

The Serpent's Tale Study Guide

The Serpent's Tale by Diana Norman

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Plot Summary

"The Serpent's Tale" is a novel by the best-selling author of "Mistress of the Art of Death", Ariana Frank. The story follows the main character, Vesuvia Adelia Rachel Ortese Aguilar, as a doctor that conducts autopsies and forensics. When Rosamund, King Henry II's beloved mistress is murdered, the king requires Adelia to investigate the murder and bring her killer to justice. Adelia, who has a baby out of wedlock with her former lover that is now a bishop, puts her own life, her baby's life and the lives of her stepparents in danger as she uncovers clue after clue.

Because women doctors are not allowed during this time period, Mansur, an Arab man, poses as the doctor. During the investigation, Adelia acts as if she is his translator. Otherwise, the people of England will think she is a witch and she could possibly be burned at the stake before Henry can save her. During the investigation, bodies keep piling up, and the hint of a civil war is always on the horizon.

By the end of the novel, the civil war threat has been put to rest. The mistress's murder has been solved. While Adelia years to return home to Sicily, the king assures her that her place is in England, where he can call upon her to investigate and solve any matters of the dead that he needs her to take care of for him.



Prologue

Prologue Summary

Sacrius, who is a hired assassin, is meeting with a client. The client is hiding his identity behind a curtain in a cellar under one of the inns in town because the client wants to conceal his identity. The client asks if Sacrius is worried about his soul being damned, but Sacrius assures the client that it is only a job to him.

Sacrius then asks the client to go over the instructions again. Sacrius asks the client to repeat the instructions so he can memorize his voice. This is so if the client reneges on the final payment, Sacrius can go after him. Sacrius assumes the client is someone who is embittered by a recent war and that his motives are political.

When the client shifts behind the curtain, Sacrius sees the tip of his doe boot peep out from under the curtain hem. When Sacrius asks for the deposit, the client calls the servant "my son," which provides another clue to the client's identity. Something about the pouch the client hands the gold over in tells Sacrius what the client's occupation is.

Prologue Analysis

The fact that the client has a servant with him suggests that he is of royal blood. It also foreshadows that the person the client wants killed is of the royal line as well. The prologue suggests that the rest of the novel will tell the story of the assassination as it unfolds. It also suggests that there will be an investigation after the assassination to solve the mystery of who the murderer is.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

A woman is writhing on a bed in the convent. Three nuns are tending to her. The walls are painted with a mosaic of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. One of the nuns is sent to retrieve the priest.

Dame Dakers takes the black cat the priest had in his lap and drops it into the boiling cauldron of water. She places the lid on top. She chants while she does this. Dame Dakers thinks about how all of their efforts have failed thus far. She thinks that if God fails, now it is time to summon the Devil.

Eighty miles away, Vesuvia Adelia Rachel Ortese Aguilar is trying to deliver her first baby from a mother's womb. Delivery has not been going as planned, or well. The mother is exhausted but uncomplaining. As Adelia takes a break to breastfeed her own baby, she conjures up the vision of the internal organs of a woman's body to try to help her figure out what could be going wrong with the birth.

When Adelia returns to the woman, she sees the backside of the baby instead of the baby's head. Adelia instructs the woman that she has to push with all her strength and might. The baby slips out up until the point of its head. If the mother doesn't continue to push, the baby can suffocate. The mother is so tired that she doesn't have any strength left.

Adelia uses one of her surgical knives to cut the woman's pubic area and free the baby's head. The baby is a boy, which the father names after the Prior, Geoffrey. Adelia greets the Prior, who was her first patient when she came to England. She asks of his grandson and his health. Then, Adelia welcomes the Prior into the home to baptize the newborn. After the baptism, the Prior, Adelia, Adelia's baby and her dog board the boat.

The Prior thinks about Adelia, who was abandoned as a baby and adopted by an Arab man and his Jewish wife. He also thinks of Adelia's baby, who is the result of a love affair. Additionally, the Prior thinks of how Adelia helped King Henry investigate the murders of children in Cambridge. Her forensic knowledge is what helped solve the cases.

The Prior presents a messenger to Adelia. The King is summoning her for help on investigating an attempted murder in Oxfordshire

Chapter 1 Analysis

The woman writhing on the bed in the convent seems to be possessed by some sort of a demon. It seems as if the nuns and the priest have tried to perform an exorcism, but

their efforts have failed. Since their efforts have failed, they are now turning to evil ways of trying to extract the demon from the woman.

Ironically, Adelia performs autopsies, but is now being called to work as a midwife to deliver a baby. The summoning of Adelia by the King suggests that her forensic knowledge is required to help solve this mystery as she has done before. It is ironic that a woman is educated, a doctor and renowned expert in forensics during this period. It also suggests that the man that hired Sacrius to assassinate someone is directly related to the investigation Adelia is being summoned for.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Bishop Rowley Pico returns to Cambridge and the people celebrate his return in the streets. He is also the one responsible for bringing the child murderers to justice. Adelia, Mansur, Gyltha and Adelia's baby are following behind the bishop. The King's messenger says that the King only wishes to meet with Adelia, but Adelia refuses to go without Mansur, Gyltha and the dog.

As Adelia and her group are let into the house of the bishop, she thinks about how King Henry II summoned her from Salerno, Italy for her talents for speaking to the dead. Once she solved the child murders, the King requested that she stay in England so that he could use her assistance whenever he needs it.

The bishop's secretary enters the room and gives the instructions to Adelia and the others. Adelia is to work with the nuns at the convent to investigate the attempted murder of Rosamund Clifford of Wormhold Tower near Oxford.

When the secretary tries to tell Adelia she has to leave the baby behind, Mansur picks the secretary up by his clothing. The bishop enters the room and greets them all, instructing Mansur to put the secretary down. Rosamund is one of the King's mistresses and there are many songs sung of the Fair Rosamund. Gyltha suggests that Queen Eleanor might have tried to kill Rosamund out of jealousy, but then remembers that the queen is in prison.

When the bishop realizes Adelia's baby is in the room, he looks at her and says she looks just like him. He scoops the baby up and starts cooing at it, even in front of Father Paton, the secretary. Adelia says the attempted murder has nothing to do with her, and takes the baby Allie, from the bishop for them to leave.

Over dinner, the bishop explains that someone fed Rosamund poisonous mushrooms. He says he must go to Normandy the following day to deliver the news to the king. The bishop says he wants to assure the king that his favorite investigator is on the case. The bishop bows to Mansur. The bishop mentions that the king appointed his son to rule as king simultaneously with him as to avoid a civil war like the country saw during a previous reign.

