

Long Call Discussion Questions

by Ann Cleeves

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & website)

Ann Cleeves is the author behind ITV's *Vera* and BBC One's *Shetland*. She has written over thirty novels, and is the creator of detectives Vera Stanhope and Jimmy Perez – characters loved both on screen and in print. Her books have now sold millions of copies worldwide.



A television adaptation of **The Long Call** was broadcast in October 2021.

In 2012 she was inducted into the CWA Crime Thriller Awards Hall of Fame and is the 2017 recipient of the CWA Diamond Dagger, the highest honor in British crime writing. Ann lives in North Tyneside.

Characters:

- **Matthew Venn** – Detective Inspector. Senior investigator. Married to Jonathan Church. Principled and ethical. Grew up in the area and is returning after many years away. Cast out of the Barum Brethren when he left.
- **Simon Waldon** – Man knifed on the beach. Large bird tattoo on neck. Good cook/chef. Renting room from Caroline Preece. Used to own his own restaurant with his ex-wife, Kate Dickinson. Has a temper and depression, but trying to reform. Caused a death by reckless driving (alcohol was involved). Volunteered in The Woodyard kitchen/café. Used to sit with Luce on the bus.
- **Lucy “Luce” Braddick** – (30s) – Down Syndrome. Maurice’s daughter. Goes to the Woodyard almost every day.
- **Maurice Braddick** – (80s) – Former butcher. Widowed. His wife’s name was Maggie. Daughter, Luce (30s), has Down Syndrome.
- **Johnathan Church** – Matthew’s husband. Runs the Woodyard.
- **Edward Craven** – (27) – Curate at St. Cuthbert’s Church. Dating Caroline Preece.
- **Gaby Henry** – Painter-in-residence at The Woodyard. Rents a room from Caroline Preece. Free Spirit. Involved with Simon Waldon.
- **Rosa Holsworthy** – Luce’s friend. Has a learning disability. No longer attends the Woodyard. Rosa’s mother, Janet, is a nurse at a care facility.
- **Colin & Hilary Marston** – (50s) – Couple renting toll keeper’s cottage near where body was found. Colin is a birdwatcher. He is a retired solicitor/lawyer. She is a part time mortgage adviser.
- **Ross May** – Constable. Rugby Player. DCI’s “golden boy.” Married to Melanie. Lots of energy. Competitive.

- **Joe Oldham** – DCI in charge. The “big boss” of the police department. He is an “old fashioned copper” close to retirement. Ross May is his “golden boy” as their families have been friends for years.
- **Caroline “Caz” Preece** – Owns a home and rents rooms to Simon and Gaby. Social worker who works specifically in mental health with depressed and suicidal people. Mother committed suicide when Caroline was young. Works at the St Cuthbert’s church. Dating the church pastor, Edward Craven.
- **Christopher Preece** – Chair of the Woodyard Board of Trustees. Caroline’s father. Rich. Widowed.
- **Jen Rafferty** – Sergeant. A really good detective. Single mother. Has two teenage children, Ella and Ben. Abusive ex-husband. Red-haired. Partier.
- **Denis Salter** – High up in the Barum Brethren. Spoke at Matthew’s dad’s funeral. Retired manager of The Devonshire Building Society (bank). One of the Trustees of The Woodyard.
- **Chrissie Shapland** – Down Syndrome. Luce’s friend. Goes to the Woodyard. Mother is Susan. Goes missing after staying with the Salters, her aunt and uncle.
- **Susan Shapland** – Longtime friend of Matthew’s mother. Daughter, Chrissie, has Down Syndrome. Calls Matthew when her daughter goes missing.
- **The Woodyard Centre** – A multiuse community center focusing on the Arts. It is also a place for people with learning disabilities to learn how to work together and get therapy. The community hub has a café, theater, and studio space for artists. Johnathan Church is the director. Christopher Preece and Denis Salter are trustees.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. This story is told from multiple points of view – primarily through the eyes of Mathew Venn, Jen Rafferty, and Gaby Henry. Did it work? Did you like seeing the case through different points of view? Why or why not?
3. Do you think the characters in the book were fully developed? Which characters were the best developed? Which characters the least developed?
4. When should a police officer recuse himself from the case? Should Matt have turned over the case when he found out it involved the Woodyard and his husband, Johnathan, as the Woodyard director? Should he have stepped back later in the case? When?
5. **The Long Call** opens with a scene of Matthew Venn standing outside his father’s funeral service, mulling over why he is watching from the outside rather than mourning with family and friends inside. How do the relationships between parents and children - Matthew and his mother, Lucy and Maurice, Caroline and Christopher - affect the events of the novel?

