An ex-marine, rural individualist Guy is a rugged Samaritan in his small-town community. But this performance of ideals only stretches so far. Having lost his wife to cancer, he struggles to reconnect with his only child. It’s not until he steps in to care for the neglected son of an opioid-addicted man that he learns emotional responsibility and the skills to rebuild his severed ties.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does Bill’s story deal with male identity and society’s definitions of masculinity?

2. Guy’s volunteer deployments in Afghanistan caused him to miss the death of his wife and ruptured his relationship with his son, Hodge. We meet Guy at a time when he has yet to face the feelings associated with the death of his wife and his subsequent estrangement from his son, as well as his son’s sexuality. How does Guy deal with his PTSD? How can we maintain social connections and build healthy relationships when faced with traumas, like fighting war or personal struggles?

3. Kopp is a particularly monstrous character. Should Guy, nevertheless, have worked harder to be inclusive? What are the boundaries of inclusivity and cohesion?

4. It was difficult, challenging, and personally risky for Guy to intervene and help Bo. It took a certain kind of courage. We might all hope we would act similarly if faced with the same circumstances. Are there limits to this approach—and might it ever backfire? What else can we do to end child abuse?

5. In “Brief Exercises in Mindfulness,” gentrification sees Raquin’s community reinvented, but with some devastating effects. In contrast, in “The Masculine and the Dead,” Guy’s community reinvents itself into a prospering economic cooperative. What are some promising approaches for strengthening our communities in ways that improve health and well-being for everyone?