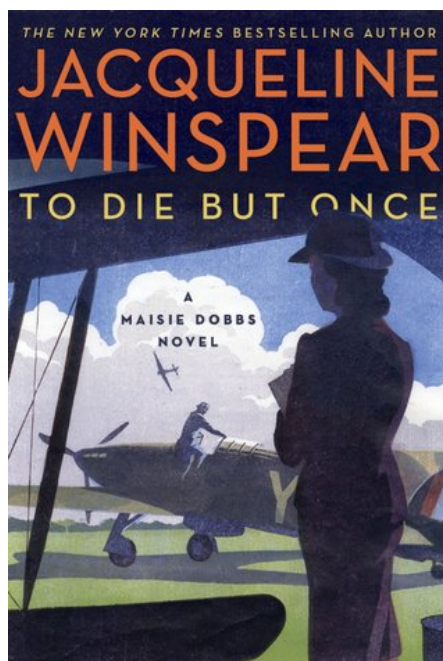




To Die But Once

Jacqueline Winspear

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Spring 1940. With Britons facing what has become known as "the Bore War"—nothing much seems to have happened yet—Maisie Dobbs is asked to investigate the disappearance of a local lad, a young apprentice craftsman working on a "hush-hush" government contract. As Maisie's inquiry reveals a possible link to the London underworld, another mother is worried about a missing son—but this time the boy in question is one beloved by Maisie.

To Die But Once Details

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From Reader Review To Die But Once for online ebook

Kathy Davie says

Fourteenth in the Maisie Dobbs, private investigator–historical mystery series now at the start of World War II in England and revolving around Maisie and the people who surround her.

My Take

I can't help but love Maisie Dobbs. Every time I read her story, I'm so impressed with her rise from her poor beginnings, simply because she wanted to learn and of her compassion for others. Yes, yes, I know this is fiction, but fiction can motivate us into believing a dream, and that's not a bad thing.

As Maisie remembers an old aphorism: "Where there's muck, there's brass", a comment about how war enriches the coffers of some and pushes others to ignore safety issues. The horror that kills so many, so needlessly. There's also a somewhat brighter side, of men, women, boys, who are willing to step up and help. Winspear pulls in the evacuation of Dunkirk, although I think she could have, should have?, created more tension for that aspect of the story.

There's also the pride and fear of those left behind, especially when the last war is still so close in their memories. Maisie does pull from the personal for what tension there is about Dunkirk in particular, what with Priscilla's and Billy's horrible experiences during World War I, as they worry about loved ones caught up in the evacuation. Other side themes include Maisie's worries about Anna and how accepted she is in both households; the benevolent spy is quite minor; and, those emotional effects of war and how it increases everyone's concerns for and thoughts of family.

It's that prologue that starts the main theme, and it hung with me, every word. A beautiful description of a worried lad who won't be coming home, and the only time we're not hearing from Maisie's third person simple subjective point-of-view. Maisie also pushes lots of good advice about acceptance and acknowledgement of the dreams of others. She does seem to be more accepting of James' choices in life.

I know it's not only wartime when parents become worried about their children, but it does increase the worries, and Winspear has quite a few examples of those worries, which make quite a bit of sense — on the sides of both parent and child. It's a child's maturation and their need for independence that is multiplied when it comes to war. Of wanting to be seen as a man equal to others.

Winspear is smooth and keeps the tension low, but it's there. Oh, yeah. It's there. I'm wondering if she has had training as a psychologist, as she's so great at describing feelings and using a person's posture to measure their concerns. Wait'll you read her description of Mrs. Digby. Almost made me want to get outside and breathe in some clear air!

There was an interesting bit about currency and the effects wartime has on it. That point about money under the bed certainly made me sit up. Winspear also explains why Britain had to ration everything during the war. I'm sure I've heard the reasons before, but for some reason, Winspear's explanation struck me. And it makes such sense. *Laughing*, I finally learn why the Flying Squad was nicknamed the Sweeney Todd, *more laughing*.

