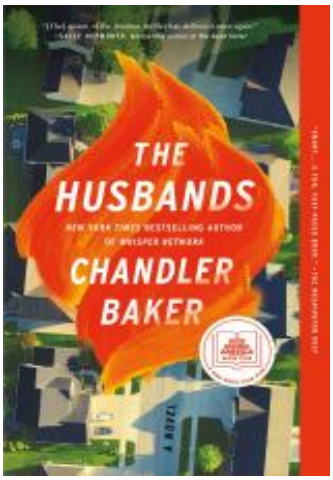
ReadingGroupGuides
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The Husbands

by Chandler Baker



About the Book

The *New York Times* and Reese Witherspoon Book Club bestselling author of WHISPER NETWORK returns in a novel that asks: To what lengths will a woman go for a little more help from her husband?

Nora Spangler is a successful attorney but when it comes to domestic life, she finds she?s always the one doing more. She packs the lunches, schedules the doctor appointments, knows where the extra paper towel rolls are, and designs and orders the holiday cards. Her husband works hard, too?but why does it seem like she is always working so much *harder*?

The Spanglers go house hunting in Dynasty Ranch, a nice suburban neighborhood where Nora meets a group of high-powered women --- a tech CEO, a neurosurgeon, an award-winning therapist, a bestselling author --- with enviably supportive husbands. When she agrees to help with a resident?s gruesome wrongful death case, she delves into the lives of the women there. She finds the air is different in Dynasty Ranch. The women aren?t hanging on by a thread.

They swear by an unorthodox method of couples? therapy that has transformed their relationships. Even as she fears digging up the secrets at the heart of her own marriage, Nora is tantalized by the possibility of a life that?s under control. The men seem strange. But maybe they?re just evolved. Soon Nora is relishing that her husband now shoulders half the load at home. But something is deeply wrong in Dynasty Ranch. As the case unravels, Nora uncovers a plot that may explain the secret to having it all. One that?s worth killing for.

Smart, sharp and timely, this novel imagines a world where the burden of the ?second shift? is equally shared --- and what it might take to get there.

Discussion Guide

1. In your ideal world, what is one thing you wish a partner would do to help without being asked?

2. At what point in the story did you start to believe something was off about the residents of Dynasty Ranch, and what does that reveal to you about your own sense of social norms?

3. In Chapter 21, Nora surmises that her boss and mentor Gary ?thinks the two of them have the same job and that he?s just better at it.? Similarly, throughout the novel?s first half, Hayden believes he?s doing his part, trying his best. Do you believe the men in the novel are truly oblivious to the disparities in the burdens of domestic labor or only willfully so? If the current social system defaults to women as both the managers and the primary performers of domestic tasks, what incentive do men have to change a status quo that directly benefits them?

4. The book spends a significant amount of time exploring the plight of the working mother through the eyes of Nora, but how does the undue burden of domestic and emotional labor negatively impact not just mothers but all women?

5. In Chapter 13, Nora?s work friend, Cameron Drummer, explains the theory of the lazy traveler: ?Two people are traveling together, and no matter what their two individual personality types might be, one person will start *doing*?. That person starts figuring out which way to the metro, what the day?s itinerary is, how to exchange currency, all that stuff, and the other one, they sit back?. Because it?s being done for them. They don?t pay attention to which way they?re going?. They?re along for the ride. Because they can be. They become the lazy traveler.? Is Cameron?s theory correct when it comes to partners sharing the responsibilities of a household? To what extent, if any, are women complicit in perpetuating the imbalance in domestic and other ?invisible? labor?

6. Cornelia seems to live by a code of teleological ethics, believing that if the goal is morally important enough, any method of achieving it is acceptable. Up to what point were you willing to buy into Cornelia?s logic? Is there a moment when you think Cornelia broke with her own moral code?

7. In what ways does THE HUSBANDS conform to the original conceit of THE STEPFORD WIVES, and in what ways does it depart from that?

8. In Chapter 5, Nora has a late-night discussion with her best friend, Andi Ogsby, about the relationship dynamics between Andi and her ex-girlfriend, Martha. Are shared household responsibilities an inevitable battlefield in any domestic partnership? What is the role of gender, specifically, in these conversations?

9. Penny specializes in giving warm, thoughtful advice. What is the kindest piece of advice you could offer to yourself during this period of your life?

10. Do you feel sorry for the men of Dynasty Ranch? Why or why not?

11. Assuming one does not believe that brainwashing men through the Trojan horse of couples therapy is a viable solution to the disproportionate strain of the ?second shift? on women, what is?

12. Cornelia?s daughter, Francine, seems to have mixed feelings about her mother?s couples? therapy scheme. What effect might growing up in a place like Dynasty Ranch have on a child?

13. What do you make of Nora?s decision in the last line of the book? Were you surprised? Did you find this final choice in or out of character for her? How so? Is she justified?

14. Let?s say tomorrow you are given the keys to a new house in Dynasty Ranch complete with all the amenities. How does your life change?

Author Bio

Chandler Baker is the *New York Times* bestselling author of WHISPER NETWORK, a Reese?s Book Club pick, as well as the "Good Morning America" Book Club selection THE HUSBANDS. A former corporate lawyer, she lives in Austin, Texas, with her husband, two small children and even smaller dog. CUTTING TEETH is her third novel for adults.

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