Additionally, the bishop says Eleanor escaped from prison. She was last seen making her way into England. He suggests that she could have poisoned a dozen of her husband's whores. The bishop says he doesn't think Eleanor did it. He says the everyone knows how much Rosamund loves to eat mushrooms. He says that an old crone gave Rosamund's servant a basket of mushrooms. The bishop brings them in for Adelia to view. Adelia tells him that Rosamund is dead. She says that one of the mushrooms causes illness, a couple days of wellness and then death.



Chapter 2 Analysis

Ironically, Adelia is welcomed into the service of the King of England, despite the fact that the church does not welcome people of her kind—Italians, and those that are raised by a Jew and an Arab. Bishop Rowley has outed himself as the father of Adelia's baby. This infers that Adelia and the bishop were having an illicit affair while Adelia was investigating the child murders. The bishop suggests that if Adelia doesn't investigate the attempted murder that it could lead to a civil war.

The bishop bows to Mansur when he mentions the king's favorite investigator to make his secretary, Father Paton, believe it is Mansur, the man, that holds the skills. If someone finds out it is a woman, Adelia, she might be tried as a witch.

The fact that King Henry's son is a king alongside him suggests that the man paying Sacrius to assassinate someone at the start of the novel was King Henry II.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

They all make the journey to bring the king the news of Rosamund. It is very cold and snowing, so the journey is not an easy one. Along the way, the men treat Adelia as if she is a whore when Rowley isn't around. They don't help her onto the horse, they talk poorly about her when she goes into the woods to use the bathroom, and she thinks they intentionally left the saddles behind for her and Gyltha's horses.

During the journey, Gyltha tells Adelia about the atrocities of the 13 year civil war between Stephen and Matilda. She explains to Adelia what happens when order and civilization are removed from society. Gyltha says that when King Henry came into power, he restored order in society.

The same messenger that originally summoned Adelia, Jacques, meets them on the King's Highway to tell them that the nuns are expecting Rosamund's body by river the following day. The bishop asks if this means Rosamund is dead and Jacques says he hopes so because they are planning on burying her body. Jacques leaves to return back to the convent, but the group catches up with him on the trail.

They stop the journey because they come across a dead man laying next to his horse in the snow. The bishop propels Mansur and Adelia to investigate. The man is dead from an arrow in his chest.

Adelia and Mansur investigate the body and the markings in the snow, as Walt, the groom, determines how and where to put the injured horse down so that it doesn't block the bridge. Mansur pretends to deliver the findings to Rowley as Adelia translates from Arabic to English to keep up their front.

Adelia explains to Rowley that two poor men waited for the man on horseback. One of them stepped out in front of the ride to kill him. They then cut the horse's hamstring. She says they robbed him of his money, but they left the identifying cloak and purse with the crest on it, along with the horse behind. She also says they intentionally did this and left the body where they did so the man could be found and identified.

Rowley agrees to take the body to the freezer of the nunnery, Godstow. They intend to set a trap for the men to return to find out why the body hasn't been identified, and then they will be able to catch the murderers.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Gyltha suggests that Rowley is trying to prevent another civil war because he lived through the 13-year civil war between Stephen and Matilda. While Adelia thinks the body of the dead man was left for someone to find, the killers had no idea that the



person finding the body would be a renowned forensic medical doctor. By getting in the middle of this murder investigation, it seems as if Adelia is putting her own life in danger. The crests on the dead man's cloak and purse suggests that he is royalty. Since Rowley doesn't recognize the dead man, it suggests that it is not the king or his son. The inference is that it might be the assassin the king hired because he was paid by the king with a purse full of gold that possessed the king's family crest on it.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The group arrives at Godstow Abbey. They are met by Mother Edyve. The bishop explains the situation with the dead man. She agrees to allow them to put the body in their icehouse so they can set a trap for the killers to return and be caught. Mother Edyve summons her own daughter, Sister Havis, to accompany the men to see something in their icehouse.

Mother Edyve goes on to explain that they have not received Rosamund's body to bury as of yet. She says that Rosamund's housekeeper Dame Daker has not allowed anyone into the towers since Rosamund died. The bishop insists that they go to the tower, but Mansur and Adelia convince him that they need to rest first.

They all accompany the dead body to the icehouse. It is well with a large cover over it. Two of the men have to lift off the cover and then they all work to lower the body into the hole. The bishop says a prayer over the body and Adelia says one of her own.

Each party is shown to their respective quarters. They sleep until the church bells, for it is Sunday morning, beckon everyone to services. People from the nearby town of Wolvercote also attend in honor of the bishop's presence and the fact that their own church is in ruins. As part of the bishop's sermon, he announces that he knows some are saying the queen is responsible for Rosamund's death.

He says this isn't true and that people must stop saying this. As Gyltha and Adelia are returning to their quarters with Allie, they run into a 15-year-old girl with a beautiful singing voice they recognize from the services. She introduces herself as Emma Bloat and asks to come and play with the baby. While Emma is playing with Allie, she tells the two women about her arranged marriage and how happy she is to be getting married.

The group meets in one of the chapels. They go over the contents of the dead man's bag. A note, written on vellum, is stuffed into the satchel. The note suggests that the dead man is Talbot of Kidlington. Adelia believes someone planted the note to make them believe this is the man's identity. They also make plans for their journey to Rosamund's tower the following day.

The bishop insists that the baby stay behind with Gyltha. Adelia refuses to leave her. Adelia fears of something happening to her or to Allie if they are separated. She thinks it's best if they die together rather than alone. Gyltha tells Adelia it is for the best and that it is time to wean Allie from breastfeeding.

Jacques comes to escort Adelia to talk to Bertha, who the servant that took the mushrooms back to Rosamund. Bertha is hiding in the stables because everyone hates her for killing the beloved Rosamund. Bertha has a pug-like nose and it is hard for Adelia to understand what Bertha is saying at first. Bertha is very simple and uneducated.



Bertha tells Adelia that an old woman smelling like flowers approached her in the woods while Bertha was collecting firewood. The old woman claims to be one of Queen Eleanor's servants. She gives Bertha the mushrooms for Rosamund, saying that Rosamund will look highly upon Bertha for bringing the mushrooms to her.

Bertha takes the mushrooms back to the house, along with the firewood. Bertha says the house is relatively empty because Dame Dakers is in town looking for a new cook and the other servants are out as well. Bertha cooks the mushrooms for Rosamund and takes them to her. Bertha says Rosamund gobbles up the mushrooms greedily and tells Bertha that she is a good girl.

Bertha is mesmerized by Adelia's cross necklace so Adelia gives it to Bertha until she can buy Bertha one of her own. Adelia asks Bertha to let her know if she smells the same soap on someone else that she did on the servant that gave her the mushrooms.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Adelia believes that the nunnery holds many of its own secrets. She describes the nunnery as being on an island of its own. It is as if the nunnery is its own village, so that it has everything it needs to function without the help of the outside world. Since the location also situates it between the two kingdoms of the previous civil war, Adelia believes that it most likely played a part in hiding many things for both Stephen and Matilda during the civil war.

