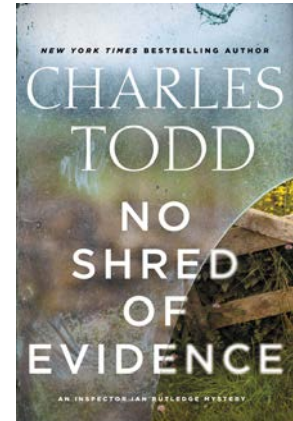


No Shred of Evidence

William Morrow Hardcover

By Charles Todd

ISBN: 9780062386182



Introduction

In this absorbing new entry in the acclaimed *New York Times* bestselling series, Scotland Yard's Ian Rutledge is caught up in a twisted web of vengeance and murder.

On the north coast of Cornwall, an apparent act of mercy is repaid by an arrest for murder. Four young women have been accused of the crime. A shocked father calls in a favor at the Home Office. Scotland Yard is asked to review the case.

However, Inspector Ian Rutledge is not the first Inspector to reach the village. Following in the shoes of a dead man, he is told the case is all but closed. Even as it takes an unexpected personal turn, Rutledge will require all his skill to deal with the incensed families of the accused, the grieving parents of the victim, and local police eager to see these four women sent to the infamous Bodmin Gaol. Then why hasn't the killing stopped?

With no shred of evidence to clear the accused, Rutledge must plunge deep into the darkest secrets of a wild, beautiful and dangerous place if he is to find a killer who may—or may not—hold the key to their fate.

Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss the opening chapter with the four young women in the rowboat. Is it clear that they are trying to rescue the man they come upon on the river?
2. Why is Inspector Ian Rutledge reluctant to take on the case in Cornwall?
3. What role does Hamish MacLeod play in this series? Why does Inspector Rutledge need him around?
4. How does Rutledge being young, a single, childless man, affect the investigation? Is this a positive or a negative?

5. Class and status play a significant role in this case. How would the story change if these were no longer issues?
6. Small-town secrets play a large role in the plot. Examine each one and their ramifications.
7. The novel focuses mainly on the four young women accused of a terrible crime. How would the story be different if it was told from the victim's point of view?
8. Talk about the nature of justice in this story and how difficult it was to achieve in the face of enormous pressure from those involved with this case.
9. Like the classic film *Rashomon*, in which a murder is viewed from the point of view of several eyewitnesses, the alleged murder in *NO SHRED OF EVIDENCE* also contains many vantage points from those present. Examine each one and the potential results.
10. How did your perspective change when additional victims began mounting up? Did you begin to suspect different characters were guilty?

Interview with Charles & Caroline Todd

Q: Where did you get the idea to involve Hamish MacLeod in the Inspector Ian Rutledge series?

Caroline and Charles: *It was obvious to us that any man who had survived four bloody years in the trenches of France could not possibly have come back to England unscathed. The Great War was one of attrition, of stalemate and a fluctuating Front Line, of high casualty rates and weapons that could inflict horrific wounds. This was a dilemma—Rutledge couldn't return to Scotland Yard and resume his interrupted career if he had been physically damaged. However, this war had also produced an invisible wound that was little understood. Shell shock, or PTSD as we know it today, was considered little short of cowardice, and many of those who suffered from it devised ways to conceal it. Enter Hamish MacLeod, a corporal under Rutledge who symbolizes all the young soldiers he has sent to their deaths in the heat of battle. Rutledge knows Hamish is dead and buried in France, but he can't accept the way Hamish died, and the guilt of his role in the young Scot's execution haunts him still. It was military necessity—Rutledge understands that too—but he can't let it go. Hamish is not a ghost, mind you. He's the personification of Rutledge's own nightmare, the voice of a man who shouldn't have died as he did. And the only way Rutledge can bring Hamish home is in his head. The only way he can live with himself is to keep Hamish alive. And yet doing so is also a constant torment. Most people who have never been at war find it hard to understand the bonds that soldiers share in the heat of battle, the trust, the I-have-your-back-and-you-have mine, the brotherhood that has nothing to do with blood relationships but is often stronger. We felt this was a part of Rutledge's character that we couldn't overlook.*

Q: What role do you see for social class and status in NO SHRED OF EVIDENCE?

Caroline and Charles: *For us it was interesting to look at the conflict between the evidence given by a farmer whose reputation in the village was sound and that of four young women from upper class families who are being accused of a capital crime: attempted murder. The farmer appears to have no reason to lie. The four young women have breeding and position behind them, and yet it appears that they themselves are lying about what really happened. The victim is neither working class nor upper class—but his father is the local banker, a social position between that of the farmer and the young women. Where then do the sympathies of the villagers lie? Certainly the local constable feels the accused should stand trial, and the family of the victim feels the same way, that the women should be held in prison. But class still has weight in 1920 Cornwall. This sets up a very difficult situation for Rutledge to deal with. His own sympathies might lie with one of the young women, someone known to him, but he must work with the evidence before him. As that shifts and changes, as contradictory facts come to light, he has to weigh what he learns against the word of an upstanding man who could very likely carry the jury to a guilty verdict in spite of the lawyers the wealthy families can afford to hire. The fact that there is a third player in the game who has not come to light only intensifies the pressure on Rutledge to condemn the women rather than look for the truth.*

Q: What intrigues you most about life in post-WWI England?

