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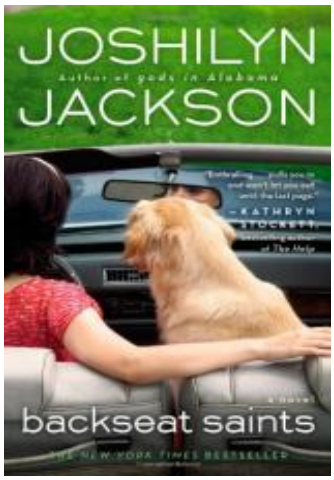
Backseat Saints

by Joshilyn Jackson



About the Book

Rose Mae Lolley is a fierce and dirty girl, long-suppressed under flowery skirts and bow-trimmed ballet flats. As "Mrs. Ro Grandee" she's trapped in a marriage that's thick with love and sick with abuse. Her true self has been bound in the chains of marital bliss in rural Texas, letting "Ro" make eggs, iron shirts, and take her punches. She seems doomed to spend the rest of her life battered outside by her husband and inside by her former self, until fate throws her in the path of an airport gypsy --- one who shares her past and knows her future. The tarot cards foretell that Rose's beautiful, abusive husband is going to kill her. Unless she kills him first.

Hot-blooded Rose Mae escapes from under Ro's perky compliance and emerges with a gun and a plan to beat the hand she's been dealt. Following messages that her long-missing mother has left hidden for her in graffiti and behind paintings, Rose and her dog Gretel set out from Amarillo, TX back to her hometown of Fruiton, AL, and then on to California, unearthing a host of family secrets as she goes. Running for her life, she realizes that she must face her past in order to overcome her fate --- death by marriage --- and become a girl who is strong enough to save herself from the one who loves her best.

Backseat Saints will dazzle readers with a fresh and heartwrenching portrayal of the lengths a mother will go to right the wrongs she's created, and how far a daughter will go to escape the demands of forgiveness. With the seed of a minor character from her popular best-seller, **Gods In Alabama**, Jackson has built a whole new story full of her trademark sly wit, endearingly off-kilter characters, and utterly riveting plot twists.

Discussion Guide

1. In the first chapter of the book, Ro says about Rose Mae that she was ?a girl I buried years ago.? How distinct are these two facets of Ro?s persona? Is it helpful or harmful for her to try to keep her two --- and later, three --- ?identities? separate?

2. Rose Mae?s mother has been flying to Amarillo and stalking Rose for years before Rose finally catches her at it in the airport. Do you think Claire allows herself to be seen, or is it an accident?

3. Ro feels she is complicit in the violence Thom subjects her to. Is this possible? What role do you think her father?s actions against her --- and her mother --- play in her current marital situation?

4. Think about Rose Mae?s houses throughout the book: Thom Grandee?s house in Texas, Gene Lolley?s house in Alabama, her mother?s house in California. Does Rose consider any of these places home? What would it take for Rose to be truly at home, and do you think she finds one, or ever will?

5. Ro discovers her mother has changed her name just as she herself has. What does a name change really do to each woman?s identity? What does Mirabelle?s refusal to call her daughter Ivy mean? Are their intentions in shedding their old identities the same, and are either successful in accomplishing this? What do you think Jackson is saying about names and identities in this book?

6. What is the significance of the ?backseat saints?? How do you explain or discount their existence here?

7. What does it say about Mirabelle that she reads people?s futures for a living? Why do you think she chose this line of work? How does she reconcile this talent for foretelling with her past? Does Rose believe in the tarot cards? Do you? Why or why not?

8. When Rose Mae comes up with the idea that Jim Beverly will save her, do you believe that he can? Do you think she could have left Thom without the potential of Jim?s saving her? What do you think the inability to find Jim did to alter her perspective?

9. A haircut is a powerful tool for change --- what did it signify for Rose? Does an external change often bring about internal change? Have you ever wished for --- or had --- such a transformation? What were the effects?

10. Mrs. Fancy and Ro have a unique bond that deepens as they find out more about each others? lives. Do you think Mrs. Fancy was drawn to Ro as a way to make up for her daughter?s troubles? Do you think Ro was actively seeking a mother figure in Mrs. Fancy? How has their relationship helped and hindered each woman?

11. One of the novel?s central themes is forgiveness. Who has the most difficulty forgiving, and is this legitimate? Who in this book most deserves forgiveness, in your opinion, and why?

12. Rose Mae brings only her trusted dog, Gretel, with her from Texas on her travels. She also meets and befriends Parker?s dogs in California. What is the significance of the company of animals here? What role do Parker?s dogs have in allowing her to trust their owner?

13. When Rose is first interested in Parker, she reverts to the only mode of male interaction she knows --- flirtation. Why

is this such a dangerous instinct for her? Do you think she is able to break herself of this habit in the end?

14. Many characters in this book are overly attached to, or ?stuck? in the past. Consider Rose Mae?s unchanged childhood room in Gene?s second house, and in her mother?s house in California, for example. What do you think this says about the Lolley family, or about Southern culture? Of what in your life have you had difficulty letting go?

15. What do you think of the manner in which Mirabelle went about saving Rose Mae? Do you think she had a choice in killing Thom? Was she wrong or right to do so, and why? Is her punishment justified?

Author Bio

Joshilyn Jackson is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of numerous novels, including GODS IN ALABAMA and NEVER HAVE I EVER. Her books have been translated into more than a dozen languages. A former actor, Jackson is also an award-winning audiobook narrator. A recent expat from the American South, she and her family have settled in upstate New York.

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