Someone is trying to implicate Queen Eleanor as Rosamund's murderer. If this is the case, someone is trying to spark another civil war. The reason, however, is unclear. Adelia is hoping Bertha can smell the specialty soap on someone else so that they can track down the foreign supplier and get a list of their clients.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

As they approach Wormhold Tower, Adelia can't help but notice the labyrinth is built to look like male and female private parts. Because the tower is built so that no one can get and the mistress cannot get out, they have to ring the bell in the front for someone to let them enter. They think they see a shadow move in the tower, but nobody comes.

They enter the maze and choose the tunnel to the left. They get to a point where they can't go any further. Since there isn't enough room to turn around, they have to back up in a single file line the same way they came in. They find themselves back at the front of the tower where they started.

They ring the bell again, but when nobody comes, they decide to go in again and choose the tunnel to the right. When they get near the entrance of a door, they find a mantrap. They also find a bunch of discarded items, a frozen dog carcass, and a dead hen's body in a bucket. As they enter the tower, they can see that everything of value has been looted—from the chandeliers to paintings from the wall.

As they continue up into the tower, all of the rooms are like this. They assume the servants hated Rosamund so much that when she died, they took all of her possessions. The only room that is not looted, but naturally stark, they presume to belong to Dame Dakers. On the wall near Rosamund's room at the top of the tower, they see a saying has been added to the wall that basically says Rosamund is the king's wife in everything but name.

The bishop concludes that a dig like this to the queen is motive for murder. The bishop sees Rosamund in her room, so he thinks she isn't dead after all. When Adelia enters the room, she sees Rosamund sitting at her desk writing. Rosamund is in fact very dead and very fat.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Adelia thinks it is symbolic that the king would put his mistress up in a home that looks like sexual parts of males and females. Adelia also believes that it left Rosamund with even less respect than she received for being the king's mistress. Ironically, Rosamund is supposed to be one of the most beloved people in the town, but as soon as she dies everyone loots her belongings.

The body that Adelia finds in Rosamund's room might not be Rosamund because it is so fat. It might also be that Rosamund is so fat that this is why the king is hiding her in the tower rather than that he wants to protect her from intruders and preclude her from leaving the tower.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

As Adelia inspects Rosamund's body, she asks the bishop why he didn't tell her that Rosamund was fat. As the mistress of the king, Adelia expected Rosamund to be beautiful and thin. The bishop leaves to meet the barge carrying Rosamund's coffin. While Adelia is alone, she tries to determine who would prop Rosamund up in the writing position at her desk and put a crown on her. She also tries to decide why someone would do this.

Adelia finds several letters on vellum paper that are addressed to Queen Eleanor. The letters say the same thing, which is basically that the king loves Rosamund and that she is the true queen. Suddenly, Queen Eleanor and some of her servants appear in the doorway of the room. Queen Eleanor makes fun of Rosamund for being so fat. When Eleanor reads the letters, she says they are the same as all the others.

Someone jumps out from behind the curtains with a knife and tries to attack Eleanor. Her servants take the would-be assassin down. Adelia assumes the attacker is Dame Dakers, and that she is the one that must be responsible for setting Rosamund up in this position. In the struggle with the attacker and the queen's servants, Adelia cuts the palm of her hand on the knife. The queen removes the crown from Rosamund's head, claiming that it is hers and she can't believe the king gave it to her.

When Rowley finds the queen in the tower, he insists she leave. He tells her the rumors are already spreading that Eleanor is responsible for Rosamund's death. The queen thrusts the letters Rosamund has been writing to her and accuses Rowley and the king of trying to make Rosamund queen. Rowley calms the queen down, assures her that he and the king knew nothing about it, and that Rosamund was crazy. The bishop leaves to meet the barge with the coffin and the queen makes Adelia stay with Rosamund's body so they can watch her rot.

The queen stitches up the cut on Adelia's hand. She says she learned how to do when she went on Crusade. As the queen continues to sit and watch Rosamund's dead body, Adelia uses the time to explore the room. She ends up finding a spy hole under one of the Adam and Eve tapestries hanging on the wall. Behind the spy hole is a garderobe, which is a private room with a chamber pot.

Adelia wonders who is watching from the spy hole, since looks directly at the bed and writing desk in Rosamund's bedroom. Adelia ponders just what kind of relationship Dame Dakers and Rosamund had. Adelia also assumes that this is where Dakers was hiding and spying on Adelia as she searched the room before the queen arrived. While climbing off a stepping stool after cracking a window for air, Adelia finds the stool is a box with a cover and legs. Inside the box, she finds papers. The papers contain



instructions to Rosamund about making her queen, and providing Rosamund with information on how the queen is reacting to Rosamund's letters to her.

Adelia decides two crimes have occurred. First, Rosamund was copying the writing of inflammatory letters to the queen. Second, someone murdered Rosamund. A very large man the queen refers to as her abbot arrives. He tells her that her son Henry doesn't plan on coming to England, but instead is going on to Paris. The two start talking about building up an army against King Henry II.

Schwyz, one of the servants that has been with the queen, starts speaking in a language the queen doesn't understand, but the abbot does. Schwyz is complaining about how the queen insisted that they come to Wormhold because Henry couldn't follow them here. He thinks now that they'll be stuck there forever since the snow came in after they arrived. As the queen and her people leave the room, Adelia remembers Rowley's words about the Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Adelia thinks they have arrived and that she has seen three of them.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Adelia is still not sure if Rosamund's death is from the poison mushrooms. No matter how Rosamund truly died, someone has staged her body, sitting at her writing desk and wearing a crown. Additionally, someone is instructing Rosamund on how to enrage the queen. Whoever this person is, they are writing letters and documents for Rosamund to copy in her own handwriting. If Adelia can get someone to identify the handwriting on these documents, it will lead her to who is behind it.

The true relationship between Dame Dakers and Rosamund is under question. Many people say that Dakers is obsessed with Rosamund. This could explain why there is a spy hole looking into Rosamund's room—a place where Dame Dakers can watch Rosamund and everything that is going on in Rosamund's bedroom.

Additionally, whoever is behind helping Rosamund is trying to frame the queen. It is likely that the person who was helping Rosamund is the same person behind her poisoning. The person is using Rosamund to make it look like Queen Eleanor has a motive for killing Rosamund so that Eleanor can take the fall for the murder. The underlying issue of all of these matters is the country is on the brink of another civil war.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

As Adelia is leaving the tower, she sees Dakers hopping along, with her feet and hands still bound. She approaches Dakers and keeps the housekeeper from returning to the tower to be with her mistress because the queen's guards have set the tower on fire. As the queen's guards escort Adelia and Dakers to a mule that will take them to the waiting boat on the river, Adelia sees Walt, Jacques and Rowley have been taken prisoner and tied together with rope.

