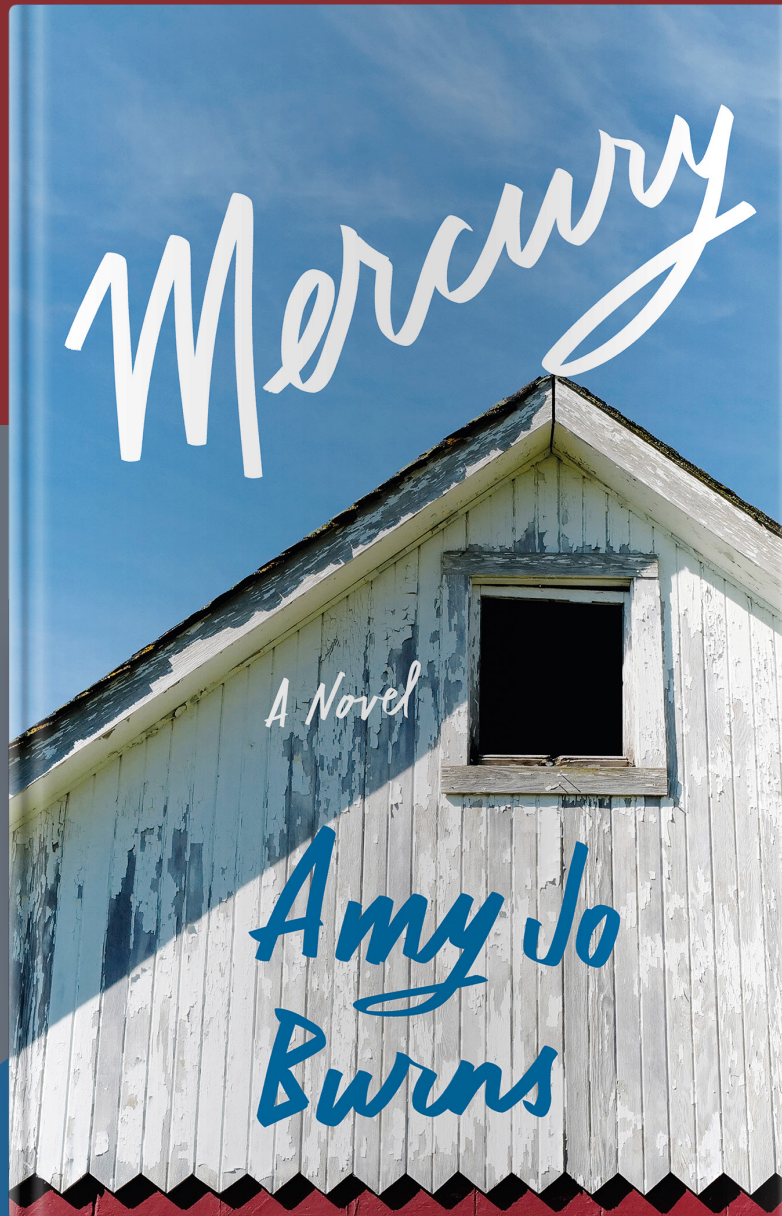


BOOK CLUB KIT



“This book was perfect for a book club because there are so many different angles to look at it from. Amy Jo Burns created complex characters that leave the discussion wide open.”

—REAL FAKE BOOK CLUB (NEW YORK, NY)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Can you relate to any of the family dynamics presented in the book? Does your family have experience keeping secrets for and from each other, and how has this affected your relationships?
- 2 The book switches between the past and present, from before and after Elise's death as well as between character perspectives. How did this structure impact your reading experience and your thoughts about each of the characters?
- 3 What character did you like/connect to the most? What characters did you want to hear more from?

Suggested by Real Fake Book Club (New York, NY)

- 4 How did your opinions of each member of the Joseph family change throughout the novel?
- 5 In what ways were Elise and Marley alike? In what ways were they different?

Suggested by Book Club (Amboy, IL)

- 6 The author often writes about strong women, forgiveness, and loyalty in her work. Discuss how each character relates to these themes and what role the theme plays in their character development.
- 7 How does the novel's setting play a role in the story?
- 8 Mick plans to take the truth behind Elise's death to his grave. Do you think Mick played a role in Elise's death?
- 9 At the end of the novel, the author reveals how Elise and Mick met and the early years of their marriage. Why do you think the author chose to include this chapter? Did this chapter change your feelings about Elise and Mick?
- 10 What do you think happens to the Joseph family after the book ends?



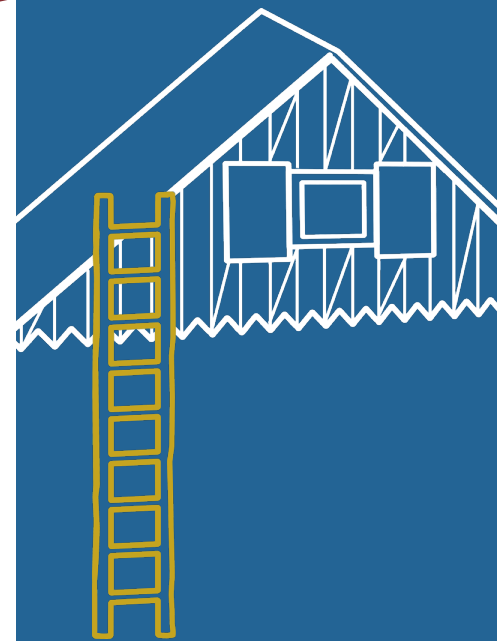
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 11 Each of the Joseph sons play a significant role in keeping their family together: Baylor the strong one, Waylon the responsible one, and Shay the baby. Marley also plays the roles of wife, mother, and the one that got away to the Joseph brothers. By the end of the book, do you think Marley and the Josephs still play their respective roles or have their roles changed?

