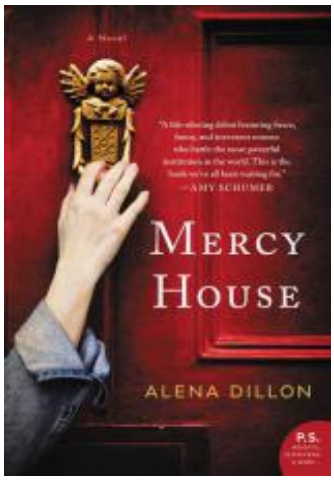
Mercy House

by Alena Dillon



About the Book

She would stop at nothing to protect the women under her care.

Inside a century-old row house in Brooklyn, renegade Sister Evelyn and her fellow nuns preside over a safe haven for the abused and abandoned. Gruff and indomitable on the surface, warm and wry underneath, little daunts Evelyn, until she receives word that Mercy House will be investigated by Bishop Hawkins, a man with whom she shares a dark history. In order to protect everything they?ve built, the nuns must conceal many of their methods, which are forbidden by the Catholic Church.

Evelyn will go to great lengths to defend all that she loves. She confronts a gang member, defies the church, challenges her own beliefs and faces her past. She is bolstered by the other nuns and the vibrant, diverse residents of the shelter --- Lucia, Mei-Li, Desiree, Esther and Katrina --- whose differences are outweighed by what unites them: they?ve all been broken by men but are determined to rebuild.

Amidst her fight, Evelyn discovers the extraordinary power of mercy and the grace it grants, not just to those who receive it, but to those strong enough to bestow it.

Discussion Guide

1. This novel takes place before the #MeToo movement gained traction in social media. How might the characters have benefited from the voices and ideals of those activists? In what ways would a shift in time have affected the plot?

2. Sister Evelyn is a heroic character, but she makes mistakes too. Were there any moments when you felt frustrated by her mindset or actions?

3. There is a large emphasis on female characters and their relationships in this novel. Did you feel male characters (Father John, Bishop Hawkins, Evelyn?s father, Sean, etc.) were presented fairly or unfairly?

4. How is the setting of Bed-Stuy important to the story? How might a different setting have affected the conflict and/or characters?

5. Evelyn?s brother, Sean, demonstrates a history with violence, first in World War II and then when he murders his neighbor. What did you think of his character, and in what ways do you think Sean?s situation and the reasons behind his imprisonment influenced Evelyn?s life?s work? Do you think her forgiving attitude toward her brother is justified?

6. How did Evelyn?s childhood and family relationships, particularly with her father, affect her life long-term?

7. Do you think Evelyn?s actions in helping a young woman get an abortion were defensible? Do you think the Catholic Church was right to excommunicate Evelyn? Why or why not?

8. In what ways is heritage important to the characters, particularly Esther, Mei-Li, Lucia and Evelyn herself?

9. How do issues of sexuality motivate character choices in this novel?

10. In what ways were you surprised by the attitudes and actions of the sisters? Did they challenge or reinforce your preconceived notions of women religious?

11. The nun population has been steadily decreasing since the 1960s. Do you think this is a shame, or do you find the calling to be outdated, unnecessary or even counterproductive? Why are we still fascinated by stories of women in the religious life?

12. How might the course of Evelyn?s life have been altered had she not been sexually assaulted in the convent? Do you think she still would have gone on to help the women of Mercy House? If not, can a traumatic event ever be considered valuable if positive effects transpire because of it?

13. What is the importance of names in this book? Do you find names to be relevant in your life?

14. Each of the women who come to Mercy House gets her own voice and story, but, save for Evelyn, none of the sisters do. Why do you think the author made this creative choice?

15. Did Evelyn truly have a calling, or was she solely influenced by her father?s choices?

16. What do you imagine happens beyond the close of this book between Evelyn and Eloise, to the other sisters and residents of Mercy House, and to Mercy House itself?

Author Bio

Alena Dillon is the author of MERCY HOUSE, a *Library Journal* Best Book of 2020; THE HAPPIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD, a "Good Morning America" pick; MY BODY IS A BIG FAT TEMPLE, a memoir of pregnancy and early parenting; and EYES TURNED SKYWARD, her latest novel.

Alena?s work has appeared in publications including *The Daily Beast*, *LitHub*, *River Teeth*, *Slice Magazine*, *The Rumpus* and *Bustle*.

She teaches creative writing and lives on the north shore of Boston with her husband, children, black lab and lots of books.

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