



THE HEART FOLDS EARLY

A Memoir

Jill Christman

"At once fierce and exquisitely tender, *The Heart Folds Early* is a breathtaking journey into the mind of a mother grappling with an impossible choice. Jill Christman has written a profoundly generous book, offering her story with open palms."

—NICOLE GRAEV LIPSON,
author of *Mothers and Other Fictional Characters*

MARCH

296 pages

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American Lives

This book is about what it means to make a choice. As mothers, how do we carry life and death in our bodies and survive with our hearts intact?

The Heart Folds Early is a story of transformation through tragedy, and an examination of the way in which great loss can make us simultaneously fearful and intrepid. Emerging from a childhood that included both devastating sexual abuse and the sustaining joy of being deeply (if imperfectly) loved, Jill Christman's sights were set on building and protecting her own happy family—until her fiancé was killed in a car accident.

Christman folds the mournful recklessness of the young widow she was against the backdrop of her later marriage and new motherhood, including the choice to end a half-term pregnancy when a routine ultrasound revealed her baby boy had just half a heart. Courageous, clear-eyed, tender, and unexpectedly funny, Christman's book reflects on her life and asks: What happens when we're afraid the worst thing will happen and then, sometimes, it does? What does it mean to make and live with a heartrending choice? How do we carry life and death in our bodies and survive with our hearts intact?

Jill Christman is the author of *If This Were Fiction: A Love Story in Essays* (Nebraska, 2022), *Darkroom: A Family Exposure*, and *Borrowed Babies: Apprenticing for Motherhood*. She is a professor in the Creative Writing Program at Ball State University, where she serves as editor of *River Teeth: A Journal of Nonfiction Narrative and Beautiful Things*.

"This book is a continuous wonder, a compulsively readable story told with keen wisdom and nerves of steel about the fierce desire to grow and birth babies from a full life of one's own."—Sonya Huber, author of *Voice First: A Writer's Manifesto*

"A brilliant, breathtaking memoir about the dignity and necessity of our choices. . . . Jill Christman writes about the toughest matters of human existence with a directness, empathy, and humor that is the closest thing I'll ever know to love born from a page."—Brooke Champagne, author of *Nola Face: A Latina's Life in the Big Easy*



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