



Before the Poison

By Peter Robinson
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Introduction

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Inspector Banks series comes a superb stand-alone novel in which a man's obsession with a decades-old crime leads him down a dark and winding path. Chris Lowndes built a comfortable career composing scores for films in Hollywood. But after twenty-five years abroad, and still quietly reeling from the death of his beloved wife, he decides to return to the Yorkshire dales of his youth. To ease the move, he buys Kilnsgate House, a rambling old mansion deep in the country.

Although Chris finds Kilnsgate charming, something about the house disturbs him, a vague sensation that the long-empty rooms have been waiting for him—feelings made ever stronger when he learns that the house was the scene of a murder more than fifty years before. The former owner, a prominent doctor named Ernest Arthur Fox, was supposedly poisoned by his beautiful and much younger wife,

Grace. Arrested and brought to trial, Grace was found guilty and hanged for the crime.

His curiosity piqued, Chris talks to the locals and searches through archives for information about the case. But the more he discovers, the more convinced he becomes that Grace may have been innocent. Ignoring warnings to leave it alone, he sets out to discover what really happened over half a century ago—a quest that takes him deep into the past and into a web of secrets that lie all too close to the present.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think Peter Robinson called the novel *Before the Poison*? What meaning does the title hold?
2. What propels Chris Lowndes to return to England? If you have left your hometown, would you consider moving back later in your life?
3. What draws him to investigate the Grace Fox case? Do you think he was smitten with her ghost? Do you believe in ghosts? Chris had the feeling that the Kilnsgate House was *waiting* for him. Do you agree? Would he have felt that way if his own circumstances had been different?
4. The author begins each chapter with journal entries and excerpts from a chronicle of the Grace Fox case. How do these extraneous materials illuminate the story? What do we learn from reading them?
5. Do you think the story would make a good movie and who would you cast in the various roles?
6. How does Chris go about piecing together the truth about Grace? What did each of the people he spoke to have to add to the story?
7. In revealing the full story about Grace, Chris shares a dark secret of his own. Is what he did a crime or an act of utmost kindness?
8. Do you think uncovering Grace's story has helped Chris to cope with his own grief and find the fresh beginning he yearns for?
9. Grace barely survived World War II, yet she felt guilt at making it through. Why?
10. Why did Grace disapprove of her husband's work? Do you think his research was immoral? Why? Argue the question from both sides.
11. Except for her diary, Grace did not talk about her experiences during the war. If she had, might it have changed anything? How much was she a woman trapped by the age in which she lived? Should she have just left her husband? What would have the consequences been if she had? Compare and contrast Grace's situation with that of Chris's real estate agent and new friend, Heather.
12. Chris composes musical scores for Hollywood movies. How does the background music emotionally affect a viewer? Do you notice the music when are watching a film? If you like film scores, is there a particular one that fits *Before the Poison*?
13. How does the weather and the setting add to the novel's atmosphere?

About the Author

Peter Robinson's award-winning novels have been named a Best Book of the Year by *Publishers Weekly*, a Notable Book by the *New York Times*, and a Page-Turner of the Week by *People* magazine. Robinson was born and raised in Yorkshire but has lived in North America for more than twenty-five years. He now divides his time between North America and the U.K.