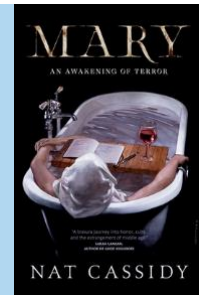


Discussion Guide



Mary: An Awakening of Terror
By Nat Cassidy

Nightfire
2022
404 pages
ISBN: 978-1250265234

Menopause

Summary

Mary is a quiet, middle-aged woman doing her best to blend into the background. Invisible. Unremarkable. Unknown even to herself. But lately, things have been changing inside Mary. Along with the hot flashes and body aches, she can't look in a mirror without passing out, and the voices in her head have been urging her to do unspeakable things. Fired from her job in New York, she moves back to her hometown, hoping to reconnect with her past and inner self. Instead, visions of terrifying, mutilated specters overwhelm her with increasing regularity, and she begins auto-writing strange thoughts and phrases. Mary discovers that these experiences are echoes of an infamous serial killer. Then the killings begin again. Mary's definitely going to find herself.

Reader Advisory – “Nat Cassidy's highly commercial, debut horror novel *Mary: An Awakening of Terror*, blends *Midsommar* with elements of *American Psycho* and a pinch of *I'll Be Gone in the Dark*.” – from the publisher. Be aware that the book could trigger abject feelings and emotions.

Questions

1. Mary struggles with facing her aging body and what it means to be a menopausal woman. Explore this theme and how society tends to view older women.
2. Mary hates the “c-word” or being called crazy, yet she constantly calls herself this. Discuss the how the word “crazy” has been weaponized particularly against women.
3. Mary’s health concerns are repeatedly dismissed or diminished by health professionals. Has this ever happened to you? How did you handle the situation?
4. Menopause, menstruation, and women’s health in general are often treated as taboo subjects. Brainstorm ways to normalize having conversations about these topics.
5. Throughout the book, Mary deals with an intensely hateful inner critic. Consider how your inner critic may have been impacted by larger societal expectations and pressures?
6. Explore the themes of social isolation, versus women supporting women. How does Mary’s social isolation impact her? How does it impact the other women in this story?
7. Mary proves that it’s never too late to start over, to reclaim your life and your body. Is there something you’ve loved that you’ve given up because ‘you’re too old’ for it now? What is something, big or small, that you can do to reclaim your body or your life?