

# The Couple at Number 9

by Claire Douglas

**Author Bio:** (from [Fantastic Fiction & Authors Website](#))

**Claire Douglas** has worked as a journalist for fifteen years, writing features for women's magazines and newspapers, but she's dreamed of being a novelist since the age of seven. She finally got her wish after winning the Marie Claire Debut Novel Award for her first book, *The Sisters*, which became a bestseller. Claire's books have been published in 24 countries.



She lives in Bath with her husband, children and two very fluffy cats.

## Characters:

- **Saffy (Saffron) Cutler** – (24) – Marketing consultant working on a book release. Pregnant. Works freelance. Partner is Tom. Just moved to Skelton House in Beggar's Nook in the Cotswolds, England. Not good with blood.
- **Audrey** – Rose's first significant other.
- **DS Matthew Barnes** – Detective on the Skeleton House Murders. Wiltshire CID.
- **Melissa Brown** – Used to own the café in Beggar's nook that Rose frequented. Knew Lorna as a child.
- **Jean Burdon** – 10-year-old child who killed her friend Susan when they were children. Went to prison.
- **Jen Carmichael** – Theo's wife. Works at a beauty salon. Feisty. Having problems having children.
- **Theo Carmichael** – (33) – Works at a restaurant. Head chef. His wife is Jen. Has a sister & brother-in-law, Simon. Mother died when he was young. She fell down the stairs. Father is a retired medical consultant.
- **Dr. Victor Carmichael** – (76) – Retired medical consultant. Lives in a huge mansion. Grumpy and focused on status. Distant with his son, Theo. His wife died 14 years earlier.
- **Euan Cutler** – Chief reporter of one of England's tabloids. Saffy's father.
- **Lorna Cutler** – (40) – Saffy's mother. High energy and emotional. "Over the top." Hotel receptionist. Divorced. Lives in Spain with her boyfriend, Alberto. Inherited and now owns Skeleton House. Had Saffy when she was 15. Was called "Lolly" as a child.
- **Glen (GE) Davies** – Private detective.
- **Rose Grey** – (75) – Saffy's grandmother. Has Alzheimer's and is in a care home, Elms Brook. Owned Skelton House before Saffy moved in. Was married to William.
- **Alan Hartall** – Daphne Hartall's brother. Knew Sheila Watts.

- **Daphne Hartall** – “Daffy” – Used to live with Rose & Lolly in Skeleton House in 1980. Liked to sew.
- **Jack & Brenda** – Saffy’s elderly, busybody neighbors. Been in the house since 1986.
- **Joel** – Owner of the Stag and Pheasant pub in Rose’s time.
- **Joy** – Nursing home worker who cares for Rose.
- **Larry Knight** – Theo’s father’s medical practice partner in 1974. Nice man.
- **Neil Lewisham** – Man found at Skeleton House. Went missing in 1980. Married. Newspaper reporter.
- **Cynthia Parsons** – (23) – Woman who accused Victor of inappropriate behavior.
- **Tom Perkins** – (24) – Works in London in finance for a Tech company. Partner is Saffy. Clumsy.
- **Sean** – Worked at the farm just outside Beggar’s Nook with Daphne.
- **Susan Wallace** – Child who was hit over the head and was killed by Jean Burdon.
- **Shelia Watts** – (1977) – Thought to have drowned. Drowning reported by next door neighbor, Alan Hartell.
- **Skeleton House** – House in Beggar’s Nook in the Cotswold’s. Currently Saffy and Tom live here. Used to be Rose Grey’s (Saffy’s grandmother’s) house.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. The story is told from multiple viewpoints and switches between present day and Rose’s journal entries/letter from the past. Did you like the way the story was set up? Did you find it easy or hard to follow? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think the title, ***Couple at Number 9***, was chosen? What does it represent to the story as a whole? If you had to retitle the book, what title would you choose?
4. Who was your favorite character? Who was your least favorite?
5. Would you be able to stay and live in a home if bodies had been found there?
6. A good portion of this story occurs when Lorna is 3 years old. Adult Lorna only gets flashes of memories of her past. How realistic do you think that is? Do you remember anything from when you were a toddler?
7. Do you think it is right/acceptable to question a person who has dementia over things that have happened in the past? Why or why not? If there is no one else to question, what should an investigator do?
8. If someone commits a violent crime, but cannot remember it due to dementia or other mental issues, should they be put on trial or in jail for their actions? Why or why not?

9. Gran says, “Jean hit her (Susan) over the head and she did not get back up again.” Did you guess who Jean was?
10. Did you figure out who Daphne was before they told you?
11. Did you figure out why Rose was running from Victor Carmichael before the readers were told?
12. Did you suspect who the female body was before the reveal? When? What clues were given that helped you figure it out?
13. Saffy forgives Rose for her deceptions. Lorna has a harder time. Who do you side with? If you were lied to for the majority of your life, would you be able to forgive?
14. One of the major criticisms of the book is Theo/Victor felt like a “throw-away” characters. What did you think? How do you feel about the Theo/Victor plotline?
15. Which characters were the most “real” to you? Which ones had the most genuine characteristics? Which characters felt one-dimensional or unrealistic? Why?
16. What would you do if you found out that you had a sibling (or many siblings) that you did not know about?
17. What do you think will happen to Theo and Lorna’s relationship in the future? What about Lorna and Euan (Saffy’s father)?
18. ***The Couple at Number 9*** was written by Claire Douglas. Will you read anything else by the author?

#### References:

- Claire Douglas webpage - <https://www.mushens-entertainment.com/claire-douglas>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/d/claire-douglas/>
- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/49430390-the-couple-at-no-9>
- Novelist – <https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=84f866e7-8094-4517-aca4-0a39e396f33c%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=11072502&db=neh>

## Claire Douglas' Books

### Stand Alone Books

- The Sisters (2015)
  - Local Girl Missing (2016)
  - Last Seen Alive (2017)
  - Do Not Disturb (2018)
  - Then She Vanishes (2019)
  - Just Like the Other Girls (2020)
    - The Couple at No 9 (2021)
  - The Girls Who Disappeared (2022)
    - The Woman Who Lied (2023)
    - The Wrong Sister (2024)
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### If you liked The Couple at Number 9, try...

- Back to the Garden – Laurie R. King
- Carolina Moonset – Matt Goldman
- Real Bad Things – Kelly J. Ford
- The Family Upstairs – Lisa Jewell
- The Breakdown – BA Paris