



MERCY'S SONG
SARAH HANKS

Discussion Guide

welcome

Thank you for downloading this discussion guide.



I want my novels to generate authentic conversations, digging deep, getting real, unearthing the hidden, and provoking metamorphosis. It is my desire that you use the discussion questions provided to catapult you into true community-building discussion, listening, sharing, and empathizing with others.

If you can find a group of people you can be real with to hash out these questions and discuss your reactions to this book, you are fortunate indeed. And if you can gather around a table with people who may not look or think like you and pursue healing together, you will be a broker of hope in a world that desperately needs it. Whoever you discuss these questions with, may you grow in grace and love.

Many blessings,

Sarah Hanks



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PROLOGUE

1. This prologue picks up right where *Mercy Will Follow Me* left off. How has Natassa grown since the beginning of book one?
2. Why do you think Natassa's mother is so uncomfortable in this scene?
3. What is the significance of Bethany singing the song from Mercy's journal?
4. What do you think the state of Natassa and Brandon's marriage is now?
5. Discuss the significance of the too big bow and Bethany's insistence that Mercy will grow into it.



CHAPTER ONE

1. Chapter One opens three years later. Why do you think DeAndre chose to come back to Java Joes?
2. What's your first impression of Janell?
3. Why do you think DeAndre is falling so fast for Janell?
4. What do you think of them together?
5. Why do you think DeAndre painted a black king? Discuss the value of representation.

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Everything DeAndre
Scott owned fit in the
back of his Corsica.

CHAPTER TWO

1. What do you think of the way Natassa handled the redhead at the park? How would you have handled the situation?
2. Natassa feels like she should be old enough to figure out what the right thing to do is, but she's clueless. Have you ever felt that way? What did you do in that situation?
3. Why do you think Natassa is browsing farmhouse listings on her computer?
4. What is your perception of David? What kind of a young man is he growing up to be?
5. Why do you think Brandon doesn't want to volunteer at St. Anthony's? Why does this bother Natassa?
6. Discuss Faith's reluctance to go to St. Anthony's. How would you have handled the situation?



CHAPTER THREE

1. Why do you think Janell is reluctant to talk about herself?
2. Discuss Janell's ability to find "pictures of Jesus" everywhere. Where do you find His fingerprints?
3. Janell says she doesn't know what she's good at, "But I'm getting pretty good at figuring out what I'm not good at, so by process of elimination, I'll figure it out eventually." Have you ever felt that way or known someone who has? What advice would you give Janell in that moment?
4. Janell says this about the portraits of Jesus: "And just because they are not accurate doesn't mean there isn't something to appreciate in them." Do you agree? Why or why not?
5. Comment on DeAndre's relationship with his mother. How is it not like he expected?
6. How do you think Janell's failure at college has affected her?



I THOUGHT MOSTLY
BOUT MAMA AN
HOW SHES SO
FIERCELY BRAVE.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Are you surprised Janell's parents have accepted DeAndre? Why or why not?
2. Discuss DeAndre and Janell's disagreement over locking the car door when entering the city. Whose side do you most empathize with? Why?
3. Are DeAndre and Janell from different worlds? Do you think they can make it work between them? What challenges will they likely face?
4. Discuss DeAndre's reaction to seeing Mercy. How do you think you would have responded if you were him?

CHAPTER FIVE

1. What do you think about Natassa's choice of a new career? Does it surprise you?
2. Why do you think Bethany had answered with, "Mm-hmm. Is that so?" when Natassa had told her she'd come out on the other side of the rough air into a place of healing?
3. Why do you think DeAndre left the painting at the restaurant but didn't show up himself?
4. Why do you think Janell took the ring?
5. Why didn't she take the painting?



CHAPTER SIX

1. Why do you think hearing the news that her rapist turned himself in affected Natassa the way it did?
2. How would having a face and a name to put with the crime committed years ago help Natassa? How would it make it harder on her?
3. Why do you think DeAndre turned himself in?
4. How did you feel about DeAndre's first jail scene? Have you or anyone you cared about been in jail? How did the experience affect you/them?



CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Have you ever, like Natassa, grasped for something you could control? Natassa chose bread. What did you choose?
2. Have you ever thought that you were over something only to find out that you were definitely not?
3. Discuss Breanna's comment: "It's like this sadness is that long wavy grass. Mommy can't go over it. She can't go under it. She's got to go through it."
4. Discuss Bethany's comment: "But playing a comparison game with pain never seems to end well for anybody. You are fully entitled to feel whatever you're feeling and so is she. Pain is pain. Hurt hurts. It won't hurt you any less by claiming you have more of it."
5. Why do you think Bethany is giving Natassa Mercy's journal now?

*COULD A MAN DIE
FROM SHAME?*

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. Do you think Mercy's having second thoughts about her choice to run south instead of north? Why might she feel conflicted?
2. What might Mercy's life contain now that it hasn't contained before? What new things does she have to adjust to?
3. Discuss the line: It's not the first time she's lied to me. When might Mama have lied to Mercy and why? Is a mother ever justified in lying to her children? Why or why not?
4. Comment on romance during slavery. How was it similar to romantic relationships today? How was it different?

CHAPTER NINE

1. Why do you think Natassa went to St. Anthony's to serve when she knew Janell might show up? Would you have made that same choice? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree with how Bethany handled the situation? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever made the choice to forgive someone only to find yourself wrapped back up in bitterness? What did you do to get free?
4. Why do you think it's important to Natassa to find out who the accomplice was? Why do you think Janell agreed to ask?

CHAPTER TEN



1. Though DeAndre still believed in God, "he didn't carry enough faith to share it, to pass it around, and parcel it out." Have you ever felt like DeAndre?
2. Why do you think Janell visited DeAndre? Was it just to deliver Natassa's message?
3. Why do you think DeAndre doesn't want to rat out the accomplice? Do you agree with his decision? Do you understand it?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. Do you remember the Ferguson riots? How did they affect you (if at all)?
2. Discuss the tension between praying for peace and praying for justice that Natassa was wrestling with. Which way do you find your prayer leaning toward? Are they diametrically opposed?
3. Why do you think Natassa wanted to see the protests up close?
4. How is Natassa identifying with the protestors in this chapter? Why?
5. How do you define justice?



CHAPTER TWELVE

1. Did you learn anything about slavery, African culture, or rice cultivation in this chapter? What did you learn?
2. What is your impression of Jonah? Of his relationship with Mercy?
3. Discuss the practice of owners separating enslaved families. How does this make you feel about the Millers?
4. How does Mercy still feel in between two worlds: white and black? Where do you see her struggling with her identity?
5. What are your thoughts regarding Isaac's preaching? What did he emphasize of the nature and character of God?

*JONAH TOOK MY
HAND TODAY,
AND I WAS A LOG
THAT MET A
FLAME.*

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. In this chapter, Natassa prays an angry prayer for God to protect her car. Have you ever prayed an angry, honest prayer? How do you feel God responded?
2. How has Natassa and Breanna's friendship shifted since Book 1?
3. Why do think knowing the accomplice's name doesn't satisfy Natassa? Did she think it would? What is she looking for with this?
4. What do you think Janell's motivation is for searching out the accomplice? Is Natassa right? Is she trying to blame shift?
5. What good has God worked in Natassa's life from the tragedy she endured? What good has God worked in your life from your lowest moments?



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1. Discuss the celebratory nature of harvest described in the beginning of this chapter. What mixed feelings does Mercy have about it? Why?
2. Did you know how enslaved people passed on African traditions to their masters? In what ways were the enslaved influenced by white culture? In what ways did they influence white culture?
3. What was your reaction to Mercy seeing Susan again? Do you think this friendship can survive their current circumstances?
4. Discuss the sale of enslaved people in the marketplace. How was dehumanization on display?
5. Comment on the significance behind the coins Mercy is given for the market. What all is connected with money for her? What does it represent?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1. Did you know that those who have a sex case are often persecuted by other prisoners? How do you feel about this?
2. Comment on the irony of having a cellie named Rob. What emotions does DeAndre experience around his old friend? Have you ever felt similar?
3. How did you feel about Reg's visit? Do you think his desire to clean himself up is sincere?
4. In this chapter, DeAndre reaffirms that turning himself in was the right thing to do, but wonders why, if that's true, it's so hard. Have you ever done something you felt God was calling you to do only to find out it was much harder than you anticipated? How did you react?
5. How is DeAndre's memory of and connection with his father affecting the choices he makes?
6. Discuss the line: *Hope. How had he given someone something he didn't know he had to give?* How did DeAndre spread hope in prison? How can you spread hope where you are?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1. How do you feel about Brandon's reaction to seeing Natassa in the paper? Was it justified?
2. *Healthy things grow.* How is Natassa growing in this story?
3. Contrast Natassa's style of hospitality with that of her mother's in book one. How are the two women different?
4. Have you or anyone you loved battled with infertility? How have you handled the *Why God* question?
5. *Hurt people hurt people.* Have you seen this play out in your life? How so?
6. How is being discriminated against because of one's uniform like being discriminated against because of the color of one's skin? How is it different?
7. Discuss the food visit. Would you have brought DeAndre a meal if you were Natassa? Have you ever felt God asking you to do something you were reluctant to do? What do you think it looks like to bless your enemies?

