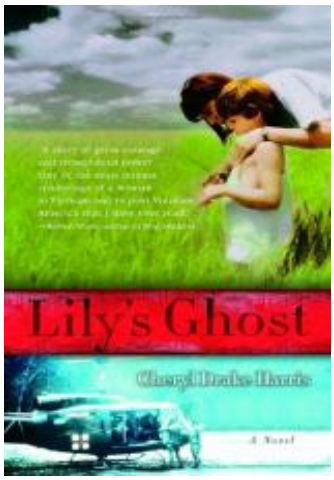
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Lily's Ghost

by Cheryl Drake Harris



About the Book

As a doctor in Vietnam, Lily survived unimaginable terror and loss. Now, safely ensconced in a close-knit Maine town and a seemingly comfortable marriage, she no longer needs to be afraid, but she is: afraid of light, afraid of sudden sounds, afraid of seeing the wide-eyed child of war who haunts her. So Lily is unprepared for the act of betrayal that threatens to take away the one thing she cannot live without: her young son. Plunged into a bitter custody battle, befriended by a man with a heartbreaking secret of his own, Lily must fight?to escape her own memories, to survive an uncertain future, and to protect, above all else, the love between a mother and child.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the storytelling approach used in **Lily's Ghost**. What was it like to watch the events in Lily's life unfold from two points in time? Is this narrative approach effective? How does it highlight or hide certain themes?

2. Ghosts reveal themselves in various forms throughout the novel. Discuss the idea of a ghost. What does it symbolize? Besides Lily's ghost, who else has a ghost? What is the overarching connection between these ghosts?

3. Lily's Ghost explores the many levels on which a person can be harmed, physically and emotionally. Lily certainly saw both firsthand while in Vietnam. Which hurts are she confronting in Maine? Which ones seem more destructive?

4. Hives are the physical manifestation of both Lily's war trauma and her conflict with Ben. How does Lily deal with her hives? Toward the end of the novel, Lily becomes more at peace with herself. How does the change in her psychological state affect her physical one?

5. Men play a prominent role in Lily's life. Discuss Lily's relationships with Ian, Ben, and Callahan. How is each relationship different? Does Lily change through her encounters with each of them? How so?

6. What is the significance of memory in the novel? Would it have helped Lily to have lost her painful recollections after the war in order to live a "normal" life? Or are these memories vital in shaping her present?and future?

7. Why does Lily prefer the dark? What is the argument that Ben makes against her "strange" propensity? Do you think he is correct?

8. "It is peaceful down in the furnace room. ?Just for a few minutes, I promise myself, I'll sit here. Feel safe." (page 93) What does Lily find so attractive about the cellar? Why are the kitchen and Jaime's room also significant?

9. Children are ever-present in the story. What do Jaime, Nina, Callahan's deceased son, and Noel symbolize? What is the importance of the Montagnard children?

10. "I don't fear losing Ben. I fear losing Jaime." (page 102). In the end has Lily lost Jaime? Discuss the issues relating to motherhood in the novel.

11. How does being a caretaker lead one to take better care of oneself? Did having a child enhance Lily's nightmares? Did it help her cope with the traumas of war? Would Lily's war images continue to haunt her even without Jaime?

12. We often read about wartime experiences from a male point of view. Based on **Lily's Ghost**, how is wartime experience different for a female? Does it offer advantages or disadvantages?

13. In the title, does the word "ghost" have more than one meaning?

Author Bio

Cheryl Drake Harris lives with her husband in Maine, where she is at work on her second novel, about Elizabeth Siddal, model for and wife of pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, which Dell will publish in 2007.

Critical Praise

"One of the most intense renderings of a woman in Vietnam and in post-Vietnam America that I have ever read....Few novels present Vietnam so thoroughly and completely with its aftershocks. A story of great courage and tremendous power."

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