

CLEAN BREAK

Reading Group Guide

Warning: Some plot points are revealed in the questions below.

1. Celeste believes with her marriage ending that “she was a different person now, with a new life ahead of her, a prospect that was both exhilarating and terrifying (99). In what ways does she experience both of these emotions throughout the novel?
2. Celeste admits that she may have turned a blind eye to her husband’s addiction, to “avoiding stepping into the cracks in their life” (21). How does her denial mirror that of an addict?
3. Professionally, both Sara and Jake behave unethically. Jake begins a relationship with a potential client and Sara gives Jake confidential business information. Why do they act this way? Is one of them more at fault than the other? Is their relationship mutually beneficial?
4. Throughout the novel, Celeste tries to make decisions that are in the best interest of her son, Spencer. How successful is she in doing this? What kind of mother is she? Is she justified in her decision to prevent Adam from seeing Spencer after he attacks her?
5. After Jake witnesses the altercation between Celeste and Adam in the GeoPol parking lot, Sara criticizes him for not contacting the police: “Keep your distance. Show you care, but not too much. That’s you, Jake” (66). Is this a fair characterization of Jake? How does Jake open himself to intimacy and vulnerability later in the novel? Why does he choose to change his pattern of behavior for Celeste?
6. What is the basis for the attraction between Celeste and Jake? Why do they become close? What do they see in each other? How do their feelings evolve over time?
7. Adam is a compulsive gambler, has acted violently toward his family, and threatens Jake when Jake befriends Celeste. Is there any way to consider him as a sympathetic character? How so?
8. Adam tells his son that his gambling problem is like a disease, comparing it to his own mother’s cancer. Celeste tells Spencer exactly the opposite: “Your father doesn’t have a disease. He didn’t contract or catch anything that made him sick. He made a *decision* to gamble. No one makes a decision to get cancer.” (206). Whose point of view do you agree with more? Why?
9. In Family Court, Howard Jasper manipulates the facts in order to satisfy his client’s demands, leading to a ruling that feels less than fair to Celeste. How does

this impact the decisions Celeste makes involving Spencer and Adam for the rest of the book? How are we supposed to respond when the systems designed to protect us are turned against us?

10. At one point Sara tells Jake, "I'm capable of doing things I never thought I could do (351)." What things is she referring to? How could this statement apply to other characters in the book?
11. When Sara sees an opportunity to tie-up an old loose end by implicating Vincent Canto in the murder of Adam Vanek, she exclaims "Oh, serendipity." Is this form of "justice," which comes via the manipulation of information, any different than Jasper's manipulation of the court system? Is one more "justified" than the other? Is justice served in the novel?
12. When faced with moral dilemmas, Klein's characters often make choices that risk *everything* – their jobs, their spouses, and their integrity. Why do they take such risks? Which characters truly learn from their mistakes?
13. Is Clean Break an appropriate title for the novel? Celeste seeks to make a break from Adam, but can the phrase be applied to other characters in the book? Is it ever possible to make a clean break from your past and start a new life?
14. Each of the main characters is dishonest in some way: to spouses, jobs, lovers, and children. What are the different degrees of deception and which ones feel more justified than others? How does the reader think these lies will affect the characters' long-term relationships with one another?
15. The novel ends on a positive note. Do Jake and Celeste deserve a hopeful future? Are they better off than they were at the beginning of the book?