is frequently utilized as a symbol of hope and possibility, of a new life beginning for Martyn in the aftermath of Dad's death. The metaphoric connection between Martyn and snow is clearly and vividly (heavy-handedly?) in "Part 6, Monday", while the meaning of that connection is strongly implied in several places, the novel's final words most of all (see "Part 9, Epilogue").

## The Beach

On the day he and Alex have planned to dispose of Dad's body, Martyn takes a trip to a nearby beach. The beach is empty and the weather is cold and volatile and, leaving Martyn alone with his similarly volatile thoughts. As snow starts to fall and rapidly becomes heavy, Martyn hallucinates a vision of a loving, beautiful Alex that morphs unexpectedly and frighteningly into a vision of Dad - in other words, the beach is the setting for Martyn's experience of both his dreams and his nightmares.



## **Dad's Inheritance**

The day after Dad's death, Martyn discovers that he (Dad) had been left an inheritance of sixty thousand dollars from a never-mentioned, long-estranged relative in Australia. The discovery of the money heightens and intensifies Martyn's intention to deal with Dad's death on his terms that money will help him change his life for the better.

## **The Bank Card, the Checkbook**

Martyn plans to access Dad's inheritance by either forging Dad's signature on some checks or withdrawing some of the money using the PIN number written on the back of the card, or both. When both disappear, Martyn deduces that they were stolen by Alex, and that she intends to use them to take the money for herself.

## **Dean's Tapes**

In one of the narrative's more farfetched scenarios, Alex's suspiciously jealous boyfriend Dean, who works in an electronics store, places a voice-controlled tape recorder in Alex's bag to record her conversations with Martyn, and records her talking about Dad's death and the inheritance with him. The tapes, and their potential for profitable blackmail, form the basis of Dean's plan to get the sixty thousand dollar inheritance for himself, and also the fulcrum of Martyn's plan to turn the tables on Dean and save both himself and Alex from his manipulations.

## **Dean's Hair and Cigarette Butts**

While talking with Martyn and Alex about the tapes, Dean leaves behind some hairs and some cigarette butts. Martyn plants them in the sleeping bag in which he and Alex conceal Dad's body, thereby ensuring that when the body is found Dean is implicated in Dad's death and disappearance, and therefore ensuring that Dean's blackmail attempt will fail.

## **The Sheet of Signatures**

At one point, Martyn shows Alex how well he can forge Dad's signature by scrawling it several times on a sheet of paper. Alex says she's going to destroy it, but in fact saves it (without Martyn knowing) to plant in Dean's apartment as further evidence to suggest his involvement in Dad's death and disappearance.

## **The Quarry**

Martyn and Alex select a small lake in an abandoned quarry as the location for disposing of Dad's body. The growth of new foliage, in the midst of the debris



surrounding the lake, can be seen as representing the "growth" of a new life for Martyn in the wake of Dad's death.

## **The Police Station**

Detective Inspector Breece takes Martyn here for interrogation once he (Breece) establishes the links between Martyn, Dean, and Dad's disappearance.





# Themes

## The Ambiguity of Morality

Several times throughout the narrative, as Martyn and Alex work out both the generals and the specifics of how they're going to deal with the situation in which they find themselves, they discuss questions of whether what they're doing is right or wrong, good or evil, moral or immoral. They go back and forth on the question several times, with Martyn suggesting repeatedly that because no-one is being hurt there is, in effect, no real evil in what they're doing. At one point, Martyn even says that there is in fact no such thing as the law and that the law is really only one person's opinion. These sorts of questions about the nature of right and wrong resurface frequently, but nowhere in the novel are they as troubling as in its final moments. Alex, in the letter to Martyn from America that concludes the narrative, suggests that the only true measure of whether an action is right or wrong depends on the perspective of the person taking that action - and whether that person ultimately gets caught. It could be argued that this perspective is true for more than most moralists would care to admit. Ultimately, though, the narrative never comes out and says, one way or the other, that what either Martyn or Alex did is either right or wrong - there is the strong sense that the reader is being left to judge for him/her self. Granted, Martyn's first person narration contains several forceful, perhaps over-emphatic, references to his belief that he did not do anything wrong. It could be argued, in fact, that this ambiguity of narrative perspective draws a connection between this aspect of the book's themes and one of its secondary themes - the nature of reality.