The prisoners are boarded on to the boat and covered with an old ship's sail in an attempt to keep them warm. Adelia and Dakers are supposed to be bailing water from the boat with jugs they have been supplied, but only Adelia is bailing. Dakers seems to be dying. Adelia tells Rowley that the queen has assembled a rebel army that is meeting in Oxford.

Rowley gets Adelia to cut his hands free from the rope with one of her surgical instruments. He slips off the boat and into the river. Jacques tells the queen's guards that he fell off. As the boats are passing Godstow, Jacques realizes that the river is freezing. This causes the boats to stop and everyone to disembark. Adelia makes her way up to the convent and sees the queen entering it up ahead. When Adelia greets Gyltha, Gyltha tells her that Allie is perfectly fine and that Adelia only left the baby the day before.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The queen has definitely assembled an army to rise up against the king. Queen Eleanor seems to be recreating the civil war between Queen Matilda and King Stephen that lasted a total of 13 years. Eleanor might be doing this to get back at the king for all of the cheating and lying. There is some indication, however, that she might be in love with the abbot—the huge, burly man that came to rescue her from the tower and take her to Oxford.

Rowley has escaped. It is likely that he is going to find the king and warn him of the upcoming uprising. While warning the king will allow the king time to assemble his own army to fight, it is also a pivot point because it will spark the start of a civil unrest.

As the group is forced to spend more time at the convent, it foreshadows that more details of the plot will unravel. This is also buys Adelia time to investigate further.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Mother Edyve makes the arrangements to put up the queen, all of her soldiers and the others as they arrive at Godstow. Adelia has to break the news to Gyltha that Rowley is gone. Gyltha fills Adelia in on the arrival of Emma's parents and Emma's fiancé, since Adelia was gone. Adelia finds out that Emma's fiancé is Lord Wolvercote, who is the man that has put together an army for the queen.

Gyltha says Emma's parents are paying Lord Wolvercote two hundred marks as Emma's dowry. Gyltha says Emma has not come out to greet Wolvercote since he arrived. Gyltha also says that an attorney, Warin, arrived looking for his lost cousin—Talbot of Kidlington. Finally, Gyltha says that Wolvercote had two men hanged from the bridge when he caught them robbing his home upon his return. Adelia confirms she saw the two bodies hanging from the bridge when the boats were on the river.

The church bells ring, summoning everyone at the convent into the chapel for a meeting. Lord Wolvercote declares military rule, imposes a curfew and bans more than five people at a time to assemble in a group. When Gyltha and Adelia return to their room, Schwyz summons Adelia to the infirmary to help with a soldier's arm that has turned green.

Adelia confirms that they have to amputate the arm. She assures Schwyz that Mansur, who has injured hands, will be directing her during the amputation. After the operation, Adelia hears screams from outside. She goes toward the shed where she talked with Bertha and runs into Jacques along the way. When they get there, they see a milkmaid screaming and Bertha's body hanging from the entrance with a belt around her neck.

The nuns assume Bertha committed suicide. Adelia examines Bertha's body, but she wishes she could do an autopsy to tell if Bertha hung herself or if someone else hung her. Adelia also doesn't find the cross necklace she gave to Bertha. Adelia searches the stable where Bertha was staying and finds the cross broken and buried in the hay of the stall.

Adelia also talks to the milkmaid, Peg. Peg says that Bertha went out the day before looking for the lady with the cross, mumbling something about it not being a her but a him. Adelia borrows Peg's milking stool and a belt to try to see if she can hang herself, but realizes that the stool isn't tall enough for Bertha to have hung herself. Adelia concludes Bertha was murdered. Jacques says Dakers did it.

Chapter 8 Analysis

It is ironic that Wolvercote is at the convent instead of in the field putting together the queen's army at Oxford, like he is supposed to be. It is also ironic that Emma is



supposedly so in love with her future husband, but doesn't even see him once he arrives at the convent. Since Dame Dakers and Bertha are now at the convent, it is likely that Bertha's murder will be blamed on the housekeeper.

After further review of the body and the stall, Adelia concludes that Bertha didn't commit suicide, but was murdered.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Adelia takes the news of the murder to the nuns. Mother Endyve seems to think that if it is not a suicide then Dame Dakers must be the murderer. Sister Havis comes after Adelia after she finishes talking to Mother Endyve. Sister Havis tells her that the murderer cannot be Dame Dakers because she locked Dame Dakers up before the murder. She agrees with the evidence Adelia presented, however, and that Bertha's death is murder.

Gyltha is working in the kitchen. She's helping the staff to prepare the meal for Emma's wedding. Gyltha tells Adelia that she thinks Emma might be having second thoughts because Emma still hasn't spoken to her fiancé.

After checking on the amputee patient, Adelia asks for Dame Dakers, but finds out she's been released from the infirmary. Adelia finds Dakers with Father Paton and Sister Lancelyn in the records room of the convent. Dakers asks Adelia if she's found Rosamund's killer yet. Adelia tells her not yet and asks Dakers if she heard of Bertha's death. Dakers smiles and says that she asked her master to punish her and he has.

The nuns go out on to the bridge to take down the two men hanging there, so they can bury them. Lord Wolvercote tries to stop them, but they return the bodies to the convent to prepare them for burial. As they are wheeling the bodies from the bridge to the convent, Adelia looks at their boots and determines they are the same ones that were in the snow near the dead man's body that is now in the icehouse.

When Wolvercote asks what Adelia is doing, and someone says she sees things, Wolvercote accuses Adelia of being a witch. When re-entering the convent from the bridge, Adelia sees Emma draped over something and her parents trying to pull her off of it. It turns out to be the body of Talbot of Kidlington. Emma asks Adelia if she sees and Adelia realizes why Talbot was killed.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Bertha's murder confirms that someone that came into the nunnery when the queen and the others arrived is the murderer. Additionally, Sister Havis indirectly states that she knows it is Adelia that has the investigative skills and not Mansur, as they pretend it is. Dame Dakers response to Bertha's death suggests that the murderer is one of the men from the queen's army.

Now that Wolvercote thinks Adelia is a witch, this could cause a new set of problems for Adelia and the investigation. Emma reacts so sadly to Talbot's dead body because it is he Emma loves. The inference is that Talbot was murdered so that Emma and Talbot

could not be together. Instead, her parents were forcing Emma to marry Wolvercote in order to make her a noblewoman.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

One of the sisters manages to convince Emma's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bloat, to let Emma go with Adelia because Adelia is a sort of doctor. Emma admits to Adelia and Gyltha that Talbot was coming to pick her up so they could elope to Wales. He had waiting until his 21st birthday because an estate in Wales was part of his inheritance. Emma says the guard gate and his cousin, Warin, were the only two people that knew.

