



The Shape  
of  
Mercy

THURSDAY

A Novel

SUSAN MEISSNER

## READERS GUIDE

1. *The Shape of Mercy* is about three distinct women from vastly different generations: Mercy, Abigail, and Lauren. What do you feel they have in common? What separates them?
2. The diary's pages reveal a time and place of tragic historical significance. What emotions did the diary evoke in you? If you were faced with Mercy's choices, which would you have chosen? Discuss why.
3. Mercy writes about a bird seeking shelter in her barn during the first few weeks of January 1692. What do you think the bird represents for Mercy? Lauren? Abigail?
4. Lauren describes Abigail's library as suffocating, overly decorated, and bursting with books—a room in sharp contrast to the rest of the house. Why do you think this room was like that? Does Lauren's opinion of the library remain consistent throughout the story?
5. When Lauren first meets Raul, she assumes he is a member of the catering staff. Later she assumes he is a rich, upwardly mobile, premed student who cavalierly rolls up the sleeves of two-hundred-dollar Armani shirts. Discuss how you believe we fall into the trap of such assumptions. Think of a personal experience when, based on first impressions, you assumed someone to be different than they actually were.
6. Esperanza is convinced Graham wants to have Abigail declared unfit to manage her affairs. Why does she think that? Do you agree?

7. Were you satisfied with Tom Kimura's response to Lauren's visit and revelations about Abigail? How might Abigail's life have been different if she had married Tom Kimura? What might have happened to the diary then?
8. When Raul takes Lauren up in the plane, she makes the comment, "I'm so small!" He tells her, "It's not always about you." What do you think he means in that moment?
9. What do you think Lauren does after she graduates from college? What kind of career do you imagine her in?
10. John Peter tells Mercy shortly before her arrest that it "is easier to believe ill of someone than good." Discuss whether you think he is right, and why.
11. What do you think of Mercy's final act of compassion? Did she do the right thing?
12. *The Shape of Mercy* is a story about choices, stigma, and preconceived notions. In light of these themes, what did you discover about yourself?