It's a different perspective on the war, and its effect on the English. I do look forward to the next Maisie Dobbs to see how that changes. For this is another reason I love this series, Winspear stays so true to the times, the clothing, the mores and customs, the everyday life, and the leading technology of the day — those fridges that are a new introduction to the English lifestyle. It makes me appreciate what we have today and

marvel at the possibilities of tomorrow. Throughout there are references to apprentices, when children are considered old enough to work, being a man at 16. It's quite the reverse of how we see today's middle teens. And it seems that Maisie is getting on a bit, not noticing those little things that Billy and Sands are noticing.

And dang it. What is it with foreshadowing that you never know until afterwards!

The Story

When a neighbor's son goes missing, especially after his complaints, his father asks Maisie to look in on him. Make sure he's okay.

It becomes an investigation that goes so much deeper, uncovering fraud, shady plots, murder, spies.

And Maisie is worried what the Ministry of Health inspector will think of Maisie's application.

The Characters

Maisie Dobbs trained as a psychologist and investigator under **Dr Maurice Blanche**. Since then, she married **James Compton**, Viscount Compton, and became widowed. She continues to run her investigative agency and consults with Scotland Yard, Special Branch, and MI5. **Brenda** was the former housekeeper who married **Frankie Dobbs**, Maisie's father. And he disapproves of Maisie's growing attachment to Anna.

Lord Julian and Lady Rowena Compton are Maisie's in-laws. Lord Julian has lots of connections in government and on the boards of a number of business, including banking. He'll be elected leader of the Local Defense Volunteers unit, later known as the **Home Guard**. **Simmonds** is the butler. They have Canadian officers billeted in their house.

Anna is the little girl, a sensitive, from *In This Grave Hour*, 13, who was evacuated to the Dower House, Maisie's home in the country and on the Compton estate, **Chelstone Manor**, near Tunbridge Wells. **Dr Stringer** is caring for Anna who's come down with the measles. **Emma**, a giant Alastian, is attached to Anna while **Jook**, as much as he loves Frankie, spends a lot of time with Anna. **Lady** is Anna's white pony. Supposedly, **Marco**, a seaman from Malta, is Anna's father.

Billy Beale has suffered his share of problems as a veteran of WWI and volunteers as an ARP man for this war. He's been Maisie's assistant for some years now. His oldest son, **Billy**, is with the British Expeditionary Forces at Dunkirk. Sixteen-year-old **Bobby**, their second son, is an apprentice mechanic with his own ideas. **Mrs. Relf** is a London neighbor. **Arthur Beale** is Billy's cousin who never came home from World War I. **Sandra** is Maisie's part-time secretary. She's married to **Lawrence Pickering**, a publisher at Pickering Publishing Company, and they have a baby son, **Martin**.

Priscilla Partridge is a close friend from their university days who soaks her depression in alcohol; she's married to **Douglas Partridge**, a writer who works with the wartime Ministry of Information. **Timothy**, the oldest, has enlisted in the RAF. **Tom** can't wait to enlist. **Tarquin** is the youngest. **Elinor** is/was the boys' nanny, so beloved that the family insists she stay on, as family. She's joined the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry, but Maisie is doubting it.

Gordon Sanderson is Tom's friend whose dad has a small fleet, including the **Cassandra**, at Rye. **Bea Sanderson** is his mother. **Mick Tate** is a fisherman in Rye. **Mistress Molly** is the saving of the **Cassandra**.

Phil and Sally Coombes run the **Prince of Wales pub**, one of Maisie's neighbors of her business office. **Archie** is their oldest at twenty-one; he's living on his own and is a foreman and fitter for an engineering works with too much money to account for. **Vivian** is the middle child who works at the telephone exchange. Their youngest, fifteen-year-old **Joe**, is lucky to have this painting job, as it's a reserved occupation.

Scotland Yard, Special Branch, etc.

