

# THE GARDEN OF MERCY

“This was an absolutely moving and heartfelt read dusted with magical realism.”

“Merkovic dives deep, unafraid to tackle contemporary issues.”

“Her characters are relatable, flawed, and utterly human.”

## FOREWARD

*The Garden of Mercy* was nominated as one of the top 61 best indie books of all time by Reedsy Discovery. I would love it if you would consider *The Garden of Mercy* for your next book club discussion group.


I promise you that the novel will foster soul-searching in each participant and lively conversations between the group. Some may even walk away with a different perspective on certain issues, be it complicated mother-daughter relationships, LGBT, handicaps, America's nursing home crisis, or the right to die with dignity.

Book Club meetings are all about the company and perhaps sharing a pastry and a glass of wine, too.

For a congenial evening, you may consider asking readers to bring a picture from their youth taken outdoors in a garden, preferably. If there are flowers in it, even better. Or they may choose to bring photos of their family, mothers, and grandparents, too. For a bit of fun, you may also encourage them to share one of their own childhood fairy stories.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. How did the prologue affect your reading of the book?
2. What is the scent that reminds you most of your childhood?
3. What is your favorite flower? And why.
4. If you could preserve one scent among all of nature's, what would it be?
5. Mercy has had a profound relationship with the scented beings since her encounter with her grandfather's jasmine. How does this relationship change as she gets older?
6. Mercy finds solace in the bosom of mother trees and friendship among wildflowers. Do you think her relationship with nature would have been different had her mother been loving?
7. Which is your favorite character in the book? Do you relate to that person, and why? Does your opinion of this character change as the story unfolds?
8. What role does Tina play in Mercy's life? How does this relationship change through the story?
9. Every character inside Oleander holds a secret. Which secret affects you the most? Do you think the characters were right to keep them hidden?



10. Would we treat people differently if we knew their secrets? Would you forgive them their sins?

11. The world is constantly changing, and so are society's opinions about what is acceptable and what isn't. Do you believe that in today's times, these secrets should be kept or told?

12. Mercy grows up having a troubled relationship with her mother and feeling unwanted. How does this sense of being unwanted influence her life and the decisions she makes along the way?

13. Do you believe children have any obligation to forgive their parents and take care of them later in life, even when the relationship is strained? How much do you think childhood heartaches make us who we are?

14. After a stroke renders Eugene bedridden, he begs Mercy to help him die. Does he have a right to ask that of her? What would you have done?

15. How do the thoughts of doing what's right by her conscience and wrong by the law play into Mercy's decision?

16. We are raised to become independent, responsible beings in charge of every aspect of our lives. Do you believe we should also have the right to decide when and how we die?

17. Do you consider euthanasia an act of mercy or murder?

18. Would you kill someone if it would save them and no one knew?

19. Does the end of the story feel organic to you, or were you surprised by it?

20. Magical realism is present throughout the book. Mercy uses nature's fantasy to overcome the voids in her life. Do you believe magic exists in the real world? Have you experienced it?



## POSTSCRIPT

Writing this novel, I had to dig deep into my past career as a physical therapist. I wanted to bring to life memorable characters inspired by the patients I have met and treated. I have literally spent thousands of hours in nursing homes, some resembling minimum-security prisons, others replicas of Victorian mansions. Most were sorrowful places where elders go (or are placed) to be forgotten. The one thing these homes had in common was that they all housed residents with extraordinary life stories, haunting secrets, and dying wishes. All I had to do was listen and be inspired.

As for the flowers, I had to research extensively the way plants come to life and take on their traits and how they respond when we plant them, cut them, water them (or not), and talk to them. The more I learned, the more I wondered if I could communicate with the beings in my garden. So, I started to smell every plant and petal, touch every leaf and stem, watch closely, and listen intently, pausing and pondering endlessly. It transformed my life. I can't go anywhere outside and not feel the green world's life force. Try it. I bet there's magic in your garden, too. All you have to do is pay attention with all your senses.