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SHE KEPT HER
MOUTH SHUT,
BUT TEARS
FOUND THEIR
PATHS DOWN
HER CHEEKS AS
SHE WATCHED
THIS GROWN
MAN BREAK
DOWN UNDER
THE POWER OF A
VALUE MEAL.

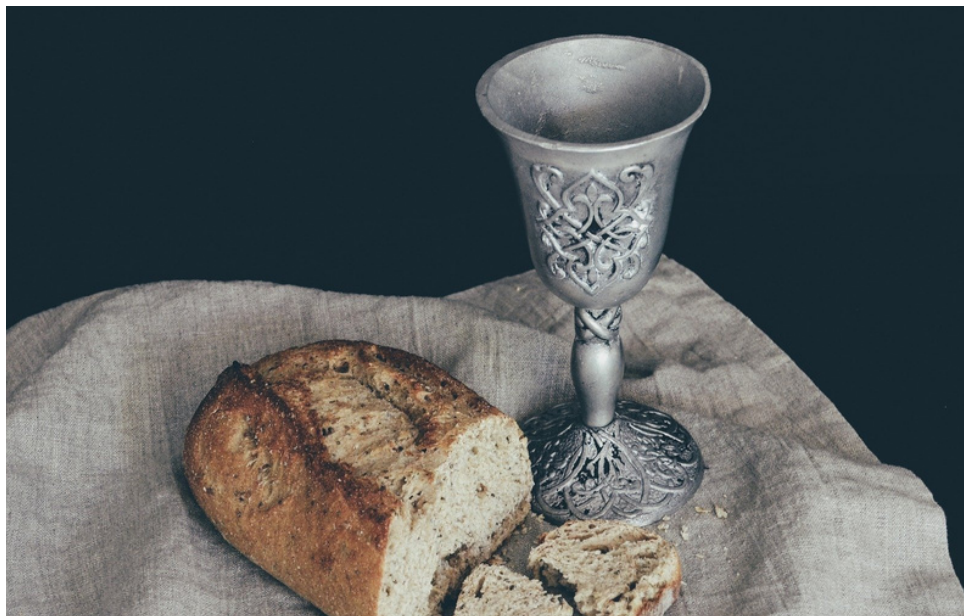
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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

1. Discuss the symbolism of the shoes the Missus gave Mercy to wear. What might they represent?
2. Discuss Mercy's experience fiddling at the party. *My hands were tougher than they had been years ago.* How has Mercy changed since playing the fiddle in the past? How is this experience different than previous ones?
3. How do you feel about the conversation Mercy overheard outside of the church about the "Christian duty" to Christianize slaves?
4. Compare and contrast the church service in this chapter with Isaac's preaching in the woods. Where is the character of God displayed?
5. What is the significance of the service ending in communion?

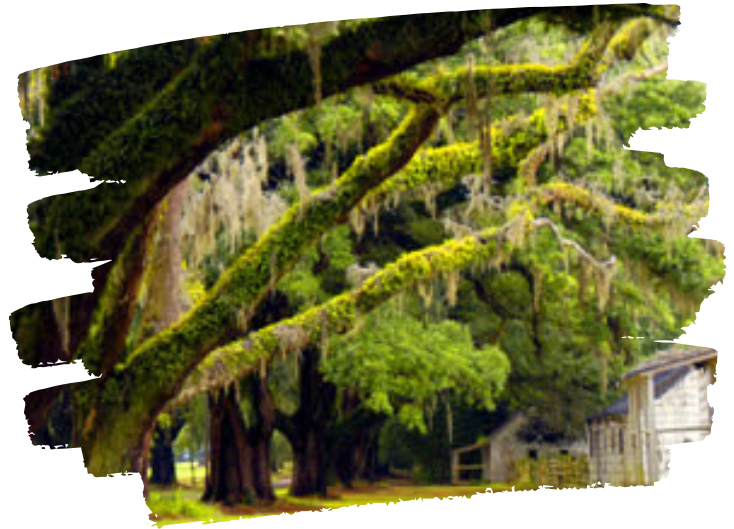
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

