

## Discussion Questions for The Cuckoo's Calling by Robert Galbraith

These discussion questions were prepared by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) for the *Reader with a Cause* book club on Goodreads.

If you like our questions please feel free to use them – and don't forget to join the conversation online at [https://www.goodreads.com/topic/group\\_folder/195485](https://www.goodreads.com/topic/group_folder/195485)



### 1. Detective Duo:

Readers have already commented about the working relationship between Robin & Strike - how it was interesting because they didn't know each other very well and because there was suspense over whether Robin would continue working with Strike -- did their dynamic stay interesting for you? Why or why not?

### 2. Depiction of Female Characters:

Galbraith had a lot to say about the female characters in this book; and, generally, did a lot of moralizing about their perceived worth and the quality of their character, in a way that we didn't notice as much with the male characters. We found this fascinating – especially considering that Robert Galbraith is actually JK Rowling!

Do you think her selection of a male pseudonym influenced her other characterizations of the women in this book? What did you think about those perceptions and judgments?

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*"Leda, Lula and Rochelle had not been women like Lucy, or his [Strike's] Aunt Joan; they had not taken every reasonable precaution against violence or chance; they had not tethered themselves to life with mortgages and voluntary work, safe husbands and clean-faced dependents: their deaths, therefore, were not classed as 'tragic,' in the same way as those of staid and respectable housewives." (378)*

*"[of Ciara Porter] It was difficult for him [Strike] to decide whether she was sincere, or performing her own character; her beauty got in the way, like a thick cobweb through which it was difficult to see her clearly." (319)*

*"The way she [Marlene Higson] bent her body towards him [Strike], the way she pushed straw-like strands of hair out of her pouchy eyes, even the way she held her cigarette; all were grotesquely coquettish. Perhaps she knew of no other way of relating to anything male. Strike found her simultaneously pathetic and repulsive." (289)*



*"She [Lula's mother] invited pity, but he found he could not pity her even as much as, perhaps, she deserved. She lay dying, wrapped in invisible robes of martyrdom, presenting her helplessness and passivity to him like adornments, and his dominant feeling was distaste." (411)*

### **3. Working 9 to 5...:**

Robin's search for a career is what preoccupied much of her thoughts, and she was torn between what she saw as two options: job satisfaction and job stability. Which is more important to you, satisfaction or stability? Do you think she made the right choice by [SPOILER] staying to work for Strike in the end?

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*"To prove, to solve, to catch, to protect: these were things worth doing; important and fascinating." (185)*

### **4. Ripped from the Headlines:**

The book is dedicated *"To the real Deeby with many thanks."*

As we were reading this book, we all wondered if Lula, Duffield, and/or Deeby were modeled after any British or American celebrities.

What do you think?

### **5. Let's Talk About Relationships...Robin and Matthew:**

The first romantic relationship we're exposed to is that of Robin & Matthew. Their flurry of romance seems to peter out markedly the longer that Robin is employed with the private detective.

What did you think about their relationship; is his often cold demeanor and belittling attitude toward her job a "red flag" (i.e., an indicator of a potentially emotionally abusive relationship) or simply the "growing pains" related to the new stage of their relationship?

What else did you think about Robin & Matthew?

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*"Matthew kept hinting that Strike was somehow a fake. He seemed to feel that being a private detective was a far-fetched job, like astronaut or lion tamer; that real people did not do such things." (185)*

*"Then Robin had lost her temper, and told Matthew that if anybody was blackmailing her it was he, with his constant harping on the money she ought to be bringing in, and his insinuation that she was not pulling her weight. Hadn't he noticed that she was enjoying working for Strike; hadn't it crossed his insensitive, obtuse accountant's mind that she might be dreading the tedious bloody job in human resources? Matthew had been aghast, and then (though reserving the right to deplore Strike's behavior) apologetic; but Robin, usually conciliatory and amiable, had*



*remained aloof and angry. The truce effected the following morning had prickled with antagonism, mainly Robin's." (354)*

### **6. Let's Talk About Relationships...Tansy and Freddie Bestigui:**

At first the Bestiguis seem like a typical multimillionaire relationship trope: trophy/golddigging wife, successful husband, loveless marriage -- until Freddie's violent past is revealed and their relationship takes on a new, disturbing air. Abusive partners utilize many tactics to gain power and control over their partner; this is seen clearly in Freddie's attempt to coerce Tansy into lying to the police through bribery (as well as through his "bit of domestic abuse")

If you were a friend of Tansy's, what would you say or do to support her? If you were a friend of Freddie's what, if anything, might you say to him?

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*"Here's what I think happened,' Strike went on... 'You and your wife had a row while she was undressing for bed. Perhaps you found her stash in the bathroom, or you interrupted her doing a couple of lines. So you decided an appropriate punishment would be to shut her outside on the sub-zero balcony.'*

*'Tansy must've started hammering on the window immediately after Landry fell past her. You weren't expecting your wife to start screaming and banging on the glass, were you?*

*Understandably averse to anyone witnessing your bit of domestic abuse, you opened up...'" (382-3)*

*"I think you shut your wife outside, headed off into the bedroom, got into bed, got comfy -- the police said the bed looked disarranged and slept in -- and kept an eye on the clock. I don't think you wanted to fall asleep. If you'd left her too long on that balcony, you'd have been up for manslaughter." (385)*

*"It [the email] was from his wife [Tansy]. It said something like, 'I know we're supposed to be talking through lawyers, but unless you can do better than 1.5 million pounds, I will tell everyone exactly where I was when Lula Landry died, and exactly how I got there, because I'm sick of taking shit for you. This not an empty threat. I'm starting to think I should tell the police anyway.' Or something like that." (349)*

### **7. Let's Talk About Relationships...Charlotte and Strike:**

The second relationship we see is one that is imploding. As Charlotte flees Strike's office, Galbraith describes her as "livid, yet strangely exhilarated," (13) feeding into the stereotype of "unstable" women who take advantage of their significant others -- and feed off of it. As the story of their relationship unfolds, we learn more about their tumultuous past -- and not even Strike is sure what to think! What do you think about their relationship dynamic? Do you think she was being intentionally manipulative and controlling by [SPOILER] going back to Ross in the end? Why or why not?

