



A Tangled Mercy

Joy Jordan-Lake

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Told in alternating tales at once haunting and redemptive, *A Tangled Mercy* is a quintessentially American epic rooted in heartbreaking true events examining the harrowing depths of human brutality and betrayal, and our enduring hope for freedom and forgiveness.

After the sudden death of her troubled mother, struggling Harvard grad student Kate Drayton walks out on her lecture—and her entire New England life. Haunted by unanswered questions and her own uncertain future, she flees to Charleston, South Carolina, the place where her parents met, convinced it holds the key to understanding her fractured family and saving her career in academia. Kate is determined to unearth groundbreaking information on a failed 1822 slave revolt—the subject of her mother’s own research.

Nearly two centuries earlier, Tom Russell, a gifted blacksmith and slave, grappled with a terrible choice: arm the uprising spearheaded by members of the fiercely independent African Methodist Episcopal Church or keep his own neck out of the noose and protect the woman he loves.

Kate’s attempts to discover what drove her mother’s dangerous obsession with Charleston’s tumultuous history are derailed by a horrific massacre in the very same landmark church. In the unimaginable aftermath, Kate discovers a family she never knew existed as the city unites with a powerful message of hope and forgiveness for the world.

A Tangled Mercy Details

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From Reader Review A Tangled Mercy for online ebook

Beth Jackson-jordan says

I was captivated by this story from beginning to end. The characters in this story are not perfect - they struggle with courage, conviction and self-doubt - which makes them very relatable. The tragic history of slavery that still haunts our society in the form of institutionalized racism is addressed with honesty and insight. I was impressed by the depth of research on historical as well as contemporary events woven into this story. Having visited Charleston many times, I appreciated the detailed and sensory description of familiar places included in the story. I recommend it highly.

Melissa Crytzer Fry says

I am not a mystery reader, but found myself engaged with this novel from the start – likely because this is a hybrid of a story: it reads like a mystery, but also is a historical novel with a dual contemporary-commercial story running right alongside it.

I adore historical fiction, and the southern setting and time period have a special place in my heart (as a research period and locale for my own work). I enjoyed the peek into the 1800s setting and into the conflicting attitudes of women in slave-holding households. As well, the descriptions of Charleston and the Low Country are lovely, and the contemporary story has a bittersweet + heartwarming ending. The bigger issues of race are well-drawn, also.

I thoroughly enjoyed the author's acknowledgements and her subsequent notes about this book's genesis, its unintended metamorphosis AFTER it was completed, and the gentle way she treats events within the book that are based on past – and recent – history in the United States.

This was the perfect read for me while I was on the treadmill. If you enjoy commercial/women's fiction and dual novels constructed with a person in the present investigating clues from the past, and the past story running concurrently, this is the book for you.

Kristina Reads - Books. Blogs. Memes. says

[lots of racism, pretty graphic description of the Charleston shooting by Dylann Roof and of executions of those involved with Denmark Vesey's slave revolt of 1822, rape (hide spoiler)]

Laura Simmons says

As stories by Southern women about Southern women are a staple in my literary diet, I expected to be entertained by this one. Boy, did I underestimate how it would make me feel. Most people say they could not put a good book down. I must confess that I kept putting this one down. Sometimes because I knew from

history that the approaching scenes would be hard to read. But most often because I didn't want the beautiful prose to end. Every detail of every moment captured me. I wanted to enjoy the wonder of a child like Gabe, and witness the regal strength of a woman like Dinah, and traipse around in the wake of a dame like Rose. I became aware early on that each line brought me closer to the end of a story I didn't want to finish. So I allowed myself only one chapter at a time, savoring every word, every feeling. I read this book through the distress of Charlottesville and finished on the anniversary of 9/11. Reading straight through the feelings brought on by such displays of hatred, I somehow felt hopeful. As Joy told these stories of redemption and forgiveness, I felt so strongly that I needed to hear more. That we all need to hear more. More peace, more connection, more love. Well-done Joy! Everyone, go read this one!

Diane S ? says

They say that the past is never really past, that it's tentacles often read into the present. No city is more indicative of this than Charleston. This city has a long, storied past, a beautiful city that for some was not always beautiful. A two thread story, one in the past, one in the present. The past story takes us back to the horrible issue of slavery, in particular 1822, and the Vessey slave revolt. This time in the novel focuses on a young, black man, a slave but one who is a talented blacksmith. The present story focuses on a young woman named Kate, who has come to Charleston, trying to find the threads of her family's life, in particular her mother, who loved this city but left it in disgrace.

Amazing characters in this story, Daniel, the current iron maker, Rose, an older woman, who feels she must right some of her family's past failings, and a young boy named Gabe, who will steal your heart. In alternating stories, we go back and forward, the past mingling with the present in a humbling way. The beauty of Charleston is beautifully described, a city I too love. Mother Emmanuel Church plays an important role, then and now. The mass shooting of church members by a sick, warped young man.

