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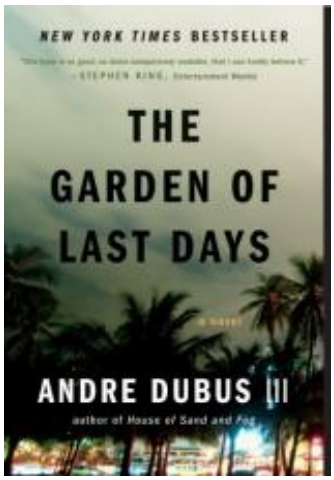
The Garden of Last Days

by Andre Dubus III



About the Book

"So good, so damn compulsively readable, that I can hardly believe it." --Stephen King, *Entertainment Weekly*

In his stunning follow-up to the #1 best-selling **House of Sand and Fog**, Andre Dubus draws us into the lives of three deeply flawed, driven people whose paths intersect on a September night in Florida. April, a stripper, has brought her daughter to work at the Puma Club for Men. There she encounters Bassam, a foreign client both remote and too personal, and free with his money. Meanwhile, another man, AJ, has been thrown out of the club, and he?s drunk and angry and lonely. From these explosive elements comes a relentless, raw, and page-turning narrative that seizes the reader by the throat with psychological tension, depth, and realism.

Discussion Guide

1. What are some possible meanings of this book?s title? What various images and interpretations of ?paradise? appear here?

2. The characters believe their own version of the truth, and each truth seems perfectly plausible while we?re in the head of that character. Is everyone in this book (and outside it) susceptible to having false convictions? Is it possible for conflicting truths to exist at the same time?

3. Children are central to this novel, and even though love between the parents is rare, the children are loved. How is the love between parents and children a touchstone for various characters in the book? How are motherhood and fatherhood represented?

4. What is the effect of the author?s use of foreign words such as ?nuhood??

5. Historical facts aside, what does the Florida setting bring to this novel? Could it have been set anywhere else in the country?

6. How are the characters molded by their pasts? Do any of them escape their upbringing?

7. How do you feel about the particular blend of fiction and history in this book? Should the author have strayed further from --- or hewed closer to --- the historical reality?

8. The characters all seem to think highly of themselves. What does this say about the meaning of self-esteem and the value we place on it?

9. How does social class affect the lives of the characters? Other ?9/11 novels? center on the lives of the privileged, who no longer feel safe after the terrorist attacks. Here, the characters (except for Jean) are on the economic edge. How does this shape the story and your response to it?

10. The author has chosen to tell this story in alternating third-person points of view, but each third-person point of view is so close to the character that it makes you feel almost as if you were inside that person?s head. If the author had used first-person voices instead, would that have been too close for comfort? Does preserving a slight distance between the characters and the author make a difference in terms of where you place your trust?

11. To what extent is AJ a victim of circumstances, and to what extent is he the author of his own predicament? What about the other characters?

12. What are the flaws and strengths of each of the characters in this book? Do they have anything in common?

13. Sex is obviously important to every character in this book, ranging from chastity to pornography and rape. Are there any happy sexual relationships? Why or why not? What are the various depictions of women in this book, and is the Western or non-Western view of women more prone to objectification and violence?

14. Are these characters shaped by their religious beliefs (or lack of them), or are their religious convictions shaped by their worldly experiences? What does this book have to say about religion?

15. Why is it important to Bassam to know Spring?s real name? What does it mean to them when Bassam touches the scar from her caesarian? What is the reader to think of it?

16. It is often said that fiction can reveal truths that nonfiction can?t express. Is that the case here?

17. The central drama of this book takes place within fewer than twenty-four hours. The timeline then stretches out as the story moves from individual psychology to a larger context, until we see each character in the light of actual historical events. Does this device work for you? Why or why not?

18. Is there redemption at the end of this story?

Author Bio

Andre Dubus III is the author of GHOST DOGS, SUCH KINDNESS, GONE SO LONG, DIRTY LOVE, THE GARDEN OF LAST DAYS, HOUSE OF SAND AND FOG (a #1 *New York Times* bestseller, Oprah?s Book Club pick, and finalist for the National Book Award), and TOWNIE. His work has been recognized with an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Magazine Award, and two Pushcart Prizes. He lives with his family in Newburyport, Massachusetts.

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