## The Nature of Reality

Several times throughout the narrative, Martyn refers to his experience as a kind of waking up or a realization that "reality" is different from life as portrayed in books/films or on television. Aspects of this experience that fall into this category for Martyn are experiences of being around death; of contemplating the difference between childhood fantasy and adult experience; and of being caught up in a murder investigation. There is also the reference, somewhat Biblical in origin, to Martyn's having given up childhood things. All these experiences, and Martyn's commentary on them, suggest that he is to some degree coming of age, realizing that the ways he had of interpreting the world had more to do with fantasy, and wishful thinking, than with the way things actually are. It is here, perhaps, that questions of Martyn's narrative reliability come into the equation.

It could also be argued, however, that thematic questions about the nature of reality are explored in another way from the angle that one's reality can be changed if one is prepared, as Martyn and Alex clearly are, to take some risks and make some bold, perhaps somewhat questionable, choices. Their present realities are constrictive and unhappy, and they become determined to do whatever it takes to change them. The narrative's third thematic consideration comes into play and its contemplation of the allure of freedom.



## The Allure of Freedom

It could be argued that the novel's central narrative line is defined less by the facts of the circumstances (i.e. Dad dying) and more to do with the prospect of freedom that those circumstances opens up. For Martyn, the prospect of freedom is immediate - freedom from violence and from other forms of abuse and when the prospect of money comes into the picture, freedom from everything that his life has both been and promises to remain. The money, in turn, also brings the prospect of freedom into Alex's life - specifically, the freedom for both her and their mother to pursue their longed-for careers as actresses. It could even be argued, in fact, that although the narrative never actually comes out and says it, Dean's attempt to blackmail his way into possession of that money represents could also be an expression of a desire for freedom. It certainly is for the other two, it stands to reason that it could also be so for Dean. In all three cases, the prospect of freedom, and its simultaneous allure, leads these three characters to do increasingly desperate, morally ambiguous things - it is, it seems, the driving need at the core of their identities, and therefore of their actions.

Meanwhile, it's important to note that the novel also contains contrasting experiences of a lack of freedom. Dad and, to a lesser degree, Jean and Breece, are both defined by the lack of freedom in their lives. Dad is trapped by his addictions, Jean is trapped by hers and her beliefs about morality, Breece is trapped by his job's necessity of responding only to facts (he believes Martyn is in some way guilty, but can't act on that belief because he is trapped by his job's insistence on basing guilt solely on evidence. In providing such a vivid contrast to the freedom envisioned and pursued by Martyn, Alex, and perhaps Dean, the experiences of Dad, Jean and Breece more vividly define the intensity of need in the latter three.

# Style

## Point of View

The first noteworthy aspect of the work's point of view is that it is written from the first-person and subjective perspective, specifically telling the story through the eyes and experiences of protagonist Martyn Pig. This narrative choice draws the reader more closely into Martyn's story, drawing him/her into experiences, emotions and insights as Martyn experiences them. A particularly interesting aspect of this narrative point of view is that it limits the reader's knowledge of the full range of Martyn's circumstances to the same knowledge as Martyn has. The reader is as duped and surprised by Alex as Martyn is.

The second point to note about point of view is one suggested throughout this analysis - specifically, the idea that at least to some degree, Martyn is an unreliable narrator. In Martyn's case, the suspicion of unreliability comes about because, as is noted below, he puts a great deal of time and energy into striving to convince the reader that what he did was the right thing. The intensity of this determination suggests that aspects of the work such as Dad's monstrosity might be calculatedly shaped in order to reinforce Dad's argument (i.e. he was such a total beast that he deserved what happened to him).

There is another way in which Martyn might be considered an unreliable narrator. It's interesting to consider, the differences in Martyn's portrayals of Dad and Alex who, it could be argued, treats him as abusively as Dad does, albeit in very different ways. Specifically, Martyn doesn't condemn or judge Alex, but fairly simply presents what he experiences as the facts. In short, it could also be argued that Martyn is an unreliable narrator for more than one reason. Not only might he want to portray Dad as deserving of what happened and himself as justified in what he did, but he might also be softening his portrayal of Alex because he still cares for her. In other words, in the case of Alex Martyn's objectivity might be tainted by longing and/or affection, in the same way as his objectivity, when it comes to Dad, might be tainted by anger, hate, and resentment.