Ultimately the novel is about forgiveness, of a personal nature for the characters, and as a city as forgiveness and grace was shown by the church members that were left, and of course their families and friends. A city that came together, black and white, to mourn together, and showed the world that out of evil can come good. In a rare instance I liked each of these threads equally. The ending does come together a little to tidily, a little too good to be true. Yet, sometimes we can hope that things like that do happen, and here in this book it fit.

ARC from Netgalley.

Judy Collins says

A TANGLED MERCY by Joy Jordan-Lake interweaves the painful stories of two different time periods and two different sets of characters. A captivating tale. A place of contrasts. Pain and beauty. *A city both vulnerable and resilient.*

A hauntingly beautiful story of dual-timelines—a moving Southern tale: 1822 dark family secrets of slavery, and present-day Charleston, SC. *From the Denmark Vesey slave revolt, and those who courageously fought for freedom.*

The strong and courageous characters who stood out to take a stand against slavery to the more recent tragic shooting at Emanuel AME in Charleston —*of rage, injustice, discrimination, and violence*.

“A time for every season, you know —a time to mourn and a time to dance. Only here in the Low Country, we sometimes do both at the same time.”

Kate Drayton’s mother has passed and as a struggling Harvard grad student in New England, she decides to return to Charleston, SC — the place where her parents met. There are unanswered questions plus she needs to salvage her career in academia using her mom’s research.

Kate’s attempts to discover what drove her mother’s dangerous obsession with Charleston’s tumultuous history are derailed by a horrific massacre in the very same landmark church. In the unimaginable aftermath, Kate discovers a family she never knew existed as the *city unites after horror and outrage*.

A well-researched meticulous blending of fact and fiction, the author eloquently outlines why this story is so important to her. Her passion shines through each word on the page. It is critical to be tuned into how the “past bleeds through the present at every corner.”

As the author reiterates, it is her hope that this story of tragedy, brutality, beauty, and courage across two hundred years might be a least a small part of a conversation to have between our races.

Where not talking is also dangerous. “Make some noise” on behalf of those whose voices aren’t being heard. Promote respectful conversations.

I appreciate the author’s specific notes how she loved American history and the South. I can envision her packing up her eight-month daughter and her adventurous husband and driving to Charleston where she fell in love with the city. There was a story to be told. And back again later with three children and a husband to finish her work.

Engrossing! It is important to show the historical characters have changed the course of American history and why their message still matters today, particularly in a cultural moment in which people of common goodwill but different racial, ethnic and political backgrounds and perspectives are trying to be heard, and understood while attempting to move forward together.

Astounding, the author began this journey some twenty years ago; however, rings true today in our complex world of understanding people, *their roots, their past, and their hearts*.

As a reader, I find these components of fact and fiction make for a powerful and insightful read. The reason I myself find historical fiction so fascinating, you have a foundation of real people, vivid places, and experiences rich in history and character.

The skill of the author is to be able to put themselves in the minds and hearts of their characters —portray which could have happened or their most intimate thoughts. *Feel what they are feeling*.

Joy-Jordan Lake and her words will empower you. You cannot read this tale and not be moved in some way. A story of hope, forgiveness, and redemption. (have you read her bio)? *Highly impressive*.

If you have grown up or spent time in the Low Country, you may know of its historical architecture, beauty, and charm today.

However, as depicted in the novel, beneath the façade, there has been a turbulent history. Darkness and ugliness in contrast to the beauty. Even today in our world and cultural climate of today, we see the pain of racial injustice and a world of violence. *We cannot read any news feed without devastation.*

As the author mentions her intent is not only to tell a story worth reading (which she does masterfully); but equally and more importantly to honor the memory of those in the nineteenth and twenty-first-century Charleston who have set an example of courage, conviction, and a spirit of love far stronger than hate. *They need a voice.*

From outrage, pain, and horror to love, unity, forgiveness, and strength. A poignant and inspiring story of how people come together, even in their darkest hours. Crossing lines of race, income, social class, and religion. Seeking justice.

I loved the author's reference to a foundation from a portion of the proceeds of the novel to go towards serving the families of victims, administered by Mother Emanuel.

Beyond the harrowing depths of human brutality and betrayal, their lives redemption, freedom, and forgiveness.

A highly recommended choice for book clubs and further discussions (Reading Group Questions Included).

For fans of well-researched historical and Southern fiction and readers who enjoy Jodi Picoult, Diane Chamberlain, Charles Martin, Karen White, Lisa Wingate and Susan Meissner. (all favorites of mine).

My first book by the author, and look forward to reading more (and her backlist of those I missed) from this talented and gifted writer! *My Top Books of 2017* and my featured Top 20 Books for Nov.

