

The Promise Between Us

by Barbara Claypole White

Reader and Discussion Questions

1. Katie and Callum both take extreme measures to protect Maisie from what they perceive as threats. Would you have acted as they did? Do you, or people around you, battle monsters? Does it make any difference whether those monsters are real or imaginary?
2. There are parallels between Katie's intrusive thoughts and Callum's intrusive memories. Katie's anxiety is genetic, but stays dormant until the postpartum period. Callum's is triggered—and retriggered—by trauma. Did their stories help you understand what it means to battle anxiety? What did the novel teach you about anxiety disorders?
3. Shame and then lack of resources prevent Katie from seeking professional help. Do you think we've made any progress in tackling the stigma that comes with mental illness? Does anyone close to you have experience in coping with mental illness without access to good resources, including health care?
4. Hindsight can be a blessing and a curse. Often it's only after the death of a loved one that we can revisit the relationship with perspective and discover something that was hiding in plain sight. Have you ever reevaluated a relationship with someone in the way that Katie does with her mother? What did you learn?
5. Katie constantly reevaluates what it means to be a mom. What do you think defines a good mother? Can you imagine a situation in which you could give up your child and/or your parental rights as Katie did? Who do you think is Maisie's real mother, and why?
6. Might Katie and Callum's marriage have survived if they'd been honest and open with each other? Do you think they could have been? How does your family handle communication? Do you believe spouses should tell each other everything?
7. Callum is a tortured hero. Discuss his character arc. (Barbara would love to be part of any discussion about Callum, so don't forget she can Skype into your book club.)
8. Jake is another dark Barbara Claypole White character. What did you make of his journey? Did you feel empathy for him? Did your feelings about him change during the course of the novel?

The Promise Between Us

by Barbara Claypole White

Reader and Discussion Questions

9. Driven by guilt, loyalty, and a childhood promise, Jake packs up his life and moves across the country for his best friend. Is there a person for whom you would do that?
10. Katie's relationship with Jake is at the heart of this novel. How does it change and grow, and how do you see it evolving in the future?
11. In what ways do creative endeavors become therapy for the different characters? Have you ever used art as therapy?
12. The Winnie-the-Pooh lamp plays a significant role in the novel. Is there an object from your childhood that still carries meaning? If so, why do you think that is?
13. Barbara met her husband thirty years ago at JFK Airport. For this reason, she's drawn to the notion that people who need each other find each other and that quirks of fate can be life changing. How do both of these themes drive this story?
14. Did you spot the references to Barbara's other novels? Do you have a favorite character from her stories, and if so, who? Barbara writes stand-alone novels, but do you see continuities?