

# Echoes of Family

by Barbara Claypole White

## Reader and Discussion Questions

1. This is a novel about an unconventional family. What do you think makes a family?
2. Darius believes he should be able to solve Marianne's problems through love, and Marianne is determined to beat her devils alone, and they both fail. What do you think the role of family should be in helping a loved one with mental illness? Do you have any experience with this, and if so, how has your family responded? Has it found balance?
3. There is still shame and stigma attached to a diagnosis of mental illness, which spills over into treatments such as ECT and residential care. What did you make of Marianne's experiences with both? Were you surprised that she had never talked openly about her manic-depressive illness?
4. How much did you know about mania, depression, hallucinations, or psychotic episodes before reading this novel? Did you learn anything about schizoaffective disorder or the bipolar disorders?
5. Did you make assumptions about Gabriel based on the fact that he's a priest? What did you think of his responses to the personal tests he's forced to navigate?
6. Guilt plays an important role in the novel. Has this story made you rethink anything in your own life?
7. The three female characters are each damaged, and yet they've responded to the challenges facing them in different ways. Why do you think this is? Do you believe that what happens in life is not always as important as how we handle it?
8. EmJ feels that she's invisible. Might she have felt differently if she'd had the support of family and friends? Does Marianne make things better or worse for her? Had you been Marianne, what would you have done?
9. Different characters exhibit different kinds of heroism in the story. Who do you think the real hero is and why?
10. Marianne is a woman of extreme mood swings, whereas Gabriel has learned the art of emotional detachment. Lack of emotional control creates problems for both of them and drives the plot. How much in our lives is steered by emotion? How have you learned to balance and manage strong emotions? Or do you feel that you haven't?
11. On the flip side, what is the role of reason? From the beginning, Marianne is determined to find sense where there appears to be none. Do you agree with her epiphany that there is reason in everything, even if we can find it only with hindsight?
12. Marianne has worked hard to manage and control her bipolar illness, and yet still the monster returns. How does she change and grow in the story? What do you see in her future?
13. What did you think about Darius? Were you rooting for him or not? How does he change and grow in the story?
14. What do you think the future holds for Gabriel and Jade? (Invite me to your book club and I'll share my thoughts!)