Jacques brings a couple of messages to Adelia throughout the day. The first is that Bertha will be buried in the nun's own graveyard, a Christina burial. This indicates the nuns have completed their investigation and do not believe Bertha killed herself. Second, the message is a request to return Emma to the cloisters.

The soldiers have taken to drinking all night and fighting. The people in the town of Godstow are holing themselves up at night, afraid of rape and pillaging. A series of funerals take place to bury, Bertha, Talbot, the dead Sicilian soldier, Girogio, and the men hanged from the bridge. While Eleanor has been staying inside her apartments, the nuns plea to her to lay down the law. The queen calls a meeting between Wolvercote and Schwyz. She sets laws to stop the drunkenness, fighting and more.

The queen also orders Emma's marriage to Wolvercote to be delayed indefinitely. Eleanor orders a feast for Christmas for all of the villagers and requires that church services be restored. Eleanor summons Adelia and Mansur to her apartment. Adelia marvels at the transformation of Mother Edyve's apartment into Eleanor's apartment. Eleanor recounts the story of how Adelia saved her life and commends Mansur on saving the life of Schwyz's soldier by amputating his infected arm.

Eleanor wants Adelia to become one of her ladies in waiting. Adelia mentions the baby and having to get up in the middle of the night to help Mansur in the infirmary. Lord Abbot of Eynsham convinces the queen to allow Adelia to come and go as she pleases, but to first give her a new wardrobe. The seamstresses change Adelia and then she and Mansur stay in Eleanor's quarters all night playing games and partaking in various forms of entertainment until the queen dismisses them.

As Mansur and Adelia arrive at the guesthouse where Adelia, Gyltha and Allie are staying, they find Allie in her cradle outside the door. Gyltha is sleeping in a chair inside. Gyltha is shocked to find out where they found Allie and that she didn't hear anyone in the guesthouse. Mansur assures Adelia that he is warning her that she asks too many questions.



Chapter 10 Analysis

Adelia and Emma are living parallel lives. They have both lost the loves of their lives. They are both living in agony, but must find it in themselves to go on anyway. Godstow is undergoing its own form of civil war. Wolvercote's men are against the mercenaries that accompany the queen. This is causing civil unrest between the two sides in the town. Eleanor, as queen, steps up and rectifies the problem.

The person who moved Allie outside the house in her cradle is sending Adelia a message. They want her to know that they can get to her. They want her to know that they can take from her what she cherishes the most—her child. They are warning her to stop investigating Rosamund's murder or else.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

When Adelia is summoned by Jacques, she declines, saying she is ill. She is sending a message back to the killer that she heeds his warning. Adelia also thinks that this is the killer of Rosamund and Bertha, with the message of moving Allie being that he only kills if he has to kill.

In the middle of the night, they are wakened by the tolling of bells and people yelling fire. They determine it is the lockup where Dakers is being held prisoner. Adelia convinces Cross, who is guarding the lockup to let her see Dakers. Cross says it was just a small fire in the hay inside that he was able to stomp out. Cross lifts Adelia to peer into the cell where Dakers is.

As Mansur and Adelia walk away, she tells Mansur that someone threw the fire brazier into the cell. Adelia says it is a natural progression. First, they killed Rosamund. Then, Bertha. Now, they're trying to kill Dakers.

Adelia finds out that Wolvercote's soldiers dragged Emma out of church services. She was taken to Wolvercote's home and she was forced to marry him. The queen is enraged that the marriage took place against her orders. What bothers Adelia the most is that Emma has probably been raped by now. Adelia goes into the chapel to pray and finds Mother Edyve.

The two women have a conversation about the songs the courtiers sing to Eleanor about love. Mother Edyve suggests that possibly their daughters are lying the foundation for their daughters to have more say in their lives. Adelia expresses her concern for Daker's safety. Mother Edyve tells Adelia to leave Daker's safety to her because she is the one with the keys to the lockup.

Adelia decides not to hide in her house any longer. She heads out to ask more questions. Adelia finds Jacques and tells him she needs his help in finding the murderer of Talbot. Jacques says he doesn't know if he's up for it. He does say that Warin kept insisting he hadn't met Wolvercote when the town men were introduced. Jacques says he was saying it as if they had in fact met. Jacques concludes that Warin could benefit from Talbot's murder because as Talbot's guardian, he might have squandered Talbot's estate. Rather than have Talbot find out, Warin might have worked with Wolvercote to have Talbot killed.

Adelia goes to Father Paton. She tells him everything she knows. She wants him to tell the king everything, in case something happens to her before the king arrives.

Christmas and the big feast arrives. Adelia is wearing the new dress the queen has had made for her. This signals to everyone that the queen approves of Adelia, which helps with the witch rumors. Adelia sits next to Warin at the feast. She knows he's lying to her



as she asks him questions about his cousin, the elopement and knowing Wolvercote. When Warin leaves, Cross sits next to her and tells her Dakers has vanished. Adelia's eyes meet Mother Edyve's as Adelia remembers what the Mother said about having the keys to the lockup.

Adelia places Allie in a cradle at the feast and sits down next to it. She falls asleep. When she wakes, she is being dragged into a stall by Enysham. He is trying to rape her, but Schwyz convinces him to stop. Mansur then comes in and saves Adelia.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The separation of the rights of men and women is clear in the actions of Wolvercote. Even though the Queen of England ordered him not to marry Emma, Wolvercote disobeyed the queen's orders and carried on with the marriage anyway. Mother Edyve is a woman ahead of her time. She believes in the quality of men and women and envisions a day when this will occur. Mother Edyve also sees that Adelia is a woman before her time, knowing of Adelia's skills in autopsy and forensic investigations, without coming right out and saying it. Father Paton dislikes Adelia dislikes him. This is why it's ironic that Adelia would confide everything she knows to Father Paton.

The implication is that Mother Edyve set Dame Dakers free before the queen and her mercenaries could kill Dakers for attempting to kill the queen. Mansur suggests to Adelia that Enysham is incapable of rape—suggesting that he is impotent.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

When Adelia wakes the next morning, she has a feeling that someone has arrived in Godstow. It is Saint Stephen's Day, so all of the servants celebrate with the leftovers from the feast the night before. Since someone dug a tunnel out of the snow down to the ice, presumably to allow Dakers to escape, the villagers go down and skate on the ice. Adelia, Gyltha and the baby in her bassinet skate as well. When the villagers go back in through the gates, a newcomer sneaks in with them.

Jacques summons Adelia and Father Paton. He says that he delivered both of Adelia's invitations and the meeting is scheduled. Adelia convinces Father Paton to eavesdrop with her in the loft of the barn because Warin and Wolvercote are meeting below. Each man received a note saying that they've been found out. Each man assumed the note was from each other. During the conversation, Adelia uncovers that it is Warin who hired the two killers. She also realizes that Enysham is the one that wrote the letters for Rosamund to copy, but is playing as if he is loyal to the queen.