1. What is your impression of Susan in this chapter? Why?
2. Comment on the irony of Phoebe waiting on Mercy. How do you feel about this?
3. *She didn't understand that the tired I talked about had weight and length and breadth outside of a sore back and aching feet. It dug down deep into the soul...* Can you empathize with this feeling in any way? How would you describe it?
4. What's the significance of Jonah doctoring Mercy's feet and bringing her shoes? What might it symbolize?
5. What does Mercy remember of her pa? What does she not remember? How might growing up without a father affected her?



CHAPTER NINETEEN

1. Discuss Natassa's reaction to seeing DeAndre's drawings in the hymnal. How might you have reacted?
2. Does your pastor/church address issues of racism and/or racial reconciliation or steer clear of such subjects? If so, is it addressed similarly or differently than shown in this chapter?
3. Why do you think Brandon is opposed to attending the prayer meetings himself?
4. What feelings might you have been feeling if you were Natassa looking at the accomplice in your attack? How do you think you'd react?
5. What does the last scene in this chapter show us about Reg?



CHAPTER TWENTY


1. What are Jonah's positive qualities? How would you describe him to Mama?
2. How is Mercy's story of falling in love with Jonah similar to love stories today? How is it different?
3. If you were an enslaved person, do you think you would want to have children? Why or why not?
4. How are Mercy and Jonah's dreams for the future similar to people's dreams today? How are they different?
5. Were you surprised by the end of this chapter? What do you think is next for Mercy?



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

1. Why do you think DeAndre imagines far-off places from travel magazines?
2. How do the hymns Natassa sent affect DeAndre? Why?
3. Why does having a job give DeAndre hope?
4. Does knowing that Reg drugged DeAndre on the night of the attack change your perspective of DeAndre? Do you think it changed DeAndre's perspective of himself?
5. Discuss DeAndre's reaction to hearing Reg is in jail for murder. Do you understand it?

*ONCE AGAIN, IT
BECAME CLEAR THAT
MY LIFE WAS NOT MY
OWN.*



CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

1. Discuss Missus Miller's reasoning for selling Mercy and her mother. Does this change your opinion about the Millers at all?
2. Mercy and Jonah play a game of "what if" in this chapter, thinking up different scenarios of what life might look like if they were free in the north. What do you think this entailed?
3. Discuss the tradition of planting lilies in place of gravemarkers. What is beautiful and heartbreaking about this picture of a graveyard?
4. Jonah expresses frustration over abiding by the master's rules and working his way up in the system only to have everything snatched away. How would this affect a person?
5. Discuss the change in Mama after finding out she and Mercy would be sold. Why do you think she's reacting this way?

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

1. Do you think it's understandable that Natassa feels Brett's death is her fault? Is it true?
2. Contrast Natassa's mother's "care" for the family after Brett's death with Bethany's. What might each "mama" represent?
3. Have you ever lost someone close to you? Did their home comfort you or rub you raw? Can you understand Laura's desire to get away from the place her husband should be but isn't?
4. What do you think of Natassa's offer for Laura to come live with them? Is it a good solution? Have you had people live with you before? How did it work out?
5. Do you know anyone who stuffs their emotions like Brandon? Have you seen someone break as described in the last scene?



CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

1. Discuss the change in Mama as soon as she hears that Susan called for Mercy. Why do you think this is?
2. Singing while working was an important part of the culture of the enslaved. Why do you think that is?
3. Contrast how Susan acts in the presence of others versus how she acts around Mercy alone. Does this make her wise or hypocritical in your eyes?
4. What do you think of Susan's suggestion to purchase Mercy? How do you think that would have worked out for them? For their friendship?
5. How do you feel about Mercy's solution?
6. Mama admonishes Mercy to "remember who you are". Who is Mercy? What does she need to remember?
7. Discuss the concept of choice in the life of the enslaved. How did Mercy choosing to go to New Orleans empower her?

