

THE CITY MOTHER

BY MAYA SINHA

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WHEN SHE BEGINS WORKING AS A JOURNALIST, Cara describes herself as a “nice girl” who wants to “do everything right” in a world she considers “orderly and slightly dull.” Yet Cara’s job as a crime reporter complicates her view of the world. Why? By the time she leaves that job, does she see things in a more “Catholic” way?

NEWLY MARRIED, CARA ARRIVES IN THE CITY and feels “swept up in an exhilarating new life.” Does this bring to mind a similar time in your own life, venturing out into the unknown? How do their shared experiences of city life benefit Cara, Tim, and the marriage? What potential pitfalls do they face? If you could give them any advice during this phase of life, what would it be?

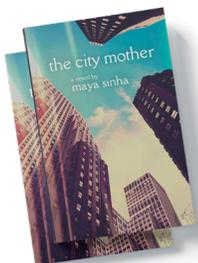
THE CITY MOTHER INCLUDES BIRTH STORIES FOR BOTH OF CARA’S CHILDREN. The atmosphere at her daughter’s birth seems “blandly medical, like a glorified trip to the dentist.” How do these experiences shape Cara’s view of the city and her predicament in it? How do they relate (or not) to your experience of birth as a parent, relative, or friend?

HOW DOES TIM AND CARA’S RELATIONSHIP CHANGE after their first child arrives? At one point, Cara wryly observes that they “had a certain new maturity, in a galley-slave way.” What are the upsides and downsides when a childless couple becomes parents? Is the answer different from a secular/materialist perspective than from a Catholic perspective?

TIM, CARA, AND THEIR CHILDREN LIVE IN AN UNNAMED CITY that has been described as a character in its own right. What *is* it about the city that bothers Cara so much after she has children? St. Augustine contrasted “the City of God” with “the City of Man”—i.e., with our earthly life in a fallen world. What lessons does the city teach Cara?

CARA BEGINS THE NOVEL IN A THERAPY SESSION, and she narrates several chapters from a psychiatric hospital. Does our culture focus too much on therapeutic/pharmacological treatment of feelings like anxiety, depression, and loneliness? What would a broader, more “Catholic” approach look like?

ASIDE FROM HER SMALL CHILDREN, Cara’s main relationships are with her husband, her mother, and her friend from work. At various times, she looks to all three for support. Yet, as time goes on, she feels increasingly isolated. How do these relationships fail to meet Cara’s needs as a new mother? Does Cara herself act in ways that add to her difficulties? What could these characters do better in supporting each other?



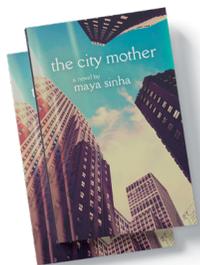
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IN THE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL, Cara meets a troubled young woman who calls herself Flee. Why is this encounter significant for Cara? Overall, does the hospital stay benefit her? If so, how?

CARA AND HER ELDERLY NEIGHBOR TABITHA DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER WELL, but they play important roles in each other's lives. How does grace operate through these characters' interactions? Does their relationship suggest something good about city life?

THROUGHOUT THE NOVEL, Cara—a self-described “escapist”—draws on books and movies to help her understand her experiences. Can the Holy Spirit reach us through art? Are works of imagination mere “escapes” from reality? What movie, book, or piece of music has spoken to you at a critical time in your life?



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