When Adelia returns to her guesthouse, someone slips his arm around her waist and mouth to throw her on the bed. She is delighted to see it is Rowley. While thinner, he is alive and well. He confesses to sneaking in with a painted face with the other hunters celebrating the day. He says that the king wants to see her and that they have to meet him in Oxford. Rowley says he told his own men of the plan and Adelia hears boots running up toward the house.

She realizes that Rowley's own men are against him and the king. She makes a rope out of a sheet for Rowley to escape out the window before they break down the door. Rowley gets away but the men take Adelia hostage and plan on using her as bait because they know the king wants to see her. As Adelia looks into Enysham's eyes as he talks to her, she knows he is a virgin. The men escort Adelia down through the tunnel of snow to the ice to go and meet the king.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Adelia feels as if it is Rowley, even though she thinks he died when he fell off the ship, or the king come to save them all. The newcomer that sneaks in with them is presumed to be Rowley. Adelia has correctly concluded that Warin and Wolvercote plotted together to kill Talbot. While Enysham is trying to make the queen believe that he is on her side in creating a rebellion against the king, this is a farce. Enysham is really in cahoots with the king's men to stage a rebellion and uprising against the monarchy in general—both the king and the queen.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Adelia can only identify Schwyz and Eynsham as two of the four mercenaries that take her down to the sledge. They put Adelia under a tarpaulin as her hands and feet are tied and her mouth is gagged. The men take turns sleeping under the tarpaulin with her as they pull the sledge north on their skates. When one of the men slips under the tarpaulin, he says she no longer needs her bindings and he removes them.

It is Jacques. Adelia tells him he didn't have to kill Bertha, but he says he did because she recognized him as the boy dressed up like an old woman giving her mushrooms. Jacques admits to Adelia that he is a paid assassin. He says he was hired by Eynsham to kill Rosamund. He says he identified Eynsham from his expensive boots. Eynsham doesn't know Jacques is the assassin he hired, but Jacques intends on collecting his final payment when they make a stop at Eynsham's house, where Eynsham keeps his gold. When the sledge stops, Adelia knows Rosamund has been waiting for her.

Eynsham goes looking for Dakers when they arrive at Wormhold. He confesses that Dakers thinks he is on her side and doesn't know he is the one that her locked up at the convent. Eynsham takes Adelia, with her hands tied, with him to find any other letters Rosamund might have left behind as evidence. When they enter Rosamund's room, she is covered on her bed and rotting. This confirms Dakers returned to put Rosamund to rest properly.

Adelia knows where Dakers is hiding as Eynsham searches the room for more letters. Adelia doesn't reveal to him that she found the letters in the stool near his right foot. Dakers thought Eynsham was on her side just as she thought Eynsham was on Rosamund's side. Eynsham mentions Jacques as the assassin, so he does know Jacques true identity.

Dakers enters the room from the garderobe, but then slips back into her hiding place without doing anything to Eynsham. Adelia says something that angers Eynsham, so he picks her up, throws her on the bed with Rosamund and pushes Adelia's face into Rosamund's rotting face. Eynsham leaves the room when Schwyz calls up to him that they've found a good horse in the stable. As Adelia starts to cry, the king comes out.

The king tells her that he left Geoffrey in charge, one of his sons. He also says that his handpicked men are on their way behind him. He says they'll be coming in the back, which Adelia didn't know existed. The king says he now realizes Rosamund had betrayed him with Eynsham. Adelia tells the king everything that has happened.

They realize that Eynsham and the others are in the kitchen cooking. They see Dakers dragging an unidentified object below the window and then she disappears into the fog. They also watch from the window as Jacques steals Henry's horse and rides away.



Finally, Henry hears his men riding up on horseback. Henry retrieves a key to unlock the bedroom door and kills one of Eynsham's men on their way down the stairs. They hear screaming coming from the back. When they get there, they see Eynsham dead in the mantrap and Dakers is dead nearby, with a laughing expression on her face.

Geoffrey stormed Godstow and took it back. Allie, Gyltha and Mansur are all safe. Warin and Wolvercote are in chains. Eleanor escaped, however. As the king's barge approaches the bridge at Godstow, Adelia sees they are about to hang Wolvercote from the bridge. Emma is watching from the other side of the bridge. Geoffrey calls down to the king that they have found the queen and are bringing her back.

When the queen arrives, she is disguised as a boy. The king tells her lovingly which prison he will bind her in this time. Adelia makes her way to shore, but the king assures Adelia that she will never be safe because she is a death investigator.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The journey has taken them north to Wormhold. The men intend on killing Adelia there, where she will lie in wait, just as Rosamund is. Jacques is a master of disguise. This is how he has been able to hide his identity from Eynsham, even though Jacques has been working for the queen since Rowley disappeared. Jacques intentionally became a messenger for Rowley so that he would have an excuse to go from place to place without anyone questioning his whereabouts.



Characters

Sacrius/Jacques

Sacrius is the assassin-for-hire that is hired at the start of the novel. When the novel opens, the reader is not aware of whom Sacrius is or who he is hired to kill. Additionally, the reader doesn't know who it is that is hiring Sacrius to carry out the assassination. By the end of the novel, the reader knows that Sacrius and Jacques are the same person.

Jacques is the messenger that works for Bishop Rowley. After Rowley disappears, Jacques starts to work as the messenger for Queen Eleanor while she is staying in Godstow. It turns out that Sacrius is responsible for killing Rosamund and Bertha.

Sacrius/Jacques is slender and somewhat effeminate. His stature and build is what allows him to dress as a woman—the old woman that gives Bertha the mushrooms for Rosamund. It is when Jacques dresses up as a woman at the Christmas feast for a skit that Adelia puts the pieces of the puzzle together and realizes that Jacques is Rosamund's and Bertha's killer.

Vesuvia Adelia Rachel Ortese Aguilar

Vesuvia Adelia Rachel Ortese Aguilar is from Salerno originally. She was called to England by King Henry II to help investigate the murders of some children in England. Adelia trained as a doctor in Salerno. She has the ability to evaluate dead bodies for forensic evidence to help solve murders and other mysteries of death.

After solving the child murders, King Henry II requires Adelia to stay in England. He wants to be able to call upon her when he needs her assistance. The king calls for her assistance again when his beloved mistress, Rosamund, is murdered. Adelia is not married and she has a baby out of wedlock.

When Adelia arrives at Bishop Rowley's home to find out the details of the new investigation, the reader finds out that Rowley is the father of the baby. Adelia and Rowley had an affair prior to him becoming a bishop. Adelia truly loves Rowley, but now that he has taken a religious oath, she is trying to keep her feelings for him at bay.

