



THE LONG CALL by Ann Cleeves

READING GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. Birds come into play more than once in The Long Call, for example the titular "long call" that refers to herring gulls, and the albatross tattoo on Simon's neck. What might these references symbolize? Are they connected?
8. 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?
9. Who did you feel is ultimately responsible for Simon's death? How did the culture of the surrounding area enable the murder to happen and the murderer to (initially) stay hidden?
10. For readers who have followed along with the other detectives Ann Cleeves has created—in particular Vera Stanhope and Jimmy Perez—how does Matthew Venn and his method differ from theirs? Could you also draw comparisons with these other two distinctive protagonists?