Detective Chief Inspector Caldwell is with Scotland Yard and has come to respect Maisie. Caldwell's assistant, **Francis Able**, enlisted as Able Seaman Able; Able's dad is a desk sergeant in Essex. **Detective Chief Inspector "Spud" Murphy** in Basingstoke is no fool. **Dr Clarissa Clark** is the pathologist, who isn't a fool either. Nor especially humble, lol. Seems Dr Blanche was her favorite professor. **Richard Stratton** is back with Special Branch doing war work. **Robert "Robbie" McFarlane** is a liaison between Special Branch and the Secret Service; his eighteen-year-old nephew, **Sandy**, is at Dunkirk. *Stratton used to see Maisie.* **Constable Sheering** is with the Rye PD. **Harry Bream** is with the Flying Squad

Duff Cooper seems to be a colleague of Douglas'. He's coordinating the release of information about the evacuation of the BFE from the beach at Dunkirk.

Yates and Sons are...

...a painting and decorating firm that got a lucrative government contract. **Bill Yates** is the father; **Mike** is the son who pushes (and gets) good contracts. **Freddie Mayes** is the foreman on Joe's painting team; **Len** is the bigger of the painters; and, **Sidney Spooner** is a driver with a previous as long as his arm. **Charlotte Bright** can't wait to leave her job working for that nasty Mike and join the ATS. Her father is a sergeant at the Carter Street police station.

Jimmy Robertson is a criminal with his fingers in a lot of pies. **Barney Coleman** had been one of his "tea boys", Jimmy's cousin, and now holding up the Rotherhithe Docks. **Doris** and **Sally** are his sisters.

Whitchurch, Hampshire, is...

...at the center of the action and where **Doreen** and **Margaret Rose** (Billy Beale's wife and daughter) are staying with **Aunt Millicent** in one of the tied cottages on Keep's farm. **Mrs. Keep** runs a B&B.

The last place Joe lodged was...

...near Whitchurch. **Mrs. Digby** is the landlady who thinks quite a lot of herself...and that **Sid Watkins** with his eyes and hands. **Leading Aircraftswoman Sylvia Preston**, a WAAF, is one of the lodgers with a conscience, and it applies to her current job as a driver as well!

Phineas "Finny" Hutchins owns Moorwood Farm over in Whitchurch and became very friendly with Joe. He raises sheepdogs, including **Odin** and **Loki** with **Freja** as the mum. **Magni** is the name Joe chose for his pup. **Joseph Hutchins** was the son who died at 19 in World War I.

Airfields in Hampshire

Captain Michaels is at Andover. **Hurstbourne Tarrant** is a decoy. **Flight Lieutenant Cobb** and **Sergeant Packham** are at the same airfield as **Corporal Teddy Wickham**, who is Archie's best friend, and whom the Coombes family has known forever.

Dr Andrew Dene (*Pardonable Lies* , 3) is now a renowned orthopedic surgeon at the hospital in Hastings and a professor of orthopedic medicine in London. Maisie once dated him, and now they're friends. He's married with children. **Walter Miles** is a new tenant at Maisie's office building. And he has the most marvelous green thumb. Well, he is a botanist and lectures over at Bedford College.

Jack Barker is still selling papers outside Maisie's office. His grandson, **Peter**, is now in the army. **Jim Turner** owns Turner's Farm and has his evacuees slaving away on his farm. **Peter Sands** is Billy's painting and decorating friend who keeps Maisie and company supplied with wallpaper ends. **Mr Roache** runs the special ambulance driver practice that Maisie and Priscilla are supposed to be attending. **Bernard Klein** is Maisie's lawyer; **Anthony** is his clerk. **Dr Elsbeth Masters** is the psychiatrist Doreen has seen in the past.

