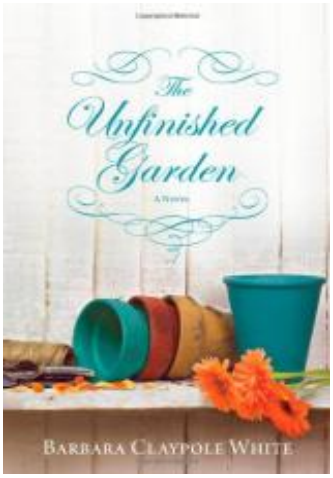
The Unfinished Garden

by Barbara Claypole White



About the Book

James Nealy needs to create a garden?

James Nealy is haunted by irrational fears and inescapable compulsions. A successful software developer, he?s thrown himself into a new goal?to finally conquer the noise in his mind. And he has a plan. He?ll confront his darkest fears and build something beautiful: a garden. When he meets Tilly Silverberg, he knows she holds the key?even if she doesn?t think so.

After her husband?s death, gardening became Tilly?s livelihood and her salvation. Her thriving North Carolina business and her young son, Isaac, are the excuses she needs to hide from the world. So when oddly attractive, incredibly tenacious James demands that she take him on as a client, her answer is a flat *no*.

When a family emergency lures Tilly back to England, she's secretly glad. With Isaac in tow, she retreats to her childhood village, which has always stayed obligingly the same. Until now. Her best friend is keeping secrets. Her mother is plotting. Her first love is unexpectedly, temptingly available. And then James appears on her doorstep.

Away from home, James and Tilly forge an unlikely bond, tenuous at first but taking root every day. And as they work to build a garden together, something begins to blossom between them?despite all the reasons against it.

Discussion Guide

1. How is gardening used as a metaphor in this novel? Do you believe in the healing power of gardening?

2. James is an unlikely hero. What do you think draws Tilly to him?

3. Do you have a favorite moment, scene or line in the book?

4. What roles do trust and mistrust play in the characters? relationships?

5. Why do you think issues of control appear repeatedly throughout the novel?

6. Is it reasonable for Tilly to cling to guilt after carrying out her husband?s final wishes? What role does Isaac play in helping her navigate her feelings?

7. What are the parallels between Tilly?s guilt and James?s fear?

8. How does the parent/child relationship impact other relationships in the novel?

9. In what ways do you think Sebastian and David have played important but different roles in Tilly?s life?

10. Finding the balance between closing yourself off and opening your life to others is an important theme of the novel. Discuss.

11. In the final chapter, Tilly says that she needs James. In what ways do you think Tilly and James need each other?

12. How do you think Tilly?s relationship with James will differ from her marriage to David?

13. How has Tilly changed from the beginning of the book to the ending? What events have caused her to change?

14. What obstacles, if any, do you see for James and Tilly in the future?

Author Bio

Barbara Claypole White grew up in the English village of Turvey with big dreams of becoming a novelist.

After a detour through women?s and medieval history at York University, she landed a job promoting London fashion. She was part of the first British Designer Show, measured celebrities in their underwear, and worked for the queen of the international rag trade, Dame Vivienne Westwood.

One day her boss sent her to New York, and she fell in love with an American professor who followed her around JFK Airport. Eighteen months later she was a faculty spouse, freelance writer, and marketing director in Champaign, Illinois, a small Midwest college town. She also started writing her first novel --- a love story set against the world of '80s fashion and AIDS.

Five years passed; then Barbara learned she was pregnant, and her husband was offered a distinguished professorship at UNC Chapel Hill. The family moved to the North Carolina forest, and Barbara became a stay-at-home mom and a

woodland gardener --- factors that would shape her writing voice. She returned to her manuscript, took evening classes in writing at the local arts center, and slammed into another detour: her young son developed obsessive-compulsive disorder.

From that moment, fascination with mental illness framed her life. She ditched her first novel and began writing DOGWOOD DAYS, which turned into THE UNFINISHED GARDEN. She also joined a nonfiction project for parents of children with invisible disabilities and blogs through the highs and lows of OCD at www.easytolovebut.com. (Her son is now an award-winning poet and musician attending college in the Midwest.)

Barbara is consistently drawn to the theme that people who need each other find each other, and is hard at work on her next novel...when she?s not gardening.

Photo Credit: Krista Moll Murray

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