

Author's notes and discussion questions for Butcher

Cees, a man about 6'3, of Dutch background, said that over the time he'd been working in a butcher shop, he had recurring customers who, after getting to know Cees and his kindness, wanted to come talk to him not about buying meat, but having a chat, and eventually, some even asked him to pray for them right there in the shop. When Cees prays, you can tell that he is able to see you like few others.

After this conversation, I had an idea about how amazing it would be if this happened in 'real' fictional life and what that would mean for people who met him. Would they be attracted to that gift? Or, if they had something to hide, would they be repelled by it?

Thus, the story of Butcher was born.

All of the characters in the book are composites of people I've met along the way, but in most cases, their personalities are magnified not only to offer humor, but also to give depth and breadth to the story. Although the author can never fully dissociate completely from his/her characters, most figures have reference from the past.

Discussion questions:

1. Penny Reynold's opens the scene setting the stage for a description of Amicable. Describe the town in which you grew up. Which parts of Amicable seem familiar (no matter the place)? Which descriptions are over the top?
2. The reader is introduced to Leo Jensen, a wandering Butcher. What is important about his name? Why did the author make him so tall?
3. The author's depiction of Reverend Deakins is important. How would you describe him? Why is he like this?
4. The bowling alley and the church are set as twin towers for and against each other throughout the book. Why do they represent? How are they used as agents of change?
5. The author uses the rumor mill as a means of information. For the older folks, it's face to face, verbal communication, for the younger ones, online. In both cases, how are rumors helpful and how are they harmful? What are some examples?
6. How does Butcher's 'reading' of people affect those around him? Do they trust him more or less?
7. What would you do if you came across a 'Butcher?'
8. Both Butcher and Rhonda, and John and Leslie, have to overcome obstacles in order for the relationship to move forward. What are these obstacles? How are they similar? Dissimilar?

9. As Rhonda moves further away from her mother, Connie, how does this strain their relationship? What does Connie do to attempt to 'keep' Rhonda close?
10. What do you see as the main point of the book? What is the role of trust in any relationships? (*Spoiler - the author's intent was an attempt to show that love cannot actually grow without trust. Control is the antithesis of trust.*) How do the characters attempt to control each other?
11. Many people have asked the question: why was Connie naked at the end of the book? (*Author's answer: In order for Butcher to completely move past the loss of his mother - who he found naked in the tub after an overdose - the author wanted Butcher to come full circle. Not his mother, but his future mother-in-law. Connie 'revealed' herself at her lowest and Butcher found himself paralyzed and needed someone to save him. In this case, George. Once Connie, Rhonda and Butcher are saved from their pasts, life can move forward.*)
12. How does *Butcher* make you think differently about relationships?