



FLATIRON  
BOOKS  
NEW YORK

# *The Family Tabor*

## Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *The Family Tabor*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *The Family Tabor*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. When Harry Tabor is being interviewed by the *Palm Times* reporter, he says: “The past no longer exists, there is only the future, whatever it may hold.” How has that sentiment shaped the course of his life? Do you agree with that point of view?
2. Why does Roma dream so frequently of her grandmother, Tatiana? What does she represent for Roma?
3. Why is Roma so affected by Noelani’s case? What does the little girl’s story reveal about Roma herself? Why do you think Noelani runs?
4. Discuss Phoebe’s views of herself. Her friends disbelieve her when she says, “Professional success isn’t the sum total of me, it’s not all that I want...” and her thoughts make it clear that she wants love and a child. Do you think Phoebe is being honest with herself?
5. Why does Phoebe invent Aaron Green? What does her invention reveal about her desires? About the pressures she feels?
6. Why does Camille have such a deep interest in researching tribes in exotic locales? How does she compare and contrast her time in the Trobriand Islands with “real life”?
7. Why does Camille hide her depression from her family? Why does she feel she might have to end her relationship with Valentine Osin?
8. Why has Simon been suffering from insomnia, and what does it reveal about him? About his relationship with Elena? About what he might be seeking in his life?
9. Discuss the dynamics between Camille, Phoebe, and Simon. What draws them together and holds them apart? How do their bonds shift over the course of the novel?
10. Discuss the dynamics between Simon and Elena. What drew them together in the beginning and what might be drawing them apart now? Does it only have to do with Simon’s potential interest in exploring his faith?

11. Roma defines family as “a shambling creature made from accidental love, a meshing of beliefs occasionally disarranged by inevitable bafflement, and the creation of others adorned with names signaling hope for their natures, prospects for their futures. Whether there is love, happiness, contentment, success, health, and satisfaction, or sadness, trauma, and tragedy in any family, so much is dependent on ephemeral luck.” Do you agree with her formulation? How would you define family?
12. Harry thinks he’s been a very lucky man. When Roma wakes, she first thinks about luck. Phoebe thinks her luck in love has run out. Camille thinks her luck is broken. Simon thought he was the luckiest boy when his father knew everything about San Jacinto. What role does luck play in each of the Tabors’ lives? What role does the concept of luck play in the novel? What role does luck play in your own life?
13. Harry begins to hear a “voice” while he’s playing tennis with Levitt. Who do you think the voice belongs to?
14. The “voice” tells Harry: “When you began life anew in the desert, the future became everything, the only thing, and since then you have believed you have always lived an endless sequence of perfect days.” Neurology has proven that a person can completely eliminate memories, and such elimination alters the brain. Why has Harry eliminated the dark memories from his past in New York? Have you ever been shocked by the reappearance of a memory you’d long forgotten?
15. The Tabors are extremely close, yet each of them keeps secrets from the others. How well do you think we can ever know the people in our lives, even our family members?
16. Roma asks Simon: “Who among us is ever as good as they can be, as they want to be? And isn’t the effort what’s most important, the pursuit in that direction, that the good we discover in ourselves we claim, or reclaim, and use wisely and well, and spread it around, and pass it on?” What do you think? How do each of the Tabors make an effort to be as good as they can be, and what holds them back? Do you think subsequent good acts can ameliorate or wipe out earlier bad acts?
17. When Simon realizes his marriage to Elena is over, he reflects: “love, no matter how real, no matter the passion that birthed it, is not always enough.” What exactly does he mean? Do you agree?
18. What does Harry mean that he is a “historical Jew”? Discuss the role of Judaism in the novel. How are the different characters shaped by it? The Tabors are a modern Jewish family. Does the fact that they are Jewish make them different from other families of different religious faiths? What do you see as similarities and differences?
19. The novel ends with Simon visiting Max Stern’s house in Jerusalem. What is the significance of that meeting? What do you think the future holds for Simon?
20. Which member of the Tabor family did you most relate to? Why?