

Blood Orange Discussion Questions

1. Do you like Alison? Do you find yourself sympathizing with her? Why or why not? Did your feelings toward Alison change through the course of the novel?
2. Several of the book's pivotal moments center around alcohol—from Alison's Friday night drinks with colleagues in the opening scenes, to Carl and Alison's ill-fated trip to Brighton, to the lunch where Madeline opens up to Alison about the true nature of her relationship with Edwin. What role do you think alcohol plays in the book, and in the characters' emotional arcs?
3. In the early chapters, we see Alison try—and fail—to stop binge drinking, and to stop seeing Patrick. Do you think her inability to do so is squarely her fault? Or does the revelation of Carl's abuse—which she isn't even fully aware of in these early moments—change your opinion of her in these scenes?
4. Do you agree with Carl's assessment that Alison is a terrible mother? Why or why not? Do you think he's justified in trying to prevent her from spending time with Matilda? What do you think about the scene in chapter 18 where Matilda gets lost in the park—was that Alison's fault? Or is it the sort of thing that could happen to any parent?
5. What do you think Matilda's feelings are toward her parents? Does she like being left alone with Carl? With Alison?
6. In chapter 15, Alison makes an impassioned plea to Carl to try to get their marriage back on track, for Matilda's sake. In general, do you think it's a good idea for struggling couples to try to patch things up for the sake of their children? Or is it better for children to have divorced parents rather than unhappily married parents?
7. *Blood Orange* depicts numerous toxic relationships: Alison and Carl, Alison and Patrick, Madeleine and Edwin, to name a few. Do you know anyone who has struggled with an abusive relationship? What advice would you give them (or Alison, or Madeleine), if you could?
8. In a novel full of complicated characters, Patrick may be one of the most complex. What do you think about his relationship with Alison? Is he abusing her? Is she a victim, or a fully willing partner? In Chapter 15, when he tells Alison he cares about her and would like their relationship to be more serious, do you believe he truly has deep feelings for her? How did your opinion of Patrick evolve throughout the book?
9. Aside from his relationship with Alison, we learn that Patrick was prepared to break the law by lying in court to help Madeleine. Do you think this was the right thing for him to do?

10. During Alison's conversations with Caroline, it's clear from Caroline's attempts to justify Edwin's actions that she never truly saw him as abusive. What makes her blind to the realities of their relationship? Do you think the murder changed her view of Edwin?
11. In Chapter 22, a despairing Madeline asks Alison, "And as a mother, what do you suggest I do now?" Do you think Madeleine did the right thing in trying to protect James? Or should she have left him to face the consequences of his own actions? What role does "justice" play here?
12. Do you see any parallels between Alison's life, and Madeline's? If yes, at what point did you begin to notice similarities? How does the author manipulate the interplay between these two story threads, throughout?
13. The book contains many examples of strong—if flawed—women, from Alison to Madeleine, to Caroline and Chloe. Do you agree? What does being a strong person mean to you?
14. Beneath all the darker themes is a simpler story of a working mother struggling to balance the various spheres of her life: her career, her home, and her social life, all while trying to maintain her sense of self. Did you find yourself relating to this struggle? Or do you know someone who does? How are you, or they, managing?
15. How do you think Carl's unemployment affects his psyche? Do you think modern society has evolved to a point where we're unequivocally accepting of men who are financially supported by their wives? Or is there still a stigma?
16. Are there situations where it's acceptable to videotape a person without their consent? Is there any justification for what Carl did?
17. Were you satisfied with the book's ending? As Carl is fond of reminding us, "actions have consequences." Do you think Alison got what she deserved at the end? Should she have been punished for what she did to Carl? Conversely, do you think Carl got what he deserved?
18. Harriet opens *Blood Orange* with a beautiful prologue, one whose importance is revealed to us in the final haunting pages of the book. What meaning did you take from the title? What do you think the blood orange symbolizes?
19. If *Blood Orange* were to be adapted into a movie, who would you cast in the lead roles?