

Are You My Mother?

A NOVEL

C. H. Avosa

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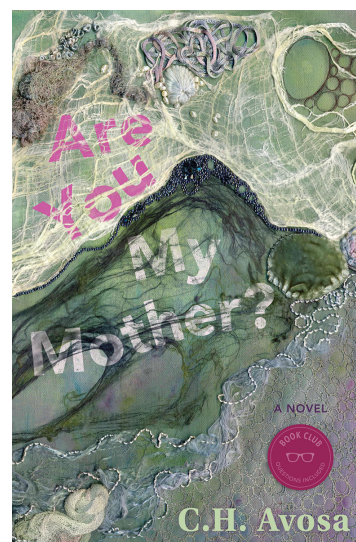
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About the Author

C. H. Avosa is an author, designer, and owner of several businesses, including Avosa Books. She's dedicated to helping increase childhood literacy and getting new stories for all ages out into the world. When she's not traveling, she lives in her adopted city of Baltimore, Maryland, with a multitude of dogs.



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Are You My Mother? Synopsis

A compelling story of nonlinear relationships, well-intentioned secrets, and difficult questions about what we owe our families

“I don’t even know what to say. I got an email last night saying that Mom isn’t my mother and my real mother needs a kidney transplant and that’s the only reason they’re telling me and this person is my sister?”

SOL GARNETT, a woman in her late thirties, initially brushes off the stranger’s unbelievable email. But the more she thinks about it, she realizes that all of her life, people have been questioning her identity. Her Spanish name and dark coloring don’t necessarily seem to fit her white family. And now that the seed of doubt has been planted, Sol has to find out the truth. And she has to find out soon if what the stranger says is right.

After questioning her mother, PATTY, Sol learns that the email about her “real” mother is true. Patty and Sol’s dad—who died when Sol was young—had separated for a while in the early ‘80s after losing their baby to a miscarriage. Sol’s dad had started dating JANICE, who was in Baltimore for law school, and Janice found out she was pregnant after they broke up. Sol is shaken to find out the story of her true origins and spends a lot of time journaling and asking questions about what this all means for her today.

Meanwhile, Janice urgently needs a kidney transplant, but has a complicated immune system and is difficult to match. Her daughter, SHYLA, first hears about Sol as a potential kidney donor and immediately tries to get in touch with her. After some deliberation, Sol agrees to meet Shyla in New York, midway between Baltimore and Boston. Shyla is delighted to have a sister and is very loving from the start. As they share stories and photos of both families, Sol realizes that her biological mother is black.

While they’re meeting, Shyla convinces Sol to meet Janice and Janice asks if Sol will come meet her right then. Sol decides to go before she loses her nerve and drives back to Boston with Shyla. She meets Janice the next day and hears the dramatic story of how Janice was hospitalized during the pregnancy and ended up asking Sol’s father to take her because of the enormous hospital debt.

After meeting Janice and learning more of the story, Sol has more empathy for her and decides to get tested to be a kidney donor. Patty offers to get tested with her although she’s afraid of hospitals. Right after they’re tested, they find out that Janice’s nephew is a match and will be donating a kidney to her. Sol flies back to Boston for the surgery and meets more of the family.

A couple weeks later, the kidney transplant fails. Shyla and the rest of the family desperately try to find another potential donor. Sol starts thinking that maybe she was meant to meet her biological mother like this and donate a kidney to her. Then she hears from the transplant center and finds out she’s not a match. She’s devastated. Unexpectedly, Patty is a match for Janice. But she tells Sol she’s not willing to go through the surgery, which causes Sol to question Patty’s character and leads to a rift between them.

After a while, Sol’s relationship with God leads her to be willing to forgive Patty. At the same time, Patty changes her mind and decides that she will donate a kidney to Janice. They fly to Boston together and the

transplant surgery is a success. A few days later, Sol's biological mother and adoptive mother meet for the first time and Sol realizes that the size of her family has doubled.

