

List of Characters

DAVID KELLER— a lean, gently handsome man lives in the English countryside, married to Adelaide. Their marriage is not particularly a happy one. David has learned to find some pleasure in caring for his beautiful gardens and in his brief conversations with his neighbor, Violet.

ADELAIDE KELLER — an intense, dark and domineering woman who has been verbally attacking her husband, David, for years. These violent exchanges are commonly heard next door by Violet.

VIOLET PRILL — a lonely, young widow who moved out to the country to try to piece together her shattered life. As she begins to adapt, Violet befriends a sweet and gentle neighbor, David.

NIGEL PRILL — Violet's husband, who was killed in an industrial accident one year ago.

QUENTIN IVY — the local Constable.

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Even though he was married, David Keller brought Violet Prill roses. Not only was David married, but he lived in the small, postcard-picturesque country cottage almost identical to Violet's and located directly next door. The two cottages were the last in a row of a dozen such charmingly functional wood and stone structures nestled in lush foliage a mile outside of the village on the old and seldom traveled shepherds' road. When the direction of the wind was right, the soothing whisper of the river at the end of the road could be heard.

Violet was a comparatively young widow. Her husband, Nigel, had been killed in an industrial accident in London only the year before. Insulated from the thoughtless and unfeeling world by his life insurance money and the solitude of the cottage she had rented, Violet was slowly recuperating from the shattering desolation she had experienced after Nigel's death.

"I appreciate these, Mr. Keller," she declared, not knowing what else to say as she accepted the dozen red roses. Surrounded by the muted earth tones of the cottage interior, their redness had the startling brightness of unexpected spilled blood. "I'll put them in water."

"Call me David," he urged her. He was a lean, gently handsome man with a kind, elongated face and thick dark hair showing wisps of gray at the temples. "They're from my garden," he said, smiling and nodding toward the roses.

He was an avid gardener. Violet saw him almost every morning from her kitchen window as she prepared her small kettle of tea. He would be planting or transplanting, clipping or pruning, working meticulously, obviously enjoying the feel of the rich black soil and the creation of beauty. His garden was beautiful, and consisted mostly of rosebushes. It was bordered in front by a long row of such bushes he'd recently planted, alternating red roses with white. The bushes ended at the corner of the narrow gravel driveway to his cottage and provided a symmetrical and spectacularly colorful property line. The rest of the garden was bordered by a dense and neatly trimmed wall of privet hedge.

"Mr. Keller - David, the roses are lovely, but why -"

"They are lovely," he interrupted. "The most delicate and feminine of flowers. Which is why I decided that you deserved them. In the short time you've lived here, I've come to look forward to you waving to me in the morning from your kitchen window as I work in my garden. I enjoy our chance meetings in the village, our brief conversations over the fence." He smiled again, not at all self-consciously. "Rose for a rose, you might say. Even though your name is Violet." Still smiling, he added, "A rose by any other name is still a rose, the most precious of flowers."

Violet felt an almost painful stirring of emotions she had put away in a far, dark recess of her mind, and then a powerful current of guilt. *Nigel*, she almost said aloud. She was suddenly embarrassed and blushing, aware of her rising blood's heat on her face. She tried to keep her expression calm as stone so that David Keller couldn't know he had touched the quick of her.

"David," she said, not quite stammering, "you're . . ."

"Married?" A shadow of sadness passed over his lean features. "Of course I am, but marriages end, one way or another. And you know how Adelaide is."

Violet knew. Adelaide Keller was a dark, domineering woman whose habitual forward lean of upper body, darting movements, and tiny-waisted gauntness reminded Violet of a wasp. And Adelaide's waspishness didn't belie her personality. She carried the accompanying sting, and her favorite prey was David. She relentlessly belittled him because his ill health had forced him to retire

from his job with a disability pension that barely paid the bills. At almost any hour, day or night, Violet was likely to hear Adelaide's penetrating, rasping voice as she assailed David, calling him every foul name imaginable, but always ending her tirades by accusing him of weakness, of not being the man he had been when they married, and telling him that his carelessness had resulted in the long-ago death of their infant son. It was obvious to Violet that every abuse David suffered at the hands of his wife stemmed from that final accusation. She wondered if David realized that. If so, how he must hate Adelaide! The thought of such pent up hatred and rage made Violet nervous. Afraid of what it might prompt David to do.

Violet glanced down at the roses and then at David Keller. "What would Adelaide think of this?"

"She won't think anything, because she'll never know." Again the gentle smile that warmed something that had long been cold in Violet. David was a sufferer, as she herself was. "Anyway," he said, "no woman was ever ruined by a rose."

Violet laughed. "I suppose that's true."

"I'd better get back home," he said. "I have to do some pruning." He said this very seriously, as if he might be held personally accountable by nature if he forgot. How could she ever suspect such a gentle soul?

Violet nodded. Still with his unembarrassed, kindly smile, he left. She watched him from the window as with lanky strides he crossed the slope of smooth lawn to his garden. From where Violet stood, only the peak of the thatched roof of the Keller cottage was visible through the trees. Which meant that her cottage couldn't be plainly seen from the Kellers'. For the first time, she was glad that this was so, even though she was alone and felt inexplicably threatened.

She placed the roses in water in her best cut-glass vase and looked at them. They were almost perfect specimens at exactly the peak of their beauty. Adelaide hated roses, as David had often told Violet. She didn't try to fool herself. She knew how David Keller felt about his roses, and she knew what her acceptance of those before her must signify to him.

As the weeks passed, Violet didn't approve of her growing fondness for David Keller. It was because she still loved Nigel. She knew he was dead in cold fact, but he was warmly alive in her mind. Still, it had been a year since the funeral. But David was married – that was inescapably true – even if it was to a sadistic shrew like Adelaide who would not let death die. And for the briefest instant Violet hated Adelaide Keller, and she fully understood how David must feel about his wife.