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

1. If you were Natassa, would you have gone to see what DeAndre wanted?
2. "In his desire to protect his friend, he had created another victim." If you were Natassa, how do you think you would have reacted to this revelation?
3. Why do you think DeAndre asked Natassa to check in on Tia? How did he expect her to react? Why?
4. Does Natassa's reaction surprise you? Why or why not?



CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

1. DeAndre had no doubt had worse words spoken to him than Natassa's. Why do you think her words affected him so deeply?
2. What does DeAndre's past connection with Tia tell us about him?
3. Have you ever felt the way DeAndre did-you know Jesus has forgiven your sins but you still feel dirty? Why is that?
4. Why do you think Natassa didn't come to DeAndre's sentencing?
5. What do you think of what DeAndre told the judge? Are you satisfied with what he shared?

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

1. How do you think DeAndre's life will be affected by his prison sentence?
2. What are some differences between jail and prison? In what ways are they similar?
3. Why didn't Preach fight back? Why did DeAndre?
4. Do you think "the hole" is an effective means of punishment? Do you find prison itself to be rehabilitative?

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

1. Why do you think Bethany has given Natassa Mercy's story in pieces instead of all at once?
2. *Offense is more like a cloak or a coat than a cut or a bruise. It's something that's handed to you, and you gets the choice whether you're gonna pick up that cloak and wear it or not.*
What cloaks of offense have you been handed in your life? Have you chosen to wear them or not?
3. What can white people learn from people of color?
4. Do you think it was right for Bethany to "kidnap" Natassa and take her to Tia's house? Why do you think Bethany did it that way?
5. Why did Natassa choose to go inside? Would you have gone in if it were you?



CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

1. What is your first impression of Octavia? Can you see God's mercy following Mercy even in these most horrible circumstances?
2. Discuss the irony of Mercy on one side of the bars while Creoles walk free on the other. How was human life valued back then? How is it valued today?
3. Comment on the significance of Mercy being called You There. What's in a name?
4. How is Mercy's new placement different than her old one? What adjustments does she have to make?
5. What parts of the past are hardest for Mercy to let go of? What dreams for her future?



CHAPTER THIRTY

1. How do you feel about the destruction of DeAndre's artwork?
2. DeAndre wonders the following about Janell: *Why is she even here? Why was she bothering with him?* What do you think the answer is to those questions?
3. Why do you think God wanted DeAndre to go to prison?
4. Do you agree that DeAndre should stop doing penance for his past sins? What should his attitude be?
5. Where do you think DeAndre would be (mentally, emotionally, and spiritually) without Janell?

*I'M HERE BECAUSE I
BELIEVE IN YOU,
DEANDRE. I SEE WHO
YOU ARE. NOT WHO
YOU WERE. NOT THE
MISTAKES YOU
MADE. I SEE YOU. I
BELIEVE IN YOU. I
LOVE YOU.*

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

1. How would you counsel Natassa to handle Laura's grief? How can she support her sister-in-law?
2. How can Natassa help Tia without making her a charity case? How can we best love others without them feeling pitied or looked down upon?
3. Tia brought up DeAndre and made the connection that Mercy was his biological child. How would you have responded if you were Natassa?
4. Do you agree with Breanna that Tia shouldn't be Natassa's responsibility?
5. *Think of all the things we do-or don't do-in the name of not getting hurt. How many of those things could actually be agents in our healing?* What are your thoughts on this quote? Do you find it true in your life?

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

1. Many masters valued enslaved children because they meant free labor, but some, especially in the sugar industry, did not because full-grown workers were needed to work cane. What parallels are there in between the disregard for human life then and now?
2. Have you ever felt numb or hollow due to grief or tragedy? How are Mercy's experiences shaping her?
3. Why do you think Octavia left Daffney behind? Would you have gone with Octavia if you were Mercy?
4. Discuss masters arranging the marriages of the enslaved.
5. Why does Mercy feel they've run God off the plantation?

*I KNOW NOW WHY THE
TREES WEEP.*

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

1. Why was Natassa nervous to leave Mercy with Laura? Would you have been?
2. Do you think Breanna is right and Natassa is trying to live vicariously through Laura's motherhood?
3. Do you think Natassa should be concerned with helping Tia or not?
4. Is Natassa playing the role of a "white savior"? Why or why not? If she is, how can she correct her course?
5. Why do you think Tia didn't want to tell the doctor about her previous abortion?



CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

1. Why do you think DeAndre doesn't want others to know he's an artist?
2. Why do you think painting again made DeAndre spiral into greater depression?
3. What truth did Preach bring to DeAndre?
4. Have you ever misidentified the enemy? Who is your true enemy and what is his aim?
5. *It was time to fight.* How can DeAndre fight the real fight? How can you?



CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

1. Why do you think Mercy's letters are so few and far between?
2. What do you think happened to Octavia?
3. Discuss the importance of African traditions to the enslaved. Why did white Americans attempt to strip them of these traditions? Do you agree with their motivations? Why or why not?
4. How do you feel about Mercy and Odel's relationship? Do you agree with Mercy that God was behind the master's plans, stretching out His arms to Mercy in the form of Odel?
5. Discuss the transformation in Mercy's prayers from prayers for her own comfort and safety only to prayers for the next generation. Why does this make her feel empowered?
6. Comment on the ending of the last letter in this chapter versus the other letters. Why does Mercy now want Susan to share her letter with Mama when before she wanted her letters to be kept hidden from her?



CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

1. Why is knowing that she herself is loved by God essential before Natassa can truly forgive DeAndre and Reg and pray for them?
2. *She had spent so much time judging him (Brandon) wrongly, complaining of everything he was not, everything he was not doing.* Have you ever been there? How did you shift your perspective?
3. How does Natassa's conversation with Brandon regarding Tia in this chapter show how she has grown since book one?
4. Are you surprised by Laura's perspective? Why or why not?

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

1. Compare and contrast Natassa trying to relate to Tia with DeAndre trying to relate to Rob and friends in book one. How do we bridge barriers of race and class with grace?
2. *We believe in forgiveness here. And love that overcomes fear.* Do you think that's an accurate description of the banner over the Bloomington home? What's the banner over your home?
3. Janell tells Natassa "Maybe you should ask him (DeAndre) to forgive you." Was that comment called for? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think DeAndre flinched when Natassa said, "I have done you a great wrong"?
5. Do you agree that it's harder to forgive someone who isn't sorry? Do you agree that in the end, it's not about whether the person is sorry or not? Discuss.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

1. How did becoming a mother to Mingo affect Mercy?
2. How is Mercy's struggle to put her children's safety in the hands of the Lord similar to parents today? How is it different?
3. How does Mercy's conviction that Mingo will be an important man inform how she's raising him? How do you think it will affect how he sees himself?
4. Have you heard of the type of sufferings Mercy is put through? How did Mercy endure such horrors?
5. *Hurts like that twist deep into people and change the way the eyes see and the ears hear.* Have you seen evidence of this? Where at?
6. What was your favorite part of Mercy's storyline in this book?

NOTHING'S GONNA
HOLD ME BACK
ANYMORE, SUSAN. NOT
A THING.

CHAPTER THIRTY- NINE

1. What symbolism can you find in the conversation between the women about cooking styles?
2. *There were many things about Tia Natassa never could have possibly known without drawing closer.* What are some of those things? Has your first impression of someone ever been very off?
3. What significance does St. Anthony Street hold for Natassa?
4. What growth has Natassa achieved since walking down this street the first time?
5. Think about the forgiveness and grace extended in this story: Natassa to DeAndre and Reg, Natassa to Janell, Laura to Tia, Janell to DeAndre. Any others? Which ones hit you most powerfully and why?
6. How has God brought restoration and redemption to Natassa's life? How has He done so to yours?

EPILOGUE

1. Why do you think Natassa assumed Tia wouldn't know the first thing about mothering? Did you think the same?
2. What do you think of the Bloomington's move to the city?
3. Have you ever felt like God led you to something you weren't even looking for? What happened?
4. How has DeAndre grown since book 1?
5. How has God brought restoration and redemption to DeAndre's life?
6. What do you think the future holds for DeAndre and Janell?



WANT MORE MERCY?

Read more of Natassa, DeAndre, and Mercy's stories in

MERCY'S LEGACY

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A handwritten signature in a cursive script, reading "Sarah Hanks". The ink is a dark purple color, matching the page's design. The signature is fluid and elegant, with the first letters of "Sarah" and "Hanks" being capitalized and prominent.

AUTHOR