The Cover and Title

The cover is the expected woodcut style (I do love it) with Maisie standing in the shadow of a plane's wing in a silhouetted profile, her back to us, and wearing a trim and neatly fitted suit and a cloche. She's holding some papers to her chest tightly as she watches a pilot clamber into his military plane on a grassy lawn. The background is a beautiful late spring sky with big billowing clouds rising up from the ground and another plane high in the sky. Text begins with an info blurb in yellow at the very top with the author's name below that in a deep orange and a much smaller title in yellow below that. The series information (thank you!) is black and centered in a cloud.

I'm wondering if the title is about everyone, for war causes those involved, with family and friends endangered, to die in their hearts for every loss. What wouldn't they give *To Die But Once*.

Beth says

This series is one of my top 5 favorites. This one didn't disappoint. It was an especially edgy read this time because both Billy's and Priscilla's sons are in jeopardy against the background of the battle of Dunkirk. And especially edgy because, as we know to our sorrow, Winspear does not hesitate to kill off anyone, even beloved characters if it furthers her story. But, boy, this one was terrific and the historic detail is fascinating. I'm starting to think, sadly, that people of this era were a lot tougher—and considerably more honorable—than they are now. Sorry, it's the age of Trump, I guess, and my faith in people isn't what it used to be.

Ann says

I love this series, the growth of Maisie's character is a draw and the variety of her cases. Set against the backdrop of war, WWI in the early books and now WWII, wartime in Great Britain, shadowed in the minds of the characters, adds to the depth.

Maisie's character has faced much opposition throughout the series. As a child, facing economic and class challenges; in business as a female, and as a woman in a male dominated profession. Her intelligence and drive, support from friends and mentors, and the opportunities opened to women in wartime have contributed and shaped her character.

We've seen Maisie worn down by grief, doors slammed in her face, and rising above it all for a majority of the time. There are more challenges ahead. It feels like Maisie represents all of us.

The Library Lady says

I like Maisie immensely more in this period of her life than I did in the earliest books, but there is a bit too much going on in the plot here. The central mystery gets buried in other plot lines and there is a final twist (not related to the central mystery) that brings in another plot line that doesn't really relate to the rest of the book. But it's a fascinating period in British history, and Winspear bases a lot of the plot on her own family's experiences, so the details ring true. This needed a better editor, but her fans won't care.

Carol Douglas says

Jacqueline Winspear's books about England facing and recovering from its 20th century wars are always good, but this is one of the best.

To Die but Once takes us to the early years after England's entry into World War II. British soldiers are fighting on the Continent. Hitler's forces are pinning them down.

At home, a boy from Maisie Dobbs' neighborhood has gone to work for a defense contractor, painting military buildings with fire retardant. The boy is murdered.

Maisie's investigation looks at the seamy side of defense contracting. It's based on things that actually happened in England in that period.

Then comes the evacuation of Dunkirk. A boy who is like a nephew to Maisie runs off to participate.

The book is full of action and compassion. Winspear's books educate us about England's suffering in war.

Kathryn says

Well, she did it again. The book is so well done; full of lots of history, new and old characters and of course Maisie. I'm trying to figure out how old she is now. In her 40s I think. It's just a great story and I shall miss her until the next book.

Holly says

After I started this, I realized that I skipped the 13th book! How I missed that one last year is beyond me! I still love this series and I'm liking the way WWII is being introduced. Looking forward to more from Maisie Dobbs.

Claudia Silk says

These books are my guilty pleasure! Found this very interesting because it included a Dunkirk story.

Phrynne says

Book 14 in the series and set right in the middle of World War 2. The author writes very movingly about events surrounding Dunkirk and the threat of an invasion of Britain from the point of view of the people left behind who knew only what the censor allowed them to know.

In the course of the book Maisie searches for the truth about a missing fifteen year old boy, helps put a major criminal behind bars and discovers a spy. In her personal life she tries to adopt an orphaned girl and helps her

friends cope with having their sons involved in the fighting and the war effort. There are some very interesting descriptions of how it was to travel at that time. Petrol was rationed and rapidly becoming unavailable to ordinary people and trains were overloaded with troop movements.

