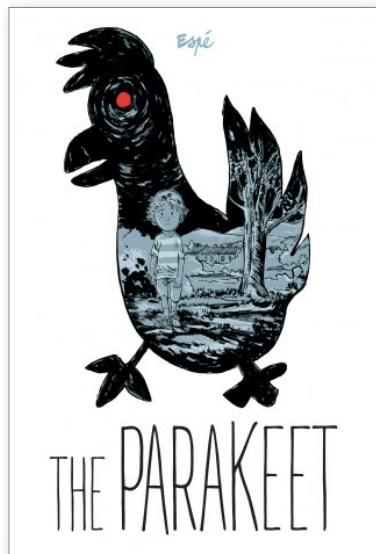


READER'S GUIDE

The Parakeet (Graphic Mundi)

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Conversations about mental health have become more nuanced, and *The Parakeet* is a beautiful mix of joy and sorrow that leaves a lot of room for discussion. (Readers should note the trigger warning for suicide before jumping in.)

CREATOR: Espé

ABOUT: Bastien's mother suffers from "bipolar disorder with schizophrenic tendencies," but he prefers to imagine her as a comic-book heroine, like Jean Grey, who may become Dark Phoenix and explode in a superhuman fury at any moment. Based on the creator's own childhood experiences, *The Parakeet* is the story of a boy whose only refuge from life's harsh realities lies in his imagination. Through his eyes, we see how mental illness can both tear families apart and reaffirm the bonds of love.

“

“Originally published in France in 2017 and affectingly translated into English by [Hannah] Chute, Espé’s artful volume presents his memories in vibrant chapters, saturated mostly in single colors with shades of oranges and reds reserved largely for his mother’s illness. Despite the terror of a child witnessing the failure of his mother’s mental health care, Espé brilliantly succeeds in creating a tender, gorgeous tribute. The genesis of the title, revealed in the final chapter, proves heartbreakingly bittersweet.” —Booklist, 2021

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *The Parakeet* begins in 1974 when mental illness, particularly for women, was less understood and handled differently than it is, and is told from Bastien's perspective. How would his experience be different today, and what hasn't changed?
2. Marie's experience says a lot about "invisible illness," as explicitly stated on pages 64-66. What other kinds of invisible illnesses have you seen people struggle with? How is it depicted in media versus reality? How does it affect Bastien to be the only person who knows about her being "Jean Grey"?
3. One overarching theme is resilience; Bastien and his coping mechanisms, and his father's seemingly endless strength, are two examples. How are other characters in the story affected by Marie's illness, and in what ways do they show resilience?
4. Different colors are used throughout the story: Marie's episodes are red, more neutral memories are blue, etc. Does that change the way you perceive the story? Did the colors "communicate" anything specific to you while reading?

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