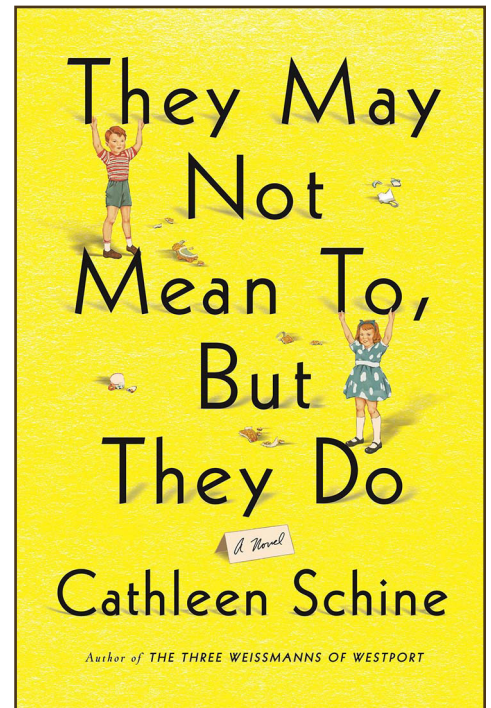


Reading Group Gold

They May Not Mean To, But They Do by Cathleen Schine



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Acclaimed for blending wry humor and crystal-clear truth, Cathleen Schine now explores the quandaries of eldercare through the eyes of a vibrant matriarch who has no interest in aging gracefully. Joy Bergman has stood by her husband for nearly a lifetime, but as he slips further into dementia and their finances dwindle, she faces exasperating choices. When their well-intentioned children try to intervene, they aren't prepared for their mother's rebellious streak, especially when an old flame enters her life. A radiant, compassionate look at three generations—including in-laws, ex-in-laws, and same-sex spouses—*They May Not Mean To, But They Do* is a modern take on timeless questions of love and loyalty.

We hope that the following guide will enhance your experience of this exuberant, heartwarming novel.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do the aging parents described in the novel compare to your relatives? Who will your long-term caregivers be when you're not able to care for yourself?
2. Aaron is "sentimental and unreliable and brimming with love and obvious charm," while Joy is "distracted, forgetful, thoughtful, brimming with love, too." How were Molly and Daniel affected

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by having lovebirds for parents? In their own marriages, and as parents themselves, are Molly and Daniel very different from their parents?

3. As Aaron and Duncan lose their grip on reality, which one fares better?
4. What is the ultimate role of Walter, Wanda, and Elvira? How does Joy navigate the fact that they are paid workers, yet they are performing deeply personal work for a family that has become attached to them?
5. Cathleen Schine is a master of tragicomedy. Which scenes made you laugh out loud, inappropriately?
6. Where should Freddie and Coco fit into the decision-making for their in-laws? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being on the fringes of a family in crisis?
7. Is “selling Upstate” the best solution to Joy’s financial conundrum? Should children help pay for their parents’ retirement?
8. How does Joy’s life as a museum conservator reflect her perception of the past?
9. Chapter 41 is just two sentences long: “Daniel asked his mother if she was depressed. She said, ‘Naturally.’” What do these seemingly simple sentences say about the nature of grief?
10. How do you predict Ben, Cora, and Ruby will treat their aging parents?
11. Would you have said yes to Karl’s proposition, even if it meant giving up a rent-controlled apartment?
12. In the closing scene, as Joy helps Ben with a legal situation, why does she finally feel at home? What does she want her purpose in life to be?
13. In the last paragraph of chapter 20, Joy turns the Philip Larkin lines cited in the epigraph on their head; in her version, “they” refers to the children, not the parents. What do her children mean to do, and why do they create such havoc for her?
14. In each of her novels, which portraits of companionship and solitude does Cathleen Schine create? How do her characters tolerate loneliness, and each other?

PRAISE FOR *THEY MAY NOT MEAN TO, BUT THEY DO*

“This marvelous novel is emotionally stirring and hilarious on virtually every page. How does Cathleen Schine know everything about everything? Her observations about family life, friendship,

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loss, aging, dignity, indignity, and the attachments we miraculously make that never seem to un-attach are profound and rewarding. I already miss living in the world of this special and winning book.” —Meg Wolitzer, author of *The Interestings*

“Cathleen Schine has written an entirely different kind of coming-of-age novel. This is not about how a twentysomething becomes a thirtysomething. It’s about how people making the difficult and at times scary journey into old old age figure out how to live. And it’s about the people who surround them—with love, anxiety, resentment, and sometimes complete misunderstanding. *They May Not Mean To, But They Do* is a great read: empathetic, and also very, very funny.” —Roz Chast, author of *Can’t We Talk About Something More Pleasant?*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cathleen Schine is the author of *Fin & Lady*, *The Three Weissmanns of Westport*, *The New Yorkers*, and *The Love Letter*, among other novels. She has contributed to *The New Yorker*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *The New York Times Book Review*. She lives in Los Angeles. For more information, visit www.cathleenschine.com.

Guide written by Amy Clements