Caroline and Charles: *Probably the fact that when war was declared in 1914, and the fighting began, it appeared to everyone that the war would end with everything just the same as it was in that glorious summer of 1914, that the country would return to that safe and well-established “normal” that they all knew. Only it would never be the same again. And it’s this reality that makes post-WWI such a rich period to write about. You have what the war itself cost, and the lost dreams, and the painful future that eventually the PBS series Downton Abbey would portray so well, and there is a lot of room for drama and for ordinary people to be driven to murder to keep their own personal worlds safe, no matter what is happening around them.*

Q: Like the Bess Crawford series, NO SHRED OF EVIDENCE involves women who served during WWI. How important is it to tell these stories?

Caroline and Charles: *We feel that it’s very important to recognize what women did in the Great War. We can only glimpse this in the context of NO SHRED OF EVIDENCE. We see a great deal more in the Bess Crawford series. She’s a great character, and she is able to demonstrate that it’s often the women left behind who carry the heaviest burden—not the weight of the actual fighting, perhaps, but most certainly filling the shoes of absent men, carrying on in spite of their sorrow for the missing and dead, nursing the wounded in the hope of saving them, working in the dangerous munitions plants, or just growing the food that will keep England alive. Somehow it’s sort of taken for granted that they will cope, serve their country, and do what they can for the war effort, without complaint or recognition. Yet what they give so freely deserves to be remembered by a grateful nation.*

Q: What challenges do you face in staying historically accurate while creating a fictional mystery set in this era?

Caroline and Charles: *First of all, it isn't our country—it isn't our time frame—and sometimes it isn't even our language. So we must check everything, even the smallest detail. There's always someone out there who will know the answer if we don't have it right. But more than that, it's a responsibility to the reader to give them a true look at the period we're writing about, not just a cracking good story and never mind the details. We go to England, we talk to people there, we look for postcards with pictures of the period, we search for letters and memoirs, and above all, we try to put ourselves into the shoes of the people in our books. We may make mistakes, it's part of the challenge, but we will make as few as we possibly can. And actually, we find it fascinating to chase a fact down. You never know what you'll wind up discovering in the process.*

Q: Do you ever imagine Rutledge in any other historical era? What makes post-WWI the ideal setting for his stories?

Caroline and Charles: *We've talked about this. Rutledge fits his time. The shell shock, the lack of forensics as we know them today, the need for him to use his wits to uncover the murderer, all make the books work so well. We really wanted to write about a detective who detects, rather than a policeman who coordinates the various threads of modern forensic science. The idea of one man pitting his intelligence and experience and character against those of a murderer intent on escaping justice intrigues us. And we like the challenge of an ordinary person committing the crime, rather than a gang or terrorist or drug lord. They are more predictable villains, whereas the person whose slate is clean, whose crime is unexpected, who feels he or she has been careful enough not to be found out, is more far interesting to write about. Unraveling that truth is exciting. Still—we've considered what sort of policeman Rutledge's grandson or great-grandson might someday be...*

Q: Which is more important: writing a story that contains social and moral issues, or establishing a classic whodunit murder mystery? Which is more challenging?

Caroline and Charles: *People read mysteries for many reasons, and the most important one is entertainment. Our feeling is, if the social or moral issue (and we've used a number of them) can grow out of the story itself, all well and good. A preachy mystery is no fun, and usually turns the reader off. The real challenge is to take a classic whodunit murder mystery, give it modern implications without destroying the story or the characters or the period, and weave these together in such a way that the reader is entertained. A chase scene is more exciting than a lecture. And can still get a point across.*

Q: The previous book in the series, A FINE SUMMER'S DAY, took place before WWI when Rutledge was a very different man. NO SHRED OF EVIDENCE continues where the series left off prior to this flashback novel. Any plans to revisit Rutledge's past again?

Caroline and Charles: *We doubt it. Although no writer ever says "impossible" because you never know when the right story will come along. We'd dealt with Rutledge over the course of*

sixteen books, taking him from the end of the war through to the autumn of 1920. And we began to wonder what he was like before the war and how he had been drawn into it. It seemed a good time, here at the centennial of the Great War, to go back and actually take a look at this man who was going to be changed so dramatically by the trenches. He surprised us, even though we thought we knew everything there was to know about Ian Rutledge. That's the beauty of letting characters determine their own destiny. They astonish you and enlighten you in amazing ways.

Q: What can we expect next from Inspector Ian Rutledge?

Caroline and Charles: *A group of men, sharing a last bottle of wine, vow on the eve of some of the worst fighting in the war—the battle of the Somme—to celebrate being alive at the end, if they make it through. Not with something as ordinary as a dinner party, but with a motorcar race from Paris to Nice. But someone attempts to murder one of the drivers where the road passes through the dangerous switchbacks and high mountain passes above Nice. It's hard to prove just what happened. But someone knows the truth. And back in England someone exacts a carefully planned revenge. Rutledge is summoned to find out why.*
