

Empty Arms

a novel

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READER'S CLUB GUIDE

1. In the beginning of the story we learn that Catharine is keeping a secret. What is her secret? Who is she keeping it from and why? Do you think keeping this secret was the right decision?
2. What is Catharine and Paul's marriage like? How do they react when they are diagnosed with unexplained infertility? Why are their opinions of adoption so different?
3. Catharine embarks on a quest to find her daughter. What issues does she face? If you were in Catharine's shoes, would you look for Emily? Why or why not?
4. What is Catharine's relationship with her mother like? What are their differences? Why do you think Evelyn refuses to help Catharine find Emily? If you were in Evelyn's shoes what would you do?
5. Catharine's habit of picking at the scabs on her arm is an act of self-harm. Why does she do this? What finally makes her stop?
6. Catharine works in the newborn nursery at Lowville General Hospital as a way of holding on to Emily. Do you think this job helped or hurt her? Why?
7. Why is Catharine attracted to Harper? What does she learn from him? Why doesn't their relationship work out?
8. Through Harper's job at the Adoption Registry, we see how difficult it can be for birth parents and adoptees to reunite. How do you feel about the mutual consent procedures? Is it effective? Is it fair?
9. In your opinion, how did teenage Catharine handle her pregnancy? What would you have done differently?
10. Why did Catharine's mother steal the letters that she and James sent to each other? What impact did this have on both characters' lives? How do you think things would've worked out if they had received the letters?
11. Catharine traveled to Texas to tell James about Emily. How did he react and why? Does his reaction make him a bad father or a good one?
12. Catharine and Melody both lived at the Home for Fallen Women and were forced to surrender their children for adoption. How were their experiences different? How were they similar? What do they learn from each other?

13. Catharine wants to have a relationship with her daughter, yet her relationship with her mother was difficult. Do you think Catharine's relationship with her daughter will be different than the relationship she had with her mother? In what ways?

14. Ellie reveals that she didn't search for Catharine out of respect for her adoptive mother. If you were an adoptive parent, how would you feel if your child wanted to search for a birth parent? How would you feel if a birth parent wanted to contact your adopted child?

15. How has Catharine and Paul's relationship changed by the end of the story? Did they get what they wanted? What do you think their future holds?

16. What does "motherhood" mean and how is it explored in this novel? What makes someone a mother?

17. Which character do you most relate to? Why?