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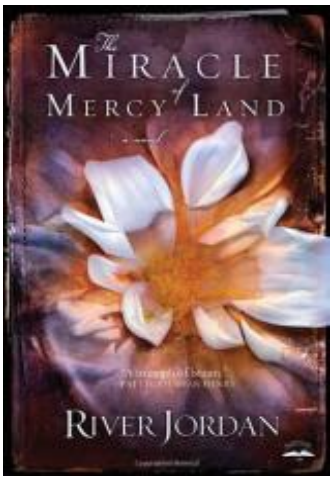
The Miracle of Mercy Land

by River Jordan



About the Book

What if you had the power to amend choices you made in the past? Would you do it even if it changed everything?

Mercy Land has made some unexpected choices for a young woman in the 1930s. The sheltered daughter of a traveling preacher, she chooses to leave her rural community to move to nearby Bay City on the warm, gulf-waters of southern Alabama. There she finds a job at the local paper and spends seven years making herself indispensible to old Doc Philips, the publisher and editor. Then she gets a frantic call at dawn --- it?s the biggest news story of her life, and she can?t print a word of it.

Doc has come into possession of a curious book that maps the lives of everyone in Bay City --- decisions they?ve made in the past, and how those choices affect the future. Mercy and Doc are consumed by the mystery locked between the pages --- Doc because he hopes to right a very old wrong, and Mercy because she wants to fulfill the book?s strange purpose. But when a mystery from Mercy?s past arrives by train, she begins to understand that she will have to make choices that will deeply affect everyone she loves --- forever.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel opens with the birth of Mercy Land along the backwaters of Bittersweet Creek, a small, rural outcropping of people where she is raised, but the character later moves to a nearby city. Have you ever found yourself living in a place very different from the one you grew up in? Did you remain there or return ?home? again? How did the change of place or the return home affect your life?

2. There is an undercurrent of the influence that Mercy?s mother and father had on her life by their steady presence and certain faith. However, another person in Bittersweet Creek also had a lot of input into her upbringing. How was Aunt Ida?s influence different from that of Mercy?s parents? How might Mercy?s life have turned out differently without

Aunt Ida? Have you had a similar experience in your life? Were there other family members or friends who contributed to your life experience in a distinct way?

3. Part of Mercy Land?s moxie comes from her rural upbringing where she had the freedom to run and romp along the trees and creeks in a fearless kind of way. How was your childhood similar or different? Do you believe having a more sheltered life as a child might cause a person to be more hesitant or fearful of the unknown?

4. One thread running through the novel is Mercy?s relationship with Doc. Perhaps in the beginning Doc was a bit of a hero, a larger-than-life character to Mercy, who saw him and his wife, Opal, as a king and queen of Bay City. Throughout the story their relationship changes as he becomes her boss, her mentor, and ultimately her friend. Have you experienced relationships that have gone through stages or seasons of change? How have those changes affected the relationships?

5. When Doc?s book shows up, at first Mercy is hesitant to touch it. Why? Why does she change her mind? Do you think she ever really regretted seeing the book and wished that Doc had kept the secret to himself?

6. Mercy becomes dedicated to solving the riddle of the book, fulfilling that purpose, and it being returned to where it belonged. What characteristics does she possess that allow her to tread through such mystical, supernatural waters?

7. John Quincy?s appearance in Bay City stirs up conflicting emotions and revelations for Mercy. What stands out to you as the most prevalent internal conflict? As the story progresses, how does Mercy come to terms with these things?

8. The story is told through the eyes of three main characters: Mercy, Doc, and John Quincy. Whose voice resonates most with you? Did you enjoy hearing the story from one character?s point of view more than the others?? If so, why?

9. The novel is set a few years before World War II, in 1938. How did this time period affect your experiencing the characters, the setting, and the events?

10. The book reveals the paths that people have chosen --- and the ones that they have left behind. Have you ever considered some of the choices you made in life to have been a major turning point for you? Do you think that your life would have been much different had you taken another road or that you would be exactly where you are at this point in your life regardless? Is life more a destiny created by our choices or an inherent fate that cannot be changed?

11. A strange woman shows up in Bay City in search of John Quincy. Ultimately, she knows about the book and wants control of it. Who do you think Pricilla really is? If she were a symbolic representation for something, what do you believe that would be?

12. John Quincy eventually experiences deep changes, but they certainly weren?t the ones he was hoping for or expecting. Do you think he ultimately makes a change for the better? When you have experienced changes or events in life that have been different than you anticipated, was the outcome sometimes better than you expected? Have you learned things or built relationships through these unexpected turns of events?

13. Mercy comes to believe that the book is primarily a book of stories --- one that illustrates clearly how those lives, those stories, interrelate and intersect. Do you believe that our choices affect not only our lives but also the lives of those

around us? That even people we don?t know are affected by our choices?

14. The daily newspaper in Bay City plays a significant role in the novel. Why is it so important? How does it affect the story?s unfolding? Why do Doc and Mercy love the paper so much?

15. When you turn the last page of **The Miracle of Mercy Land**, what is the strongest impression the novel leaves with you? If you were to have one takeaway memory of the novel --- something you could apply to your everyday world --- what would it be?

Author Bio

River Jordan is a southerner with a global perspective. She began her writing career as a playwright and spent over ten years with the Loblolly Theatre group, where her original works were produced, including *Mama Jewels: Tales from Mullet Creek, Soul, Rhythm and Blues*, and *Virga*.

Ms. Jordan?s first novel, THE GIN GIRL (Livingston Press, 2003), has garnered such high praise as ?This author writes with a hard bitten confidence comparable to Ernest Hemingway. And yet, in the Southern tradition of William Faulkner, she can knit together sentences that can take your breath.?

Kirkus Reviews described her second novel, THE MESSENGER OF MAGNOLIA STREET, as ?a beautifully written atmospheric tale.? It was applauded as ?a tale of wonder? by Southern Living, who chose the novel as their Selects feature for March 2006, and described by other reviewers as ? a riveting, magical mystery? and ?a remarkable book.?

Her third novel, SAINTS IN LIMBO has been painted by some of the finest fiction voices of today as ?a lyrical and relentlessly beautiful book,? and ?a wise, funny, joyful and deadly serious book, written with a poet?s multilayered sense of metaphor and meter and a page-turning sense of urgency.

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