## Setting

The novel is apparently set during the period in which it was written, around the early part of the 2000's. There is little or no sense that it's much later. Martyn and Alex, for example, don't use cell phones to communicate and neither appears to have access to a computer. This might be a function of the lower class / blue collar circumstances in which they live, but in contemporary society, it seems that almost everyone can afford a cell phone no matter how economically disadvantaged the family situation. In any case, there is the sense that the work's setting in time is of less significance than its setting in place - specifically, in a working class, blue collar community in Great Britain. This is significant in a couple of ways. First, it affects the way language is used, particularly in terms of vocabulary. Second, it gives the work an almost Dickensian feel, referring to



the work of 18th or 19th Century British novelist Charles Dickens, who wrote in considerable, knowledgeable detail about England's working class poor and about questions of their morality. There are clear echoes of Dickens' narrative and thematic perspective here, but not necessarily his scope - Dickens created broad canvases of narrative with large groups of characters, sweeping periods of time, and numerous physical locations. In short, "Martyn Pig" might be described as being, at least to some degree, Dickensian in miniature. There is one last point to consider about the relationship between this novel and those of Charles Dickens. In many cases, the latter created characters whose names reflected their nature and situations. It could be argued that, to some degree, Martyn's admittedly troubling name is reflective of his situation and of his attitude towards Dad's body.

## Language and Meaning

When it comes to language and meaning, there are several important points to note. The first, as commented upon above, there is the work's being set in Great Britain, the differences in language becoming apparent in the vocabulary used throughout the narrative. The second point to note about language is the sense that without incorporating any curse words, the novel's language is often hard-hitting and uncompromising, particularly when it comes to portrayals of Dad's brutality. There is a strong sense of immediacy and urgency about the language that connects with, and portrays, Martyn's feelings of desperation. Third, there is the brief employment of present tense narration during Martyn's hallucination of Alex and Dad during the snowstorm at the beach (Part 4, Saturday, Section 1). This very effectively draws the reader into Martyn's experience even more thoroughly and immediately, its impact intensified because of its brevity and uniqueness.

But perhaps the most important aspect of the work's use of language is the way it reinforces its central thematic context. It's clear that the novel is exploring, to a significant degree, questions of relative morality, it's important to note that the narrative never actually comes out and says that what Martyn did was right. Yes, he repeatedly justifies his actions in his first person narration, but there is a quality about his justifications that suggests he is striving to convince himself as well. In other words, it could be argued that the novel is, in fact, suggesting that the opposite is true - that acting purely from motives of self-preservation is not a good thing. The novel certainly seems to be making that point about Alex and after all, Martyn loses the money, the girl, and the capacity to fulfill his dreams with both. One could argue that this is, in fact, justice for not doing the right thing.

## Structure

For the most part, the narrative is constructed in what might be described as a traditional and linear fashion - cause and effect; action leading to reaction leading to action; A happens because B happens which leads to C; and so on. After a relatively brief period of exposition and as noted in the analysis, the novel presents its inciting



incident - the accidental death of Dad - which, in turn, triggers all the other incidents in the narrative. The forward-moving progression of the story is occasionally interrupted by Martyn's descriptions of past events and circumstances that relate to the present situation - in other words, exposition is offered at times throughout the work, and not just at the beginning. It's important to note, however, that these sections are not flashbacks, but simply narrated stories, previous aspects of Martyn's life and experience that he interjects, almost in passing, into his narrative.

An important point to note about the novel's structure is that its events all take place within a week. Dad dies on the Wednesday before Christmas, and following his and Alex's adventures with Dad's body, with Dean, and with the unexpected appearance of sixty thousand Australian dollars, Martyn is released from police custody the following Wednesday - Christmas Day. When one thinks about it, it's a remarkably short and compressed, but very intense period of time.

The exception to both points noted above is the book's epilogue, which takes place about a year after the events of the main body of the narrative. The epilogue sums up what has happened in that year - what happened after Martyn was released from police custody, and where he has ended up. While wrapping up a few narrative loose ends, the epilogue also communicates the sense that since his release from custody, Martyn's focus has been on his future, rather than on his past, an important component of his overall journey of transformation. With the epilogue and in particular the letter from Alex, Martyn seems finally able to move forward with fuller freedom than ever. On the other hand, the letter also holds out the possibility, albeit somewhat remote, that Martyn and Alex might one day be reunited.