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*"He would have been glad to remember Charlotte with the same uncomplicated affection." (87)*

*"There, in that first night, had been everything that had subsequently broken them apart and pulled them back together: her self-destructiveness, her recklessness, her determination to hurt; her unwilling but genuine attraction to Strike, and her secure place of retreat in the cloistered world in which she had grown up, who values she simultaneously despised and espoused. Thus had begun the relationship that had led to Strike lying here on his camp bed fifteen years later, racked with more than physical pain, and wishing that he could rid himself of her memory." (219)*

*"Strike, however, knew Charlotte as intimately as a germ that had lingered in his blood for 15 years; knew that her only response to pain was to wound the offender as deeply as possible, no matter the cost to herself. What would happen if he refused her an audience, and kept refusing? It was the only strategy he had never tried, and all he had left. Every now and then, when Strike's resistance was low (late at night, alone on his camp bed) the infection would erupt again: regret and longing would spike, and he saw her at close quarters, beautiful, naked, breathing words of love; or weeping quietly, telling him that she knew she was rotten, ruined, impossible, but that he was the best and truest thing she had ever known." (267)*

## **8. Life in the Spotlight:**

While we were reading this book, we kept thinking about, as Lady Gaga puts it, *The Fame Monster* and what fame does to those seeking it and those ensconced in it. On top of that, Galbraith's juxtaposition of war and celebrity was reminiscent of *The Hunger Games'* use of those concepts.

Our culture seems obsessed with celebrity, violence, and fame - why do you think that is? What do you think Galbraith was trying to say about these concepts?

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*"And he [Kieran Kolovas-Jones, the driver] digressed into a brief exposition of the TV dramas in which he had appeared, exhibiting, in Strike's estimation, a marked desire to be considered more than he felt himself to be; to become endowed, in fact, with that unpredictable, dangerous and transformative quality: fame. To have had it so often in the back of his car and not yet have caught it from his passengers must (thought Strike) have been tantalizing and, perhaps, infuriating." (102)*

*"Duffield and his cohorts' apparent unselfconsciousness was, Strike recognized, nothing but expert artifice; they had, all of them, the hyper-alertness of the prey animal combined with the casual arrogance of predators. In the inverted food chain of fame, it was the big beasts who were stalked and hunted; they were receiving their due." (330)*

*"But the photographers ran alongside the vehicle, flashes erupting on either side; and Strike's whole body was bathed in sweat: he was suddenly back on a yellow dirt road in the juddering*



*Viking, with a sound like firecrackers popping in the Afghanistan air; he had glimpsed a youth running away from the road ahead, dragging a small boy." (334)*

*"In the wing mirror he could see two motorbikes, each being ridden pillion, following them. Princess Diana and the Parisian underpass; the ambulance bearing Lula Landry's body, with cameras held high to the darkened glass as it passed; both careered through his thoughts as the car sped through the dark streets." (334)*

*"Strike felt himself momentarily allied with the other two by the experience of being hunted. The tiny, dimly lit lobby felt safe and friendly. The paparazzi were still yelling at each other on the other side of the door, and their terse shouts recalled soldiers receiving a building." (335)*

### **9. Gender-swap:**

One of our readers wondered what would be different about this story had "Lula" been "Lucas?"

We think there would be a HUGE difference -- seen the most markedly in the character's treatment by the media (especially in terms of their mental illness, selection of relationship partners, and relationship with their first and second families).

What do you think? Agree or disagree?

### **10. Let's Talk About Relationships...Lula and Evan Duffield:**

From the Commitment Ceremony one week to "manhandling" her the next, what do you think about Lula & Evan's relationship dynamic? Do you think Duffield's volatile nature is a result of his drug use and life in the spotlight (which is still no excuse for "manhandling" your significant other), or is something else at play?

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*"...she [Lula] and Evan go back together and they had the commitment ceremony; it was all fantastic for her, she was on cloud nine." -Ciara (320)*

*"Then Duffield and Lula argued. Lots of people saw it happen. He manhandled her a bit, tried to make her stay, but she left the club alone." (35)*

*"Well, yeah. I saw her number coming up...I felt like teaching her a little lesson. Let her wonder what I was up to..." (340)*

*"[Lula] got up, came over to tell me she was leaving, and said I could have my bangle back; the one I gave her when we had our commitment ceremony. She chucked it down on the table in front of me, with everyone fucking gawping. So I picked it up and said, 'Anyone fancy this, it's going spare?'" -Evan (342)*



### **11. Spoiler Thread!:**

We got off to a bit of a slow start with our discussion threads for *The Cuckoo's Calling* - sorry about that! There was a lot to unpack...

**So: Did you figure out who did it??** (Or were you as surprised as we were?)

*Please be mindful about posting spoilers in the other threads and give a warning when doing so.  
In this thread: SPOIL AWAY.*