All the characters in these books have really grown on me as the series has progressed. There are still some loose ends though so I am hoping for another book - or several even!

Jean says

I have thoroughly enjoyed this series. This is book fourteen in the Maisie Dobbs series. Maisie was a nurse in World War One; then trained to be a psychologist/investigator after the war. The story opens in May 1940. Great Britain is again at war with Germany. Maisie has been hired to investigate the disappearance of a fifteen-year-old boy, Joseph Combes. He is an apprentice painter working for a company that has a government contract to go about the countryside to paint a special fire-retardant chemical on strategic government and military buildings.

The book is well written and researched. The author has the story set with a background of Dunkirk and the battle of Britain. This is a great historical novel. The plot twist and turns around family drama. I have read that Winspear bases a lot of the plot on her own family's experiences. If you enjoy historical novels this book would provide you great enjoyment.

I read this as an audiobook downloaded from Audible. The book is ten and a half hours. Orlagh Cassidy does a superb job narrating the book. Cassidy is one of my favorite narrators. Cassidy is an actress, voice over artist and award-winning audiobook narrator.

Peggy says

Happily, I received an uncorrected proof of To Die but Once as a Goodreads Giveaway. Even better, I found it be an excellent entry in one of my very favorite series. Set in the spring of 1940, while the public slowly learns the news about British troops trapped in France, less noble acts than sailing to Dunkirk are taking place. War is full of tragedy, including on the home front, where greed and callousness have tragic consequences. There is a heartbreaking thread throughout the book - the children of those who survived the Great War are going off to fight the next one. And while Maisie sorts out her case, she needs to sort out the next chapter in her own life. I wish her all the best!

Charlene says

One of the best in the series and I've read them all, so far. It's spring, 1940. There's several stories running here; the mystery concerns the disappearance of Joe, the young painting apprentice? He's been working on a crew painting RAF buildings with a fire retardant that gives him headaches and seems to be causing a personality change. Then there's the WWII story . . . Maisie and friend Priscilla are training as rescue ambulance workers, there's rumors that the British Expeditionary Force is in trouble in France and then there's Dunkirk. Maisie has her young ward, Anna, safe in the country but we see the worries of those still in London and those who have left.

I enjoyed the author's acknowledgments, too, where she gives credit to her dad for inspiring the story; he was a fourteen year apprentice doing his part as a government painter also, and to her extended family who were in all theaters of the war & shared stories. And her own WWI family story is always the background, too . . . of how the horror of war damages lives for decades after treaties are signed.

Lynn says

This series is a comfort to read. Even major drama and disaster are calmly presented. The Dunkirk evacuation is one of the main story lines in this book, but I did feel this book is just a prep for the real shit to hit the fan in the Battle of Britain.

Stephanie says

Another excellent entry in the MAISIE DOBBS series. I have been wondering how Winspear would handle the introduction of the second World War, and how it would impact our main characters, all of whom were touched by the First in significant ways. In TO DIE BUT ONCE, we have this introduction, and it's both quite personal and part of the larger history, with a plot point hinging on Dunkirk.

It is essential to have read prior books in the series before this one, as many characters from throughout the series make appearances. The mystery Maisie is looking to solve is not the prominent story, and I wonder if we might be coming to the end of the series, as things feel as though they are being tied up slowly and in a satisfying way. After all, it's not likely we readers will stand for the second generation of characters -- Priscilla and Billy's boys among them -- to die in battle.

Erikka says

I just love this series. These mysteries are so well crafted, the historical aspects are so authentic, and Maisie is such a beautifully developed character that I feel like you live in the book more than read it. Every Maisie Dobbs book is an experience, not just a book. The exploration of war profiteering, the challenges of adoption for single women in the 1940s, and the evacuation of Dunkirk were all particular high points of this adventure. I also found myself worrying about the fictional children of fictional Maisie's fictional supporting character friends. You know a book is well written when you actually tell your husband "Boy, I hope young Billy comes home...the Beales don't need another loss after Lizzie." Lol