## Quotes

"Most of it I can't remember, anyway. It's all just bits and pieces of things, things that may or may not have happened - scraps of images, vague, feelings, faded photographs of nameless people and forgotten places - that kind of thing" (Section 1, p. 1).

"It took me a long time to realize that the best way to deal with name-calling is to simply ignore it. It's not easy, but I've found that if you let people do or think what they want and don't let your feelings get too mixed up in it, then after a while they usually get bored and leave you alone" (Ibid, p. 3).

"Without me, he was just a drunk. But with me, he was a drunk with responsibilities, a drunk with welfare benefits, a drunk with someone to clean up the puke ...it wasn't so much the thought of losing me that worried him, it was the thought of staying sober for another two months" (Ibid, p. 6).

"It's there all the time, the sound of too much everything, but no-one ever listens to it. Because once you start to listen, you can never stop, and in the end it'll drive you crazy" (Ibid, p. 10).

"Things don't just happen, they have reasons. And the reasons have reasons. And the reasons for the reasons have reasons. And then the things that happen make other things happen, so they become reasons themselves. Nothing moves forward in a straight line, nothing is straightforward" (Ibid, p. 20).

"...if you follow that line of reasoning, then it was all his fault in the first place. If he hadn't been my father, you know, if he hadn't impregnated Mom, then I would never have been born. I wouldn't have existed. And he would still be alive. It was his fault that I existed. He made me. I never asked to be born, did I? It was nothing to do with me" (Ibid, p. 33).

"It's strange, the lack of emotion, the absence of drama in reality. When things happen in real life, extraordinary things, there's no music ... there's no close-ups. No dramatic camera angles. Nothing happens. Nothing stops, the rest of the world goes on" (Ibid, p. 33).

"The moment when she held me - it was as if nothing else mattered. Nothing. Everything would be all right. Her soft hand on the back of my head, the comfort of her body close to mine - everything else just faded away into nowhere. This was where I wanted to be. But nothing lasts forever" (Ibid, p. 38).

"the thing about dreams, the don't come from anywhere else but yourself. It's not as if there's some evil demon waiting around somewhere, waiting for you to sleep so he can sneak into your mind and show you all his crazy things. It's you that does it. It's your mind. Whatever demons there are, you invite them in. They're YOUR demons. No one else's" (Ibid, p. 45).



"Look, he was already dead. I couldn't change that. I didn't mean it to happen, it just happened. It happened. All I was trying to do was make the best of it. I wasn't harming anyone. I wasn't hurting anybody. You can't hurt the dead, can you? I was just looking out for myself, that's all. What's wrong with that" (Ibid, p. 56).

"You can't hurt me. You've got no strength, no purity. All you've got is cruelty and a streak of dumb cunning. That's not enough, that's not nearly enough. You know what your trouble is, Dean? You don't understand. You don't get it. You think that any of this really matters? You think I CARE what happens? To me, to anybody, to anything? I know it. I KNOW. I know that nothing matters. That's what makes me strong. Strength in my own pure weakness" (Ibid, p. 66-67).

"It was good. A good feeling. Like I'd found my true self at last. What I was" (Ibid, p. 67).

"What's wrong with silence? Listen to it, it's beautiful" (Friday, p. 76).

"And you have to open your eyes and look at it, listen to it, smell it: people who don't like you, things you don't want to do, things that hurt, things that scare you, questions without answers, feelings you don't understand, feelings you don't want but have no control over. Reality" (Ibid, p. 79).

"None of us has any control over what we do. If you're good, you're good - if you're bad, you're bad. That's all there is to it. You can't change the way you're made" (Ibid, p. 92).

"In every house, I realized, there'd be a story of some kind: a family drama, a tragedy, a love story, a comedy. Right now, scenes were being acted out, plots followed, stories told. Fights, arguments, sex, betrayal, revenge, boredom, cunning, evil, bad luck, laughter, desire, delight, death - what did I care? None of it had anything to do with me" (Ibid, p. 96).

"As I gazed up into the sky I wondered how I'd look to God if He was up there. I imagined myself as a tiny black dot, a blind particle crawling through the snow and sand. An insect. Going nowhere. Alone, Indeterminate, immeasurable, and shapeless. Nothing much at all" (Saturday, p. 107).

