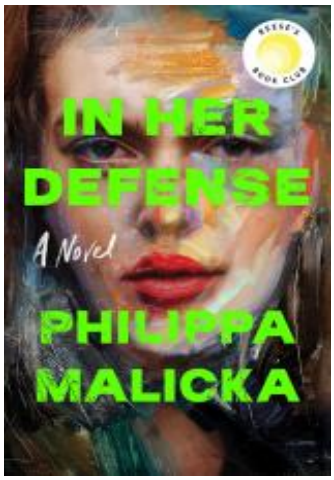
In Her Defense

by Philippa Malicka



About the Book

As a sensational celebrity libel trial unfolds, a young woman at the periphery secretly wields the power to make or break the case. But with her own hidden past, will she dare to speak up?

Everyone is watching. Only one person knows the truth.

The whole country has been riveted by the trial: Beloved TV star and national treasure Anna Finbow, standing in court, accusing her daughter?s therapist, Jean Guest, of brainwashing her daughter, Mary, for her own financial gain. Jean insists that Mary?s traumatic memories arise from her upbringing and her time studying at a prestigious art school in Rome --- wounds only Jean?s therapy can heal. But as the trial unfolds, it?s Augusta ?Gus? Bird, Anna?s former employee --- a seemingly insignificant bystander, a nobody --- who holds the key to unraveling the tangled web of lies and deceit.

What really happened to Mary in Rome? And if her memories can?t be trusted, how will they ever uncover the truth behind her estrangement? Twisty and propulsive, IN HER DEFENSE is a compulsively readable debut for fans of Lucy Foley and Laura Dave.

Discussion Guide

1. Introducing the reader to Anna Finbow, the narrator, Gus, says ?there is always a ?them? and always an ?us?? (p. 4). What does this tell us about how Gus sees herself in comparison to Anna? How do you, the reader, see yourself in comparison to Gus and Anna?

2. A big theme in the book is how we perceive people. How do you perceive Jean, and how do you interpret her motives? Do you see her as ?a modern-day cult leader?? Do you think she is just doing what she does for money, or do

you think there?s a part of her that does want to help people?

3. Much of Gus? pull towards Jean has to do with aesthetics. When she first meets Jean, she describes her ?orange velvet house slippers? (p. 121) and her ?beautiful living room? (p. 122) and how ?in her immaculate presence, I felt instantly grubby? (p. 121). Why do you think Gus is so drawn in by these things? How does Jean use this to her advantage?

4. The author cleverly structures this story to hide Gus? past with Mary and Jean in Rome in part 1. Why do you think she structures the novel in this way? How would the novel be different if we knew this information from the beginning?

5. Another big theme in this book is the idea of ?owing debt.? Gus feels indebted to Jean because Jean is giving her therapy even though Gus can?t afford to pay for it. She also feels indebted to the Finbows for giving her a job and letting her into their home. How does class play into that? How does this impact Gus? decisions?

6. On page 267, Anna calls Gus a ?leech,? which seems to really stick with Gus. Discuss what it means to be a leech and why you think this had such an impact on Gus.

7. Art plays a big role in this novel; Mary, Gus and Anna are all artists. What did you think is the importance of this?

8. On page 227, when Gus sees the portrait Mary painted of her, she hates the way she is depicted, saying ?the shock of how wrong it was brought tears to my eyes.? But then, on page 325, when she sees it again, she sees it in a whole new way. Why do you think she sees it differently the second time?

9. At the end of part four, when Gus is wondering how the sketch artist depicted her, she envisions herself as ?[a] somebody. Whatever may be said of me, however I will be sketched, not a nobody? (p. 318). How do you think this captures Gus? preoccupation with how she?s perceived? How is this different or the same as how she wants to be perceived in Mary?s portrait?

10. At the end of the trial, Gus is faced with the difficult decision of upholding her lie or telling the truth. Do you think she made the right decision? Do you think there was a right decision?

11. The truth behind the trial is complicated. Who do you think should have won the trial based on the evidence that is given? Who do you think should have won the trial based on everything you know?

12. What do you think of Lawrence?s ending? Do you think he got what he deserved? Why do you think the author decided to give his character this ending?

13. Consider the title of the novel. Who do you think this book is a case in defense of? Is it multiple people?

14. Trust is a central theme of the novel. In a story full of lies and half-truths, which characters do you trust, if any? How can you determine who can be trusted? Do you believe Gus? version of events by the end?

Author Bio

Philippa Malicka was born in Essex and now lives in London. She is an alumnus of the Prose Fiction MA at the University of East Anglia. Her nonfiction has appeared in *The Sunday Times* (London), *The Sunday Telegraph* (London) and *Grazia*, among others. IN HER DEFENSE is her first novel and has been longlisted for the Bridport First Novel Award.

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