At a few minutes past ten o'clock one warm spring evening, Violet heard the shouting from the cottage next door, the familiar rasping accusations. Soon she could also hear David's softer, calmer voice. She couldn't understand what he was saying, but she could understand Adelaide. What Adelaide was saying made Violet lie in bed trembling, and Adelaide wouldn't stop saying it, over and over, louder and louder. No one should be made to endure what David was enduring, and Violet was suffering with him.

It was her neighbors' most violent argument yet, and it ended in silence at eleven o'clock after Adelaide threatened to destroy David's prized rosebushes.

Violet lay in the silence wondering how she had allowed herself to become entwined in her predicament, experiencing ever-increasing compassion and affection for a man with whom she had shared only limited time and no physical contact more intimate than the touching of hands. Gentle hands she'd once seen nurse a stunned finch back to its senses after an attack by an owl in the

garden. David had even constructed a birdhouse for the finch and attached it to a huge tree near the rosebushes.

In the morning, as she was standing near her kitchen window brewing tea, Violet saw the chief constable's Morris sedan turn into the Keller's driveway and disappear behind the trees. Through the open window she heard the crunch of tires on the gravel, and then the ratchety groan of an emergency brake being applied.

She stood staring out the window for a long time. Then she suddenly straightened, turned away, and hurried to get dressed.

Five minutes later she was knocking on the door of the Keller cottage. David answered her knock. His lean face was drawn and blanched. Beyond his left shoulder, Violet could see the constable seated with authoritative weight on the sofa.

Appearing somewhat dazed, David invited her inside and introduced her to the constable, who was a large man with the most translucent blue eyes that Violet had ever seen. The constable didn't stand, though he shifted his considerable bulk, and nodded cordially to Violet. His name, curiously enough, was Quentin Ivy.

Violet returned the nod with a smile. "I brought these for Adelaide," she said to David, holding out a lush bouquet of roses. "They're from my garden."

Looking deeply and curiously into her eyes, David took the roses from her. He laid the roses gently on the coffee table and said, "Adelaide drowned in the river early this morning."

Violet didn't have to feign her reaction to his words. She slumped backward into a chair. "What? . . . How? . . ."

"We were gathering rocks along the bank for the garden," David said forlornly. "I heard her yell my name, turned, and saw her lose her footing and slip into the water. It was so terribly sudden. The river is deep at that point. Apparently the undertow took her. She didn't come to the surface even once. She simply . . . disappeared."

"Steady on, Mr. Keller," the constable said sympathetically. His uncanny blue eyes drilled through Violet, then swung their focus to David. "We'll search," the constable said. But all three people in the room knew that often the river didn't give up its dead until months had passed, if at all.

Violet offered to help in any way she could, then excused herself and returned to her cottage. Half an hour later she saw Constable Ivy walking around the grounds next door. Fifteen minutes after that she saw his car turn from the Keller driveway onto the county road. He was alone in the car.

Violet sat at the kitchen table with a cup of tea. She knew what she'd done, but she wasn't sorry. She was very calm.

Earlier in the morning, when she had seen the constable's car turn into the Keller driveway, she had noticed something else.

**ASSEMBLE THE JIGSAW PUZZLE AND FIND WHAT VIOLET HAD NOTICED.
UPON CLOSER EXAMINATION, WHAT ELSE COULD SHE DETERMINE?**

Solution

From that time on, each year for their wedding anniversary, David lovingly gave Violet a bouquet of roses.

Thanks to Violet, the constable never became suspicious.

by eight hours and concocted a plausible story for Constable Ivy.

that they'd argued violently just before her death. Then he had changed the time of Adelaide's death two rosebushes over the damaged birdhouse, not to conceal his wife's body but to conceal the fact returned home, realized he was a prime candidate for a murder suspect, and hurriedly replanted the road, hoping to get somewhat ahead of her, had seen her lose her footing and plunge into the river. He'd dived in and tried to rescue her, but it was no use. Distantly, soaked, and exhausted, he had and crashing through the hedge to flee into darkness. David had run to the end of the cobblestone from the ground two of his newly planted precious rosebushes before hurling the birdhouse at him the truth. That he and Adelaide had argued the night before, that she'd left him, and spitefully ripped Now Violet truly understood. David had known how it would seem if he'd told the constable needs by two fishermen a mile down the river bank.

A month after the constable's visit, the body of Adelaide Keller was discovered among the wouldn't take him long to figure out why.

roses Violet had brought to his cottage that they weren't from her garden but from his own. If there were no roses around Violet's cottage, David must have known when he accepted the spade.

It hadn't taken Violet long to make up her mind. She quickly set to work with her garden That is, unless the bushes were switched back to their original positions.

bushes in the row, and then to the carefully replaced sod beneath them.

grave. The break in the symmetry and color would surely draw someone's attention to the last two mind, he'd accidentally transposed the rosebushes when he'd replanted them over her hastily dug her. Perhaps by striking her with the birdhouse. Then, in the darkness and in his tumultuous state of stood everything. Adelaide had ripped up David's beloved rosebushes and in a fit of rage he'd killed Violet had remembered the Keller's argument of the night before and she'd suddenly under- been ripped from a woman's nightgown. Not only that, the birdhouse was missing.

the two end rosebushes, and snagged on a thorn was a strip of silky fabric that looked as if it had other bearing red roses, then one bearing white. And there were footprints in the soft earth around ending at the driveway with a white and then a red rosebush, there were two bushes next to each The row of alternated rosebushes that she looked at every morning was different. Instead of