6. Matthew goes to examine Simon's body on the beach, and thinks: "Now he could hear the surf on the beach and the cry of a herring gull, the sound naturalists named the long call, the cry which always sounded to him like an inarticulate howl of pain. These were the noises of home." Is it significant that the sounds that remind Matthew of home also remind him of pain? How does this relationship between home and pain relate to his past? To his present?
7. Why do you think the author named this book "**The Long Call**"? What is the significance of the title?
8. What do you think the albatross tattoo on Simon's neck symbolizes?
9. When Jen and Ross first see Simon's room, Jen says "it could be a monk's room," and Ross responds: "Or a prison cell." As you learn who Simon was, throughout **The Long Call**, which of these comparisons do you find most accurate?
10. The Woodyard looms large in the novel - both as a setting that brings many of its characters together and as the site of the event that sets everything off. Do you think it's meaningful that the events in **The Long Call** revolve around a community center? How so?
11. Jen is surrounded by men at her job, including, of course, her boss DI Matthew Venn. Does she get treated differently from Ross because she's a woman?
12. Religion - whether it be the Brethren or Caz's beliefs - is important in this story. How do the beliefs of different characters affect their choices?
13. Lucy is a strong and sympathetic character throughout **The Long Call**, and in the end her strength becomes incredibly important. Do any characters in the novel underestimate her? If so, who and how?
14. Why do you think Simon Warton was so invested in the Woodyard case? Should he have left it alone? Why or why not?
15. Were you shocked by the big reveal at the end? Did you see it coming? When did you figure out the twist(s) and what were the clues that led you there?
16. There are actually multiple crimes that occur in the book culminating in Simon Warton's death. Who did you feel is ultimately responsible for Simon's death? Who is the most culpable?
17. What about the people who tried to cover up the initial crime? How much of what ultimately happened is their responsibility?
18. A number of Ann Cleeves previous books have been developed for TV. Do you think this book would make a good TV show? Why or why not?
19. Ann Cleeves has written a number of other books and series. Will you read them?

References:

- Ann Cleeves -- <https://anncleeves.com/>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/c/ann-cleeves/>
- MacMillan – <https://images.macmillan.com/folio-assets/readers-guides/9781250204448RG.pdf>
- Novelist – <https://web-s-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=e2c66fac-537c-4859-afd1-ed8545a21ea0%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10804703&db=neh>

Ann Cleeves' Books

Series

George and Molly Palmer-Jones

1. A Bird In The Hand (1986)
2. Come Death and High Water (1987)
3. Murder In Paradise (1988)
4. A Prey To Murder (1989)
5. Sea Fever (1991)
6. Another Man's Poison (1992)
7. The Mill On The Shore (1994)
8. High Island Blues (1996)

5. The Glass Room (2012)
6. Harbour Street (2014)
7. The Moth Catcher (2015)
8. The Seagull (2017)
9. The Darkest Evening (2020)
10. The Rising Tide (2022)
- Frozen (2020)

Inspector Ramsay

1. A Lesson In Dying (1990)
2. Murder In My Backyard (1991)
3. A Day In The Death Of Dorothea Cassidy (1992)
4. Killjoy (1993)
5. The Healers (1995)
6. The Baby Snatcher (1997)

Shetland

1. Raven Black (2006)
2. White Nights (2008)
3. Red Bones (2009)
4. Blue Lightning (2010)
5. Dead Water (2013)
6. Thin Air (2014)
7. Cold Earth (2016)
8. Wild Fire (2018)
- Shetland (2015)
- Too Good To Be True (2016)

Vera Stanhope

1. The Crow Trap (1999)
2. Telling Tales (2005)
3. Hidden Depths (2007)
4. Silent Voices (2011)

Detective Matthew Venn

1. The Long Call (2019)
2. The Heron's Cry (2021)
- 2.5. The Girls on the Shore (2022)

Stand Alone Novels

- The Sleeping and the Dead (2001)
 - Burial of Ghosts (2003)

If you liked Long Call, try...

- In the Bleak Midwinter – Julia Spencer-Fleming
- Still Life – Louise Penny
- His Right Hand – Mette Ivie Harrison
- The Blackhouse – Peter May
- The Ruin – Dervla McTiernan

Devon, England

Devon, England (archaically known as Devonshire) is a county in South West England, reaching from the Bristol Channel in the north to the English Channel in the south.

The north and south coasts of Devon each have both cliffs and sandy shores, and the county's bays contain seaside resorts, fishing towns and ports. The inland terrain is rural, generally hilly and has a lower population density than many other parts of England.

As well as agriculture, much of the economy of Devon is based on tourism. The comparatively mild climate, coastline and landscape make Devon a destination for recreation and leisure in England.

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devon>)



Down Syndrome

Down syndrome or Down's syndrome, also known as trisomy 21, is a genetic disorder caused by the presence of all or part of a third copy of chromosome 21. It is usually associated with physical growth delays, mild to moderate intellectual disability, and characteristic facial features. The average IQ of a young adult with Down syndrome is 50, equivalent to the mental ability of an eight- or nine-year-old child, but this can vary widely.

Life expectancy is around 50 to 60 years in the developed world with proper health care.

Down syndrome is one of the most common chromosome abnormalities in humans. It occurs in about 1 in 1,000 babies born each year.

It is named after British doctor John Langdon Down, who fully described the syndrome in 1866. The genetic cause of Down syndrome was discovered in 1959.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Down_syndrome)

