

COMPARISONS

You can have interesting discussions comparing the themes in *Strings Attached* to those in the following books.

Rona Jaffe. *The Best of Everything*. Simon & Schuster, 1958.

A group of young women from different backgrounds try to make their way in New York in the 1950s.

Mario Puzo. *The Godfather*. NAL Trade, 2002.

First published in 1969, this book is considered the definitive crime family novel and inspired several blockbuster movies.

James Cross Giblin. *The Rise and Fall of Senator Joe McCarthy*. Clarion, 2009.

Provides background information on the problems facing Kit's New York neighbors, the Greeleys and their son Hank.

Betty Smith. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. With an Introduction by Anna Quindlen. HarperCollins, 2001.

This coming-of-age story about an Irish-American girl growing up in an early 20th century New York tenement has been a bestseller since its publication in 1943.

Susan Waggoner. *Nightclub Nights: Art, Legend, and Style 1920-1960*. Rizzoli, 2001.

A richly illustrated account of the glamorous world of the New York nightclub scene in the mid-20th century.

E. B. White. *Here Is New York*. Little Bookroom, 2000.

The well-known writer composed this essay in 1948 to honor the metropolis he had once lived and worked in. His description gives a taste of the vitality of the city at mid-century.

WEBSITES

Organized crime and how it works:

<http://people.howstuffworks.com/mafia.htm>

The Kefauver Hearings:

<http://www.pophistorydig.com/?p=320>

The 1950 Long Island Railroad Thanksgiving disaster:

<http://www.richmondhillhistory.org/LIRRcrash.html>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo © 2011 by Michael Frost.

Judy Blundell is the author of the National Book Award winner *What I Saw and How I Lied*, a novel set in the late 1940s which was hailed as “a stylish, addictive brew” by *Publishers Weekly* in a starred review, and was called “an extraordinary, gripping story” by *The Wall Street Journal*. Judy Blundell lives in Katonah, New York, with her husband and daughter.

Strings Attached by Judy Blundell

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READING GROUP GUIDE

Strings Attached
By
JUDY BLUNDELL



ABOUT THE BOOK

The year is 1950, and seventeen-year-old Kit Corrigan has left her working-class Irish family in Providence, Rhode Island, hoping to make it as a dancer in New York City. Billy, the boy she once loved, is about to be shipped out to Korea. Then, Billy's father, Nate Benedict, a hotshot lawyer who defends mobsters, offers her a free apartment in the city. He says there are no strings attached, but gradually we find out there are certain...expectations.

This riveting book puts readers right into Kit's life as she navigates her way through love, treachery, dazzling theater lights, and dark back-stage doors, in an era of swells and dolls, stand-up guys and hit-men. Steeped in the atmosphere of mid-20th century America, the story takes place against a backdrop of anti-communist hysteria, gangland slayings, and the Korean War. Family feuds, secrets, and lies come to the surface as Kit tries to make sense of her past and build hope for her future.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Why does Kit take the apartment that Nate offers her? Is Nate straightforward about why he wants her to move into the apartment? When she gets the job at the Lido, why does the fact that Nate "paved the way" take some of the pleasure out of her new position?
2. Compare Kit and Billy's story to the theatrical story in the musical "Carousel." Kit says the show was about "love and lies and cruelty and beauty, and the music that could be like a bruise way deep inside." Why does Nate tell twelve-year-old Kit that he thinks the lesson of the play is that "we can't have what we want" and "maybe it's good that you learned that now"? What did the show mean to Delia?
3. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story in a series of flashbacks? How does the way the action unfolds affect your perception of the characters and their interactions?
4. Compare Kit's situation in New York to her neighbors, the Greeleys. Why do they say to her, "We're making honest money"? What does Nate want from Hank on the day after the murder? What makes Nate think he can "fix" every situation?
5. Discuss how Billy's relationship with his father is different from Kit's and her siblings' relationship with their Da. How would their lives have been different if Maggie Corrigan had not died in childbirth? Why is Da so set against Kit and Jamie hanging out with Billy, so much that he says, "...it will break my heart to see it."
6. Billy and Kit both have a passion for something – Kit for the theater and Billy for photography. How and why do their passions develop and how do they affect their lives? Why does 12-year-old Billy share his photographs with Kit when the Corrigans visit his father's office?
7. Does the experience of joining the Army change Billy, as he says it does? Would he and Kit have been able to find happiness together if she hadn't allowed Nate to manipulate her? Would it have made a difference if she had told Billy the truth as soon as he arrived in New York?
8. What role does Jamie play in the story? Why can he and Kit not comfort each other when he comes to tell her of Billy's death? Why does he leave without her?
9. What does Kit hope to accomplish by going to find Delia? What makes her so angry about the story Delia tells her? Would she have reacted so strongly if she wasn't grieving for Billy? What is the most tragic aspect of Delia's life?
10. Why does Delia return to Providence after Billy's death? Does she believe Kit is in danger? Does she want revenge on Nate, or does she believe she can keep the family safe by talking to him?
11. Why does Kit return to New York? What does she mean when she says, "There were accidents in life, collisions, damage, and some happened through no fault of your own and some happened because you invited them... I'd been thrown clear of the wreck. I was alive."
12. Aristotle said that the tragic hero's "disastrous end results from a mistaken action, which in turn arises from a tragic flaw or from a tragic error in judgment." By this definition, which character(s) in this story might be considered a 'tragic' hero?