

Girl in Disguise

by Greer Macallister

Please be aware that this discussion guide may contain spoilers!

1. Widowed and without job prospects, Kate answers a newspaper advertisement for a job as a Pinkerton operative. What do you think she would have done if Pinkerton hadn't agreed to hire her?
2. Kate is unsentimental about the death of her husband, Charlie. Did you find this surprising? What did you suspect was the reason for her unusual detachment?
3. When Graham DeForest meets Kate, he is flirtatious and solicitous, and Kate believes he is a ladies' man. When she follows him to practice her surveillance skills, she finds this is definitely not the case. Did you suspect his secret?
4. Kate has many good qualities that make her an excellent operative, but she is also impulsive and judgmental. What do you think her strengths and weaknesses are? Is there some overlap between the two?
5. Although the accountant, Vincent, is the one who has been embezzling money from the railroad, Kate considers his mistress "more guilty" because she initially suggested the idea and also threatened to blackmail Vincent when he wanted to stop. Do you agree?
6. Kate draws a parallel between the roles she saw her father and other actors play when she was a child and the roles she's asked to play as a Union spy. What are the similarities between the two? The differences?
7. Allan Pinkerton's wife, Joan, is highly suspicious of Kate, warning her, "You keep your grubby mitts off my husband. Don't think I don't know what you're up to with your late nights and your cases and your work." In truth, there was a widespread assumption that the two were having an affair. Do you think this was influenced by the fact that Kate was the only woman working among so many men? Would a woman in the same position today still be suspected?
8. When her friend and fellow Pinkerton agent Graham DeForest proposes marriage, Kate is seriously tempted to accept. She thinks, "We could protect each other. Keep each other safe from what we both feared." Do you think this is true? As a gay man who had to keep his orientation secret, would Graham had been better off if she had married him? Would Kate?
9. At Lincoln's inauguration, Kate reflects on what she and her colleagues have done to fight crime. "Deceived, lied, disguised, misled, threatened, entrapped, captured, hurt... Were we devils, even on the angels' side?" Do you believe it's okay to do bad things for good reasons? Did you feel Kate's actions ever went too far?
10. Kate's relationship with Tim Bellamy evolves from mutual dislike to grudging respect and eventually into love, which is revealed when the two assume the identities of husband and wife as part of an undercover operation. Do you think they would have discovered and admitted their feelings without this forced proximity? In some cases, can pretending something help make it true?
11. Two of the women Kate is asked to befriend under false pretenses, Catherine Maroney and Rose Greenhow, have young daughters. In both cases, Kate questions the actions she is taking to punish the women for their criminal behavior. Did you feel this was appropriate? Should their status as mothers have figured into their pursuit and punishment?
12. The real-life Kate Warne was among those who foiled the 1861 assassination attempt on Abraham Lincoln in Baltimore. How do you think things would have been different had the assassination succeeded? Did knowing this assassination was not successful affect how you felt while reading the scene?
13. Kate's parents threaten her with exposure and demand money to keep silent. Did you feel one was more dangerous than the other? Did Kate deal with them fairly? How did you feel when their fates were revealed?

14. In her final showdown with Mortenson, rather than let him escape, Kate rolls them both into the path of an oncoming carriage out of desperation. Do you think she expected to die? Was her revenge that important to her?

15. Kate's mother tells her "a woman's family is her legacy," and Kate thinks of this often as she considers what her own legacy will be. What legacies do you think are left by other women in the story, such as Mrs. Borowski, Hattie, Kate's mother, and Rose Greenhow?

16. In the author's note, Macallister calls this novel "a love story between a woman and her work." Did you find Kate's excitement about the end of the war and resuming her life as a Pinkerton a satisfying conclusion to the book? Did it feel like a "happy ending"?

Unless otherwise stated, this discussion guide is reprinted with the permission of Sourcebooks. Any page references refer to a USA edition of the book, usually the trade paperback version, and may vary in other editions.