Are You My Mother? tackles timely issues in this era of DNA testing, a culture of “canceling” people, and a bloated health care system, including navigating identity questions, salvaging muddled relationships, and making costly sacrifices to pay for medical expenses. It also invites readers to think about what family really means.

Excerpt: Chapter 8

That Sunday, Sol's family gets together for Mickey's birthday. Her mom cooks a ton of homemade Polish sausage, potato pancakes, and sauerkraut, his favorite meal. Patricia Thompson is originally Patty Sipinski from a big Polish family in Baltimore and has recipes that have been passed down in her family for generations. Mickey always talks about how blessed he is to have found her—and not just because of the cooking. It's a bittersweet story, since the reason they met and eventually married was because Sol's dad, Patrick, had died.

Mickey is Mike Thompson, the owner of Mike's Moving. Everyone in Baltimore knows his company's jingle: “Make your move go right, move with Mike...” All these years later, people still sing it to him. That jingle was the best money he could have ever spent on his business. Mike's Moving is who moved Sol's family into the house they bought with Sol's dad's insurance money. Mickey and Patty became friends, and he always seemed to be there when she needed help with something. They got married about five years after Patrick died.

Today Mickey is turning sixty-eight, and the timing helps Sol figure out her next move. Her mom has always kept a row of photo albums on a bookcase in the living room. Sol decides to look for a picture of her mom when she was pregnant with her. Willow sits beside her as they look through the old pictures and talk about their memories. Memories of their dad too, though she wonders whether she really remembers him at all or if the memories are conjured from the stories people have told her over the years and the old pictures like this. Dove was a little older when he died, eight years old, and so she definitely has real memories of him. She's living in California now, working with a high-profile commercial real estate development company, so Sol can't tap into her memories now. Dove did a quick video call to say happy birthday to Mickey, but that was hours ago.

“Oh, here's a picture of mom pregnant with me! And you and Dove are just swarming her legs!” Willow shouts out.

“Oh, here's one of mom when she was pregnant with Dove. Looking super crunchy granola! I love your hair parted down the middle like that, Mom!” Sol yells to the kitchen.

“Aww, here I am at my first birthday! Aren't I cute?” Sol says. “No preggo mom, though! Hey Mom, do you have a picture when you were pregnant with me?”

“I don’t know—isn’t there one in there?” Patty answers.

“Hmm, I don’t see one,” Sol says, but she decides not to push it. They keep looking through the albums and especially crack up about their old prom pictures.

The Polish food has her thinking about her Grandma and Grandpa Sipinski. They both died when the girls were in high school, but before that, the family had all spent a lot of time together. Patty’s younger sister lived in the Sipinski family house now. Sol looks through the older pictures to find one of her grandparents and asks her mom if she can take it home with her.

She doesn’t really remember her dad’s parents much. After Patrick died, they pretty much disappeared. Patrick was an only child, and his death completely devastated them. Her mom had once told them that shortly after Patrick died, his dad developed dementia. They used to send checks for the girls’ birthdays, but she can’t remember when that stopped either. She didn’t think about them much because they weren’t really there in the years she remembered. But now that she’s looking through these old pictures, she realizes that it’s another missing part of her family tree.

When she gets home that night, Sol starts looking through her papers for her birth certificate. Where did I put it? When did I last even look at it? She searches for two hours before she finds it wedged in the back of a drawer.

When she looks at the certificate, it says just what it has always said:

State of Maryland Certificate of Live Birth

Child’s name: Sol Surya Garnett

Date of Birth: June 22, 1983

Hour: 7:39 AM

City or Town of Birth: Baltimore City

Hospital Name: Harbor Hospital

Father’s Name: Patrick Gant Garnett

Mother’s Full Maiden Name: Patricia Liliana Sipinski

I certify that this child was born alive on the date and hour stated above.

Certifier’s Signature

Date Signed: June 22, 1983

She’s so confused but decides that’s enough detective work for one day. She leaves the papers strewn all over her bed and takes her journal to the couch with Jericho to try to at least get a couple of thoughts out.

