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As Husbands Go

by Susan Isaacs



About the Book

Call her superficial, but Susie B Anthony Rabinowitz Gersten assumed her marriage was great --- and why not? Jonah Gersten, MD, a Park Avenue plastic surgeon, clearly adored her. He was handsome, successful, and a doting dad to their 4-year-old triplets. But when Jonah is found dead in the Upper East Side apartment of second-rate "escort" Dorinda Dillon, Susie is overwhelmed with questions left unanswered. It's bad enough to know your husband's been murdered, but even worse when you're universally pitied (and quietly mocked) because of the sleaze factor. None of it makes sense to Susie --- not a sexual liaison with someone like Dorinda, not the "better not to discuss it" response from Jonah's partners. With help from her tough-talking, high-style grandma Ethel, who flies in from Miami, she takes on her snooty in-laws, her husband's partners, the NYPD, and the DA as she tries to prove that her wonderful life with Jonah was no lie.

Discussion Guide

1. Early in the book, Susie reflects on her personal growth, or lack thereof, since the death of her husband: "Maybe I'm still shallow, just deluding myself that after all that's occurred, I've become a better person" (p. 2). How does Susie's character progress through the novel? Do you think that everything she has endured has made her a better person?

2. Jonah's friends, family, and colleagues all seem surprised that he might be cheating on his wife, and they repeatedly describe him as decent, honorable, and kind. What was your gut feeling about Jonah's murder from the very beginning? Did you believe that he had been buying the services of this prostitute, and did your impressions change at all as you were reading? Why or why not?

3. Susie seems to have always taken unabashed pleasure in her happy marriage, while her friend and business partner Andrea views her own marriage it as a vehicle to the lifestyle that she wants. Compare and contrast Susie and Andrea's views on their husbands and marriage in general. Do you think Susie married for money, and simply chanced upon happiness with Jonah?

4. Throughout the book, Susie lovingly reflects on the household items that she and Jonah collected, from the ornate bergÈre chair to the antique settee from Vermont. In the midst of mourning her husband's death, she maintains, "I knew if I were sitting in a repro Regency covered in polyester damask, I would feel worse" (p. 25). What is her relationship with these objects of luxury? Do you think she is truly fulfilled by her life of material wealth? And do you think Isaacs is being ironic when she says that sitting on polyester damask would make things worse?

5. As much as Susie clashes with her in-laws, Babs and Clive Gerston, she seems to revile her own parents even more. Discuss the depiction of the Rabinowitzs. How do you feel about Susie's attitude toward them? Do you believe they are truly as selfish and miserable as she makes them out to be, or is she resentful of her humble upbringing?

6. Susie struggles to reconcile her mother's perception of Ethel as a selfish absentee parent with the alluring, open-hearted woman she knows today. What is your opinion of Ethel? Do you see her attempt to establish a relationship with Susie as penance for her past actions, or do you believe she has simply chosen a glamorous granddaughter over a misfit daughter?

7. On page 139, Isaacs writes, "[Babs] and Grandma Ethel shared two dualities: an ability to manipulate other people and a powerful ambition to be a somebody. Most likely, they also shared a common ruthlessness." Discuss the strengths and shortcomings of these two characters. Why do you think Susie seems so repelled by Babs and so enamored with Ethel, despite their apparent similarities?

8. Susie relentlessly investigates Jonah's murder even as her friends, family, and the police encourage her to move on. On p.149 she states, "What I'm after is the truth, even if it's an ugly truth" and at the end of the book she explains, "It wasn't so much truth-seeking as I couldn't stand the thought of that repulsive, stupid, useless, innocent hooker rotting in jail" (p.339). Do you think that she is driven by the desire to clear Dorinda's name, her husband's, or both? Does her motivation evolve at all as the novel progresses?

9. Were you surprised to discover who the murderer was? Did you have any other suspects in mind?

10. Susie relies on an eclectic support group of friends and family, from Andrea and her husband Hugh "Fat Boy" Morrison to tough talking Ethel and her lover, Sparky. Which of the novel's characters is your favorite?

11. What do you think lies ahead for Susie and the triplets? Will Ethel remain in their lives now that the mystery has been solved?

12. Reread the novel's epigraph from Walt Whitman's **Leaves of Grass**. How do you think this quote applies to the novel?

Author Bio

Susan Isaacs is the author of 15 novels, including BAD, BAD SEYMOUR BROWN; TAKES ONE TO KNOW ONE; AS HUSBANDS GO; LONG TIME NO SEE; ANY PLACE I HANG MY HAT; and COMPROMISING POSITIONS. A recipient of the Writers for Writers Award and the John Steinbeck Award, Isaacs serves as chairman of the board of Poets & Writers, and is a past president of Mystery Writers of America. Her fiction has been translated into 30 languages. She lives on Long Island with her husband.

Critical Praise

"Wildly sassy?Susie is an irresistible character."

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Publication Date: April 5, 2011
Paperback: 368 pages
Publisher: Scribner
ISBN-10: 1416573089
ISBN-13: 9781416573081