"Home is home, I suppose. No matter how much you hate it, you still need it. You need whatever you're used to. You need security" (Ibid, p. 114).

"Here and there, nature was reclaiming the land. Clumps of wild grass swayed in the wind and the ground was dotted with dark and squat looking shrubs. The wasteland was being reborn. It was all twilight grey, colorless in the pale light of snow and moon" (Ibid, p. 134).

"...what did I do that was wrong? You tell me. What did I do? Who did I hurt? I hurt nobody. It's not as if I broke any commandments or anything ... what it all boils down to is: I never hurt anyone. And that's what it's all about, isn't it? Hurt and pain. Physical, mental, whatever else kind of hurt there is. That's what's bad. You can do just about





anything you want - as long as it doesn't hurt anyone, or anything, it's probably OK" (Ibid, p. 136).

"The thing lying in a sleeping bag at the bottom of a deep pool, that was just a wet sack of bones and meat. That was nothing to do with anything. An empty wrapper. Whatever it was that Dad was - his self, his being, his soul, call it what you like - had drifted away like a wisp of smoke the second his head hit the fireplace. Just drifted away. Where? Who knows? Who cares? Not me. Wherever it went, it wasn't here. This house is empty" (Sunday, p. 147).

"There was me, Martyn Pig, standing at the window looking up at the sky; and there was another me, a star-shaped me, drifting down in the snow...I was crystal. Strong and intricate and beautiful. I was weightless. Floating. Far above the ground . I could see for miles...and although I was just one of a million tiny jewels of ice, there was only me. All I had to do was fall...free and easy, no fear, no feeling at all ..." (Monday, p. 170).

"The truth has a way of shining through, no matter how hard you try to ignore it" (Tuesday, p. 184).

"You don't know anything, I told him silently. You don't know anything. You might think you know, but you don't know. You can never know what's in my head. Only I know that. I know it. You don't know anything" (Christmas Day, p. 203).

"...it doesn't matter what the police think, it doesn't matter what they know, all that matters is proof. If they can't prove something, there's nothing they can do. Nothing. They're stumped. That's the way it is, that's the way it works. That's justice" (Epilogue, p. 225).

"As I read the words I could hear her voice in my head. It was unreal. Like in a film, where you see the hero, alone in his room, reading a love letter, and in the background you hear the disembodied voice of his lover. That's exactly what it felt like. Exactly" (Ibid, p. 229).





## Topics for Discussion

How does the idea of Alex not looking back as she leaves Martyn behind, related to her eventual departure from their relationship and her overall attitude towards him?

Do you agree with Martyn that he was right in reacting to Dad's death the way he did? What do you think about the choices he made in terms of the money? Do you think Martyn was wrong? Explain your answer.

Where in the story do you believe that Alex makes her decision to frame and kill Dean and to take the money for herself? Explain your answer.

Dad is clearly portrayed in the narrative as something of a monster. Does this influence your view of Martyn's actions in any way? Why or why not?

Discuss ways in which the novel's use of snow imagery, including the appearance of such imagery in the work's final moments, relates to its thematic consideration of the allure of freedom. What is the connection between snow and freedom?

How much do you think Martyn's arguments about the morality of his actions (for example, his comment in Part 3 that the law is only someone's opinion) are what he actually believes or merely attempts to justify and/or rationalize his actions? Explain your answer.

What, do you think, are the metaphoric implications of setting the action around Christmas? Include in your considerations reflections on traditions and ideals associated with Christmas such as happy family time, the giving of gifts, and "goodwill to all men." Discuss how they are integrated into the narrative and its thematic considerations. Consider also the specific irony associated with setting the narrative, and particularly its final confrontations, climax and actions, on and around Christmas Day.

Discuss the difference between personal and societal morality. What is the responsibility of each individual to live up to what has been/is accepted as morality, either legal or traditional? Does what each individual believes to be his or her morality transcend and/or trump societal values? Is value a relative thing? Where is the line between the responsibility to adhere to societal values and the need to live according to a personal value system?

How important is freedom to you? To what lengths do you think you might go in order to realize and achieve it? Do you think Martyn and Alex go too far? Why or why not?

What has been your experience of moving from childhood reality into that of adulthood? What aspects of belief and identity have you had to give up as you transitioned from one to the other? How difficult or easy was it?