Gyltha

Gyltha is the nursemaid that raised Adelia. Gyltha is now helping Adelia to care for and raise Allie. Gyltha is a former eel merchant. She is now Adelia's best friend. Gyltha is rough around the edges, so she doesn't seem very educated. The inference is that Gyltha and Mansur are a couple, although they act somewhat indifferent toward each other throughout the novel.



Mansur

Mansur is a very tall Arabic man. He is surrogate father to Adelia. Mansur acts as if he is the doctor and Adelia is his translator. This is because during this timeframe, it is not acceptable for women to know and do the things that Adelia is able to do. Mansur often acts as Adelia's bodyguard. He saves Adelia from several different situations throughout the novel.

Allie

Allie is Adelia's baby. She is also the baby of Rowley. Allie cuts her first tooth and says her first word while she is staying with her mother and Gyltha at Godstow. Allie, asleep in her bassinet, is moved from inside the guesthouse to the front porch to send a message to Adelia that the murderer is watching her and can get to her.

Bishop Rowley

Bishop Rowley works for King Henry II. He is also Adelia's former lover and Allie's biological father. Rowley is the one that provides Adelia with the information she needs to start the investigation on Rosamund's murder. When Rowley is taken hostage by the queen's men at Wormhold, he throws himself into the icy waters of the river. Adelia believes he is dead, but Rowley shows back up at Godstow to save Adelia.

Father Paton

Father Paton is Rowley's secretary. When he finds out about the relationship between Adelia and Rowley, Father Paton shows his disdain toward Adelia. At Godstow, Father Paton works with one of the nuns to help her organize the records' room. Adelia confides everything she knows and the copy of the letters in Eynsham's handwriting to Father Paton in case something happens to her.

Rosamund

Rosamund is King Henry II's mistress. She lives in Wormhold Tower, which is a labyrinth that is supposed to keep suitors out and the mistress trapped in the tower. Rosamund dies a miserable death when she is fed poisoned mushrooms. Rosamund's dead and rotting body remains in the tower throughout the novel. In the end, even though King Henry finds out she betrayed him, he arranges for a proper burial of Rosamund's body.

Eleanor

Eleanor is the Queen of England and Henry's wife. She was married before to King Louis, but divorced him to be with Henry. Eleanor and Henry have eight children



together but one of them died. Eleanor is older than Henry, in her 50s. Eleanor is plotting with Eynsham to start a civil war in an uprising against the king. In the end, Eleanor is taken prisoner once again by Henry and the civil war is squelched.

Mother Edyve

Mother Edyve is in charge of the convent at Godstow. She is a small, elderly woman. Adelia describes her as being unfazed by the news that they bring to the convent about finding a dead body and needing to store it in their icehouse. Mother Edyve has her biological daughter, Sister Havis, at the convent as well. This is an indication that she was married or involved in a relationship prior to joining to convent. Mother Edyve also seems to be a forward thinker. She believes that women should have more rights than they do now. She hopes that in the next few generations, things change for women.

Abbot Robert Eynsham

Abbot Robert Eynsham is a tall and burly man. He states he is a Gloucester man when he arrives at Wormhold Tower to meet Queen Eleanor. Eynsham has been plotting with the queen to stage an uprising and rebellion against King Henry. What nobody else knows at the time is that Eynsham has also been visiting and plotting with Rosamund before she dies. Eynsham turns out to be the man that hires the assassin, Sacrius, to kill Rosamund. When Eynsham kidnaps Adelia and returns to Wordhold, Dame Dakers sets up the mantrap to murder Eynsham to get him back for betraying Rosamund.



Objects/Places

Godstow

Godstow is the town where the convent is located. This is the primary setting for the majority of the novel. Adelia, the bishop and the rest of their party ends up getting snowed into Godstow after they find the body of the young man that turns out to be Talbot of Kidlington.

Icehouse

The nuns have a huge icehouse on the property. The icehouse is essentially a huge well dug into the ground that has a huge iron cover, similar to that of a modern day manhole. Adelia and the bishop place Talbot of Kidlington's body in the icehouse to preserve it until they can find out who he is and why someone murdered him. The true purpose of the icehouse is for the nuns to store their meats and other perishable goods.

Wormhold Tower

Wormhold Tower is a tower that is surrounded by a maze. It is where Rosamund lives and dies. It is said that King Henry placed Rosamund in Wormhold Tower so that suitors could not get in and Rosamund could not get out. When Adelia sees the tower and the maze, she remarks on how the architecture resembles that of male and female genitals. Wormhold Tower is where Rosamund, Dakers and Eunsham die. It is while searching Rosamund's room in the tower that Adelia discovers the letters that Rosamund has been sending to the queen.

Letters

Adelia finds letters in Rosamund's room of the tower. The letters are written in someone else's handwriting. Rosamund then copies the letters in her own handwriting. Rosamund was sending these letters to the queen telling the queen that Henry loved her and that she was the true Queen of England and that Eleanor was only the queen in name. Adelia turns one of these letters over to Father Paton as evidence in case something happens to Adelia. When Adelia compares the handwriting on the letter with a letter Eynsham wrote to one of the nuns at the convent, Adelia realizes Eynsham wrote the letters that Rosamund was copying.

Cross Necklace

Adelia wears a cross necklace around her neck. When Adelia meets with Bertha, Bertha is mesmerized by the necklace, as if she doesn't know what a cross is and what it



stands for. Adelia ends up giving Bertha her necklace until she can buy Bertha her own. When Bertha is found dead, Adelia finds that the necklace was ripped off Bertha's neck. The marks in Bertha's neck from the necklace also help Adelia to determine Bertha was strangled rather than that she hung herself. Adelia ends up burying the cross necklace with Bertha.

Oxford

Oxford is the area in England that the queen is supposed to be heading with Eynsham. It is where they plan to raise an army in rebellion against the king. They are waylaid because of the snowstorm, so they have to stop and stay in Godstow instead.

Mantrap

The mantrap is an item Adelia, Rowley and Rowley's men encounter on their first visit to Wormhold. It is a big steel jaw that is laid flat so that approaching men do not see it. When someone steps into the trap, it snaps shut, trapping the man or body part in its steel jaws. Dame Dakers sets up the mantrap in the fog, which ends up trapping and killing Eynsham.

Garberobe

A garberobe is a separate room where a chamber pot is. The chamber pot has a hole dug under it so that it doesn't have to be emptied. It is equivalent to an outhouse or a modern day bathroom, without the working plumbing. Rosamund has a garberobe off of her bedroom in Wormhold Tower. Adelia also finds a spyhole between the garberobe and the bedroom, which indicates that someone is watching what is going on in Rosamund's bedroom. The garberobe is where Dame Dakers hides before trying to attack Queen Eleanor. The king and Dakers also hide in the garberobe when Eynsham returns to Wormhold holding Adelia hostage.

