Mad Mabel

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Elsie's voice is sharp, witty, but deeply personal. How did her unique voice shape your experience of the story? Did you find her likable? Did her voice make you trust her more or question what she might be leaving out?

2. The novel opens with the line, "there are two groups of people who are rarely, if ever, suspected of murder . . ." How does this statement frame your expectations for the story? In what ways does the book play with assumptions about age, gender, and guilt?

3. Friendship between women, especially in old age, is at the heart of this book. What makes Elsie and Daphne's bond so powerful? How does their relationship challenge or affirm your ideas about lifelong friendship?

4. The character of Persephone brings both levity and chaos. What role does she play in Elsie's world, and how does their unlikely dynamic evolve throughout the story?

5. How does the novel use humor to address serious themes like trauma, loneliness, aging, and regret? Did the humor ever feel like a shield, or did it enhance the emotional weight of the story?

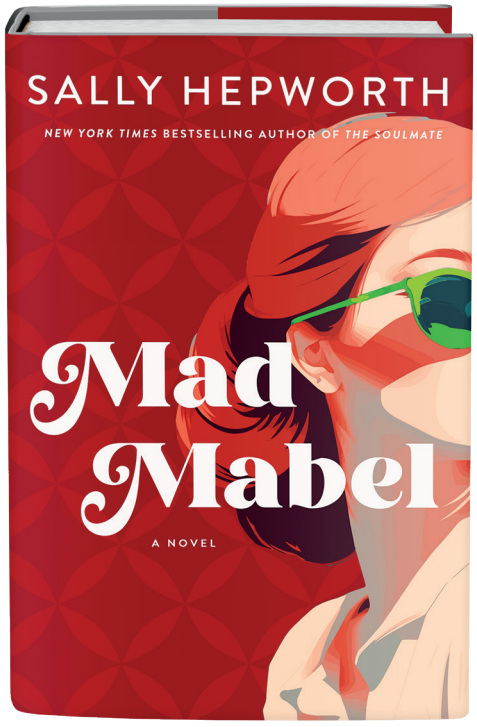
6. Elsie's past unfolds slowly, revealing tragedy, cruelty, and buried secrets. How did the flashbacks shape your understanding of who she is today? Were you surprised by any of the revelations?

7. Joan plays the part of antagonist, her motivations rooted in suspicion and fear. Do you think she is justified in her actions? How would you have reacted in her shoes?

8. Much of the book explores how labels like "mad" or "difficult" follow women through life. How has Elsie internalized or rejected these labels? How does society treat "difficult" women differently across generations?

9. The residents of Kenny Lane are quirky, nosy, and tightly interconnected. How does the neighborhood function as both a refuge and a battleground for Elsie?

10. The novel calls itself "a love story," not romantic, but a story about platonic love. Do you agree with that description? What does the book suggest about the role of non-romantic relationships in a meaningful life?



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