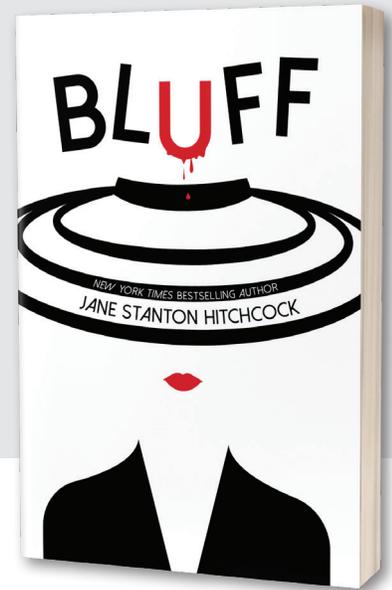


BLUFF

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JANE STANTON HITCHCOCK

DISCUSSION GUIDE



1. Maud Warner states early on that she is able to commit murder in broad daylight and leave the crime scene because “Older women are invisible and we don’t even have to disappear.” While she uses this to her advantage, both at the poker table and in life, do you feel that society ignores older women “at their own peril”? Why or why not? Have you or anyone you know experienced this personally?
2. When Maud’s poker friend Billy tells her that Sun Sunderland has died from the gunshot wound she inflicted, she explains her “next hand” philosophy in poker and how it translates to the rest of her life. Do you think her attitude is callous, considering she has caused a man’s death? Why or why not?
3. Magma “the magpie” is the gossip of the group, yet her friends (and the author) paint her as a sympathetic character—an almost vital cog in the social machine. Do you enjoy gossip? Do you think it’s unavoidable? Harmless? Intolerable? Have you ever known it to have a good result?
4. Greta the hostess is another archetype that the author presents as an integral part of high society circles. Do you feel her role is significant in this story? In general?
5. Jean Sunderland maintains that she had no idea her late husband was a bigamist, and her shock is as real as her heartbreak and subsequent anger. Do you think the fact that she truly loved her husband made her “blind” to his double life? Would she have been as easy to fool if her marriage was the business arrangement all of her friends believed it to be? Why or why not?
6. Burt Sklar is portrayed as someone with the power to completely win people over. His father, a car salesman, gave him two pieces of advice—to always make people feel important and to tell them what they want to hear. Do you feel that this strategy can ever be employed ethically, or is it strictly for con artists?
7. Burt believes himself to be in love with Danya, but many of his actions suggest otherwise—the killing of her beloved cat, for example. Sun Sunderland also demonstrates his love for Danya by marrying her and wanting to take care of her financially—and yet he physically abused her on more than one occasion. Do you think either of these men truly loved Danya? If so, how do we explain their abusive, controlling behavior?
8. Aside from Maud’s defense attorney, Linda Fairley, the lawyers in this story are not portrayed in the most flattering light. Do you feel their characterization is stereotypical or two-dimensional? If so, do you think this was the author’s intention?
9. The author has taken great care to construct this novel as a long hand of poker, even dividing it into sections called “The Flop,” “The Turn,” and “The River.” Do you feel the poker analogy adds to the drama of the book? Would the story be as effective or appealing if it were simply in the third person perspective without Maude’s point of view in alternate chapters?
10. Did you want “Mad” Maud Warner to get away with murder? Why or why not?