If you decide to adopt *Mercury* for your book club, we would love to hear about it! Please let us know by emailing us at reader@celadonbooks.com or post on social media using the hashtags #CeladonBookClub and #MercuryBook.



*Sometimes a secret is all
a woman has to call her own.*





AN INTERVIEW

with Amy Jo Burns

AMY JO BURNS is the author of the memoir *Cinderland* and the novel *Shiner*. Her writing has appeared in *Elle*, *Good Housekeeping*, *The Paris Review Daily*, and the anthology *Not That Bad*. A western Pennsylvania native, she now lives in New Jersey with her family.

How did you come up with the idea for *Mercury*?

I come from a family of roofers, and they are some of the most complex, creative, and dauntless people I know. They deserve a novel dedicated to characters like them—and when I couldn't find one to read, I decided to write one of my own. I wanted to write a story about a roofing family in all its complicated splendor—a saga with loads of grit and gravitas but not a lot of money. No college degrees or trust funds. No famous parents. I wanted to write about a family whose members try to save one another and fail, and in that failure find the true bond that holds them together.

I was also inspired by what it takes for a woman to make a life for herself when she has limited choices. These Joseph women—like the women in my family—help build their husbands' careers and don't get paychecks or titles of their own. They raise their children with the full assumed responsibility of child care, and they rarely say no to any of it. I wanted to show the cascading cost of this lack of choice through a generation and also celebrate how a woman finds her way even still.

For those who have read your debut memoir, *Cinderland*, the setting of *Mercury* will seem familiar. What other details of this novel did you draw from your own life?

Though the characters and events in the novel come mostly from my imagination, *Mercury* is very much a real place. Many beloved landmarks in Mercer (the real name of my hometown) appear in the book, from the baseball field in the opening scene to the church attic where some of the story's juiciest moments take place. Even the Josephs' "great house" is based on the huge Victorian my grandparents used to own in town.

My father once repaired the steeple of the Presbyterian church years ago, and he told me a story about climbing up into that creepy space and having a swarm of bats fly toward him. He drew me a map of the attic and the ladder that led to the steeple, and he showed me how one wrong step would have sent him straight through the sanctuary ceiling. In many ways, that story was *Mercury's* first spark.

The story is told from the perspective of most of the novel's main characters—protagonist Marley, three Joseph family brothers, and matriarch Elise—but never the family patriarch and complicated character Mick. Why did you choose to tell the story this way?

I love telling the story behind the story—and in *Mercury's* fictional universe, everyone knows Mick Joseph as the leader of the family. It's his name on the business logo, on the deed to the house, and on the bank account. He's already shared his story with anyone who will listen, and in his mind, he's always been the hero. I wanted to reach toward the other members of the family, who each hold their own version of the truth. Together, their stories depict family loyalty in all its tangled and messy iterations. Who one of them calls a hero, the next calls a villain. One's moment of celebration is another's deepest loss. Each of them commits sins for the sake of those they love; they tell lies, and they keep secrets. Every one of the Josephs owns a piece of the blame and the burden for what their family has become, and they each need to determine if they want to play a part in its salvation.

What themes did you set out to tackle in writing this novel?

This book is full of characters who each believe it's their role in life to save the family, even though they're all terrible at it. Waylon, the "responsible" son, thinks saving the family business will hold the Josephs together, while Shay, the youngest, is certain that roofing is to blame for tearing the family apart. Baylor, the oldest, tries to corral his father's misdeeds to spare his mother pain, and Marley keeps her mother-in-law's secrets in exchange for her own seat at the family table, no matter what it costs her. Their story asks whether it's possible to "fix" someone you love, and what might be gained by choosing one another just as they are instead.

To me, the heart of this book is about what it means to belong—whether to a person, a place, a family, or even a craft—and how that belonging forms our identity and the price we pay for it. So often we mistake silence for true belonging, and I wanted to write about a family who discovers the power in letting one another's voices finally be heard.

Mercury

CHARACTER PLAYLIST

LISTEN TO THE PLAYLIST, ALONG WITH SONGS FROM SCENES IN THE NOVEL,
HERE: [HTTPS://SPOTI.FI/46WSWUK](https://spotify.fi/46WSWUK)

MARLEY

“DANGEROUS” BY ROXETTE

WAYLON

“PLEASE FORGIVE ME” BY BRYAN ADAMS

BAYLOR

HE WANTS YOU TO THINK IT'S “POUR SOME SUGAR ON ME” BY DEF LEPPARD
BUT IT'S ACTUALLY “NOVEMBER RAIN” BY GUNS N' ROSES

SHAY

“RUNNING UP THAT HILL (A DEAL WITH GOD)” BY KATE BUSH

MICK

“MOONLIGHT SERENADE” BY GLENN MILLER ORCHESTRA

ELISE

“MY LOVIN' (YOU'RE NEVER GONNA GET IT)” BY EN VOGUE

JADE

“THAT'S THE WAY LOVE GOES” BY JANET JACKSON

RUTH

“RHIANNON” BY FLEETWOOD MAC

THEO

“HERE COMES THE HOTSTEPPER” BY INI KAMOZE