Mushrooms

The mushrooms an old woman gives Bertha is what is believed to kill Rosamund. Adelia finds a deathly mushroom mixed in with the other types of mushrooms. The poisonous mushroom would make Rosamund very ill. Then, for one or two days, it would seem as if Rosamund was getting better. Finally, Rosamund would die.

Barges

The barges are what allow the individuals to get from Godstow to Wormhold and vice versa. When the river starts to freeze, the barges are not able to continue on from

Wormhold to Oxford. Thus, the barges make a stop in Godstow, where the queen, her soldiers and their captives must remain until the weather clears.



Themes

Good versus Evil

The primary plot throughout the entire novel is that of good versus evil. Biblical symbolism can be found throughout the book, including the fact that one of the primary settings of the novel is a convent filled with nuns, priests, and other religious figures. Each of the characters experiences an inner struggle with good versus evil.

Adelia struggles with the good and evil of protecting solving each of the murders as they take place throughout the novel. At times, Adelia has a hard time determining which of the characters is good and which of the characters is evil. For example, Jacques appears to be good and innocent, but it turns out that he is in fact evil, a hired assassin that sets the events in motion.

Adelia also struggles with her affair with Rowley that has produced their baby, Allie, out of wedlock. Now that Rowley is an abbot. Adelia is also struggling with her romantic feelings for him because he has now taken an oath to God.

Fidelity and loyalty are also opposing good and evil factors at work in the novel. It seems as if everyone in King Henry II's life betrays him, even though he is supposed to be the good and loyal king. Even Queen Eleanor struggles with good and evil. While she is supposed to be a faithful and loyal wife to King Henry, she is also plotting behind his back to create a civil war.

Mental States

Another primary theme in the novel is the mind or mental state of human beings. Primarily, the focus falls on whether or not Rosamund is crazy or sane. There is also some question as to how sound in mind Dame Dakers is. Even Queen Eleanor seems to struggle with some sort of depressive state and acts of lunacy.

Bertha's mental state is also in question. Bertha seems to be highly uneducated and innocent, which puts her at risk in many ways. Adelia believes it is Rosamund's neglect of Bertha that causes Bertha to be this way.

Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. The primarily covers two different kinds of relationships: friendships and romantic relationships. A third relationship the novel touches upon is family relationships.

Friendship is the first type of relationship the novel tackles. It is clear throughout the novel that King Henry and Adelia are very close friends, even though the two are not



together until the end of the novel. It is through their friendship that Henry has amassed great respect for Adelia and her abilities, even though she is a woman, and women of the time are not typically respected as such by men.

Romantic relationships are also tackled in the novel. While Rosamund is one of King Henry II's mistresses, it seems as if the two are truly in love with each other. Rosamund's love for Henry, however, does not stop her from betraying him before she is murdered. Additionally, Rowley and Adelia seem to genuinely love each other. Their love, too, is a forbidden love. The situation prevents them from being together in a conventional way, but it doesn't change the way they feel about one another.

Emma is in love with Talbot. It is her love for him and his love for her that has them planning an elopement. Unfortunately, it is the same love that lands Talbot dead and Emma married off to Lord Wolvercote.

The final type of relationships the novel tackles is family relationships. Gyltha and Mansur raise Adelia as her surrogate parents. Because of this, they are all very close and very loyal to one another. They even stay on to help her raise and care for her own daughter, Allie. The same holds true for the nuns and religious figures living at Godstow. While none of them are biologically related, they all consider themselves part of God's family. They live as a family and even treat the guests they take in as part of their family throughout the novel.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view, from the perspective of author. The novel swings back and forth between the present and the past. The present represents the time after the civil war between Matilda and Stephen. The past represents before the civil war between Matilda and Stephen.

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

Setting

The novel is set primarily in different parts of England. While the novel never specifically states the time period, King Henry II's rule in history was during the 12th century, which is when the novel seems to take place. The novel covers one to two month period it takes for Adelia to investigate the murder of Rosamund. The main characters are involved in the aftermath of her death.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware who the assassin is or that Adelia is a female "medical examiner." However, as events unfold, the deaths and Adelia's abilities are a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The novel is divided into a prologue and 13 chapters. The length of each chapter is approximately 10 to 20 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and with some dialogue. The narrator injects her own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing her opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is the struggle of human beings in choosing between good and evil. One subplot is the mental states of the characters. Another subplot is the different relationships that form between the characters.

Structure

Description



Quotes

"Give Master Sacarius the purse, my son."
Prologue, p. 5

"We are ready for you now, Father."
Chap. 1, p. 9

"There's absolutely no cure. Rowley, I'm afraid she's gone."
Chap. 2, p. 44

"It must be known who he is and that he is dead."
Chap. 3, p. 61

"Somebody wants us to think so."
Chap. 4, p. 97

"He prefers me to you. I am his wife in all but name, the true queen of his heart."
Chap. 5, p. 120

"Yes, yes. A pronged attack. But have we the men? Here in England, I mean? Schwyz has so few with him."
Chap. 6, p. 158

"They're going to raise Eleanor's standard at Oxford. They think the Midlands will rise up and join her rebellion."
Chap. 7, p. 175

"She was murdered."
Chap. 8, p. 220

"She can tell things, she can. Looks at things and knows what happened."
Chap. 9, p. 241

"He is warning you."
Chap. 10, p. 268

"I'm better than Saint Albans...I'm better...Look at me, I can do it...Love me, you bitch, love me..."
Chap. 11, p. 299

"I told you, my lord. I would not have you wronged by one of my own family; when I heard what the boy intended..."
Chap. 12, p. 314

"Adelia, you're my investigator into the dead, like it or not."
Chap. 13, p. 367



Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Adelia? Why has King Henry II chosen her as his death investigator? Do you believe Adelia will return to Salerno now that the novel is over? What do you think happens between Rowley and Adelia?

Discuss the death of Rosamund. What impact does her death have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?

Discuss the relationship between Adelia and Rowley. Are they lovers, foes, allies, or something else? Why does Rowley not acknowledge that Allie is his baby until Adelia returns to investigate Rosamund's murder? How does Adelia feel about Rowley? How does Rowley feel about Adelia? How do Adelia's feelings change after Rowley comes back? What does she do about it? What happens to Rowley?

Who is Jacques? Why does he choose to be an assassin for hire? Why do you think he escapes with Henry's horse instead of trying to collect the final payment from Eynsham? What role does Jacques play in solving each of the murders?

Why does Eynsham hire Sacrius to murder Rosamund? Why does Sacrius as Jacques end up killing Bertha? What do you think happens to Jacques?

What do you think happens to the Adelia, Allie, Gyltha and Mansur after Henry sails off with Queen Eleanor? Do you think King Henry ever calls on Adelia again?

Do you think the king imprisons the queen again? Why do think he doesn't choose to assassinate her for treason or some other crime against him? Do you think that someone else might plan an uprising against the king in the future?