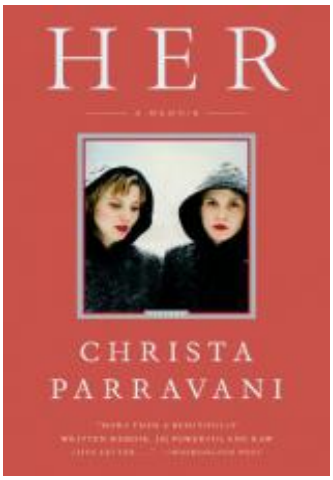
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Her: A Memoir

by Christa Parravani



About the Book

A blazingly passionate memoir of identity and love: when a charismatic and troubled young woman dies tragically, her identical twin must struggle to survive.

Christa Parravani and her identical twin, Cara, were linked by a bond that went beyond siblinghood, beyond sisterhood, beyond friendship. Raised up from poverty by a determined single mother, the gifted and beautiful twins were able to create a private haven of splendor and merriment between themselves and then earn their way to a prestigious college and to careers as artists (a photographer and a writer, respectively) and to young marriages. But, haunted by childhood experiences with father figures and further damaged by being raped as a young adult, Cara veered off the path to robust work and life and into depression, drugs and a shocking early death.

A few years after Cara was gone, Christa read that when an identical twin dies, regardless of the cause, 50 percent of the time the surviving twin dies within two years; and this shocking statistic rang true to her. "Flip a coin," she thought," those were my chances of survival." First, Christa fought to stop her sister's downward spiral; suddenly, she was struggling to keep herself alive.

Beautifully written, mesmerizingly rich and true, Christa Parravani's account of being left, one half of a whole, and of her desperate, ultimately triumphant struggle for survival is informative, heart-wrenching and unforgettably beautiful.

Discussion Guide

1. Christa mixes in excerpts from Cara?s writings throughout the book. How did this help in your understanding of Cara and how did it affect the storytelling? In what ways is Christa?s memoir also Cara?s?

2. What makes the relationship between identical twins unique from that of just siblings, or even fraternal twins? Do you

think that identical twins are biologically prone to think and feel the same way, or is it something that evolves from their inextricably knit experiences? In what ways is the relationship between Christa and Cara so special? As much as they are alike, how were they also very different?

3. Art is a signi?cant part of the sisters? lives. Discuss the importance of creating art for Cara and Christa. What do you think it meant for them to be able to create works of art in the midst of their tumultuous lives?

4. After Cara?s death, there were moments when Christa tried to be exactly like her sister, and also moments when she wanted to be completely free of her. Why did she assume these con?icting states of mind? Do you think that as an identical twin you can ever have your own identity?

5. Research shows that when an identical twin dies, the chances of the surviving twin also dying within two years drastically increases. Although coming very close to death, how was Christa able to survive and start a new life without her sister?

6. What is the importance of home and location in the sisters' lives? How did their constant displacement as children affect their idea and need for a home as adults? What does "home" mean to them? What does it mean to you?

7. The book is mostly comprised of Christa?s memories of her life with her sister. Christa says that it?s hard to tell if her memories are true without Cara; that she is ?the sole historian left to record [their] lives.? Think back on the memories you have of growing up. How do we distinguish truth from mere memories? And does truth matter when it comes to your own experiences, or is it the things you take from those moments that really count?

8. Do you think the body is a mere vehicle for the person or is it a part of your whole self? Do you think it is possible to detach yourself from your body? After Cara suffered a horri?c rape, how was she changed? What seems to have happened to her connection with her body? What happened to Christa?s connection to her body after Cara?s death, and how was she able to ?nd a new connection with her body in the end?

9. What do you make of Christa?s conversation with the psychic? Do you believe in the supernatural and that we can communicate with those who have passed? Do you think that Christa?s visions of Cara were actually visits from another world, or were they illusions of dreams and grief?

10. Christa?s connection to her husband, Anthony, was unlike any other she had with a man. They both experienced much heartache and pain throughout their lives. Why do you think Christa was so drawn to him from the start? Are the best matches the ones who are as equally broken as we are?

11. Discuss the theme of birth and death. How are the two juxtaposed within the memoir? How does the birth of her daughter signal a new beginning for Christa?

Author Bio

Christa Parravani is the bestselling author of the memoirs HER and LOVED AND WANTED. She has taught at

Dartmouth College, UMass Amherst, SUNY Purchase and West Virginia University, where she served as an Assistant Professor of Creative Nonfiction. She earned her MFA in Visual Art from Columbia University and her MFA in Creative Writing from Rutgers-Newark.

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