



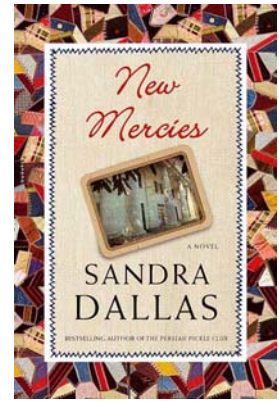
New Mercies

By Sandra Dallas

St. Martin's Griffin

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About the Book:

Natchez, Mississippi, in 1933, is a place suspended in time. The silver and china is still dented and cracked from Yankee invaders. And the houses have names...and memories. Nora Bondurant is running away--from her husband's death, from his secrets, and from the ghosts that dog her every step. When she receives a telegram informing her that she has an inheritance, Nora suddenly has somewhere to run to: a house named Avoca in Natchez, Mississippi. Now, she's learning that the lure of Natchez runs deep, and that, along with Avoca, she's inherited a mystery. Nora's aunt Amalia Bondurant was killed in a murder/suicide, and the locals are saying nothing more--except in hushed, honeyed tones. As Nora becomes more and more enmeshed in the community and in her family's history, she learns surprising things about the life and death of her aunt: kinship isn't always what it seems, loyalty can be as fierce as blood relations, and every day we are given new mercies to heal the pain of loss and love.

Reading Group Guide Questions:

1. Nora Bondurant is a woman with secrets. At what point in the story did this become clear to you? How do her secrets mirror the secrets of Avoca?
2. In what ways does Natchez of 1933 cling to its past? In what ways has it shed its past?
3. Nora is an outsider when she first arrives, and views this town with an outsider's eyes. What are some of the more surprising aspects of the South that Nora discovers?
4. What is the "old South" and what is the "new South"? Which does Pickett Long represent? Which does Odalie represent?
5. What was your initial impression of the relationship between Ezra and Aunt Polly, and at what moment did that impression change?
6. Was Amalia a victim in any way? If so, how? If not, why not?
7. Were you surprised at Nora's reaction to the revelations at the end of the book and do you agree with how she responded?
8. How does the theme of "memory" play in the book? How does each character receive his or her own "new mercies"?