Target Audience

Fans of books by Brit Bennett or Celeste Ng, or the TV series *This Is Us*

Life experiences: Late-discovery adoptees, kidney disease

Suggested Interview Topics

1. What was your inspiration? What made you write a book?
2. Talk about your book writing process. How did you push through any writer's block and what inspired you to keep writing?
3. What is your encouragement for novice authors? How did you find your voice for this book?
4. Did anything change in the process of writing the book? Were there any other characters, different story lines, deleted chapters, or alternate endings you considered and what led you through the decision process?
5. Can you tell us about some of the research you did for the book?
6. How did you choose the names for the characters?
7. Did you make a deliberate choice to rewrite the narrative about Baltimore? Did you use real Baltimore places and landmarks to tell your story?
8. Health problems are linked to family in many ways. Where did the kidney transplant theme come from? Is transplant or kidney disease something you have personal experience with?
9. How do topics of race and identity inform the story?
10. What do you want readers to come away with?
11. Your author bio talks about your commitment to childhood literacy and getting new stories out into the world. How do those things play out in your life?
12. How did Sol show your unique characteristics? Does she or do other characters represent elements of your personality?

Family Secrets Are Exposed to Save a Mother's Life

Baltimore, MD, USA - March 27, 2021 - A new novel by author C. H. Avosa raises timely but uncomfortable questions, including how to navigate uncertain racial identity and what levels of sacrifice due to medical crises are too much. The book, *Are You My Mother?*, raises the questions in what seems like a digestible manner, but then leaves them stuck in the readers' throats, inviting them to wrestle along with the characters, dissect and discuss.

"As DNA testing becomes more and more popular, can family lineage even remain a secret anymore? What do we do with the things we learn, especially when they're unexpected? And how far will we go for people just because they share our DNA? These are some of the questions that I was asking and that compelled me as I wrote my characters' stories."

C. H. Avosa is a Baltimore-based author, designer, and owner of several businesses, including Avosa Books. She's dedicated to helping increase childhood literacy and getting new stories for all ages out into the world.

The book centers on Sol Garnett, a woman in her late thirties, who gets an email from a stranger saying that her mom isn't really her mom and that her "real" mother needs a kidney transplant. This sparks an urgent search for answers and takes the reader on a journey full of twists and turns as Sol discovers the real story about her birth and what family actually means.

Are You My Mother? is a gripping, must-read book for lovers of complex family dramas and is recommended as a book club or partner read to start impactful conversations about family, race, health, and identity. Discussion questions are included. It is available through C. H. Avosa's online shop at bookshop.org/shop/chavosabooks and at book retailers everywhere as a paperback or e-book.

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Get in touch to request C. H. Avosa to do a reading and discussion as part of programming around family, health, and race.

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Other Media: Book Launch Party Interview



[WATCH THE INTERVIEW AT CHAVOSABOOKS.COM/LAUNCH-PARTY >](https://chavosabooks.com/launch-party)

Reviews

“An authentic mix of warmth, humor, suspense, and family drama, *Are You My Mother?* is a page-turner that follows a young woman as she uncovers the truth about her family and her own identity. This entertaining book has unexpected twists, and yet the characters are familiar and relatable like old friends—I found pieces of myself and my own story in these pages. A beautiful balance of human fragility and the power of God’s grace makes this story a must-read.”

—Jeneil Palmer Russell, author of *Sunburned Faces*

“*Are You My Mother?* captivated from the first word to the very last. C. H. Avosa’s story simultaneously explores some of the most complex issues of our time—DNA testing, race, and adoption, while taking us on Sol’s journey of coming to terms with her identity. Instantly connecting to unforgettable characters and complex family ties—the difficult decisions each character faced became my own personal dilemmas. Avosa’s one-of-a-kind story will resonate universally, because who doesn’t have a complicated family history? I absolutely adored this book!”

—Ashley Timsuren