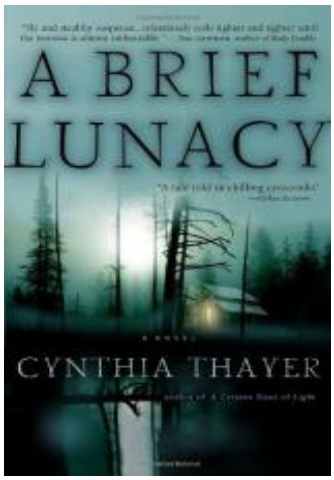
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# A Brief Lunacy

by Cynthia Thayer




## About the Book

With her acclaimed novel **A Certain Slant of Light**, Cynthia Thayer dazzled critics with her subtle grace and lyrical prose. Now this masterful storyteller brings her prodigious literary gifts to a very different kind of novel --- a haunting edge-of-the-seat thriller that begins with a simple act of kindness and ends in a scene of escalating violence in a secluded Maine cabin.

The stranger arrived on a cool October evening. Jessie and Carl invited the stranded young man into their cabin, fed him supper, and let him spend the night. The next morning he repays their kindness by taking them prisoner in their own home.

Who is this man who calls himself Jonah? Why does he seem to know everything about them? What is his connection to their troubled, missing daughter, Sylvie? As Jonah's behavior grows increasingly erratic and frightening, Jessie and Carl are trapped in a single day of brutality and shattering revelations that will test the limits of their sanity and their will to survive.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** Discuss the storytelling approach used in **A Brief Lunacy**. What was it like to watch the episodes unfold from two points of view? What was the effect of the way past and present were woven throughout?

**2.** Would you have let Jonah into the house that night? Were your reactions more aligned with Jessie's or Carl's? In what ways do their personalities complement one another?

**3.** Jessie and Carl's marriage is marked by beautiful rituals, from the way they share a meal to their pet phrases. Does their predictability make them vulnerable, or is it their salvation?

**4.** The landscape in the novel shifts from enchanting to eerie. How does the author paint varying moods across this corner of Maine?

**5.** Though Jonah is a stranger to Jessie and Carl, Sylvie is their own child. Do they draw a distinction between the way they treat Jonah's and Sylvie's mental illness?

**6.** Most parents maintain a protective role in the life of the child, but Jessie and Carl illustrate the situation of parents who are in danger because of a child. How do family dynamics shift when children become a threat to those around them? How do various relatives react to Sylvie's illness?

**7.** What is the essence of Jonah's quest? What is his understanding of power? What are his essential fears? How do his attitudes toward men differ from those toward women?

**8.** Art and music become part of the sinister devices used by Jonah during his siege. Why was Carl ordered to draw the portrait of Jessie? What was the effect of his playing children's music on the violin?

**9. A Brief Lunacy** explores the many levels on which a person can be violated, physically and emotionally. Do Carl's horrific recollections have very much in common with those horrific hours in his home? Was it to Jessie's benefit that she had never experienced anything so fearsome before?

**10.** American writer Flannery O'Connor defended her use of violence in fiction by saying that characters in violent situations are forced to discover their most essential qualities. If that is so, what do Jessie and Carl discover about themselves? Who are they, in essence?

**11.** The author tells us that Sylvie became pregnant once, and Jonah expresses the desire to become a father. In your opinion, should someone with their illnesses be prevented from becoming a parent?

**12.** Were you aware of Hitler's campaign against the Romany (Gypsy) people during the Holocaust? What did Carl's memories help you discover about their history and persecution?

**13.** Discuss the various portrayals of "lunacy" in the novel. What mental destruction does Jonah wreak on Jessie and Carl? How is he able to do this? What is the nature of their reality, and their perceptions of it?

**14.** What is Jessie able to do that Carl can't? What made her a better candidate for setting in motion the resolution of their deadly situation?

**15.** What realities about Jonah were revealed in the end? Had you believed his stories about childhood?

**16.** What do you predict for the future of Jessie, Carl, and Sylvie? Would Hans's wife be able to feel safe in this part of Maine again? What might transpire in a sequel?

## Author Bio

Cynthia Thayer was born in New York City but moved with her family to Nova Scotia when she was seven years old. After earning a college degree in English and theater, Cynthia became a teacher of both subjects, but for more than twenty years now she has owned and operated a diversified organic farm in Goulds-boro, Maine, with her husband.

When she was 48, she began writing, and of her ?new? career, she says, ?I guess you could say that I am a late bloomer?Writing has become part of the ?new me.?

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