JDCMustReadBooks

Suzanne Robertson says

These characters are so well-drawn that weeks after finishing the book I am still catching myself wondering how Kate, Gabe, Rose and the others are getting along. Jordan-Lake's quiet descriptions -- eyes the color of a gray glint of a blade; like a whispered apology; the (beautiful) sky was such a liar -- are so real and subtle you are placed in the moment without even realizing it. Clues are hidden throughout like Easter eggs -- an old leather gun case, heron earrings, seashells, a silver hairbrush -- that gave me a Nancy Drew feeling as if I was solving a mystery.

However, the book is deeper than that, too. For instance, the heartbreak scene of a mother and child being auctioned off to separate plantations did me in. The gripping intertwining racism and privilege of today are connected through two time periods, with readers left to draw our own conclusions. The use of real historical figures, both in the 1822 and 2015 narratives, is very effective and because the Vesey slave revolt upon which it is based was real, educational. I had not heard of it before -- why? The book is set in Charleston where the revolt happened in real life, so it was inevitable that the author also included the horrifying

shootings in that city in 2015. The delicate and careful treatment of the shootings turns into a beautiful tribute to the actual victims, an unexpected salve to the reader that these people who reached out so selflessly to their killer are honored in this way. (This event is not a main part of the book but adds to the depth of the story.) Of course the book is fiction, but these true elements within it give an extra layer of realness, as good fiction always does. The connection of the two tragic events is inevitable -- but seeing the vastly different reactions of the people of the same city nearly 200 years apart is gratifying and hopeful.

The book left me with an appreciation for the positive change, small steps of reconciliation, which have occurred in our society, even in these times that sometimes feel backwards and so uncertain. It is also such a well-written exciting journey and easy read -- I could not wait to see what happened next and to figure out who was, or was not, connected to each other. I only put the book down when forced -- for the most pressing of daily chores -- and was sorry when the story ended.

Deanne Patterson says

A haunting book, A Tangled Mercy held my attention gripped in its claws from the first page. A time slip book it contains alternating chapters taking place in the modern time of 2015 and the past time of 1822. Based on true facts of what really happened in Charleston, South Carolina. The author has done an absolutely amazing job of research and presenting facts in this book. The writing though is not stiff and boring it flows and keeps you wanting to read it. The story touched on the slave rebellion planned by Denmark Vesey in 1822 but aborted when terrified associates leaked the plan to the white men of the city. The 2015 part included the massacre of nine members of a Bible study at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. When the author went to this church to interview people she was welcomed in. The two time periods have just the right amount of information that keeps you reading rapidly right to the end to see the conclusion. At times heartbreaking and heartwarming you will love this historical fiction. This is my first book I've read by Joy Jordan-Lake and I am now looking for more books by this author.

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Thank you to NetGalley and Lake Union Publishing for a review copy in exchange for my honest opinion.

Linda Zagon says

MY REVIEW OF "A TANGLED MERCY" by Joy Jordan-Lake

"A Tangled Mercy" by Joy Jordan-Lake combines the genres of History with Fiction, and Kudos to the author for the vivid descriptions of the charm, spirit, and architecture of Charleston, South Carolina. There are so many contrasts to Charleston in the past and in the present. The timeline of the novel is basically divided into two, weaving the story of the 1822 slave uprising and the 2015 Massacre at Charleston's AME Church. This is a very heavy and significant read.

The characters in this novel in both past and present are complex and complicated. Somehow the contrast between good and evil, betrayal and loyalty, love and hate, freedom and oppression seem to be evident in both timelines

Kate Drayton had come to Charleston after her mother's death to seek answers her mother never gave her. In the process Kate is looking to discover herself. Kate's mother was obsessed with the 1822 slave revolt and a blacksmith named Tom Russell, a slave. Kate meets a colorful cast of characters, each adding some information for the unanswered questions she is seeking. Kate is a graduate student seeking similar information as her mother to the slave uprising.

We see in the past when Tom Russell was a gifted blacksmith, and how slavery was a part of Charleston's history. Although Charleston was a port that welcomed people of different religions , it was a tremendous port for slavery. We meet characters that are loyal and those that are betrayers. During this time period there are complicated and conflicted personalities.

Both timelines merge as secrets are discovered and history is revealed. The topic of DNA is brought up and the significance of the research of it. The author shows us that despite hatred and fear, love, hope, trust, and faith is what keeps Charleston. and the people together. In the end, Love, forgiveness, hope and faith will survive. The author also discusses the importance of family, friends, and love.

I recommend this novel for those readers that appreciate fictional characters based on historical facts. I received an Advanced Reading Copy for my honest review.

Anne Bogel says

I've been excited about this one for a long time! The backstory of how this book came to be what it is is really incredible, and I hope Joy tells it publicly one day. The story itself is timely and engaging, and perfect for fans of historical fiction that flips back and forth in time, like you'd see in the works of Kate Morton or Susan Meissner.

Cathy says

A Tangled Mercy is a historical fiction novel set in pre-Civil War and present day Charleston, South Carolina, with the real-moment-in-time Vesey slave uprising of 1822 centering the story. The historical setting and details in this novel are fascinating, and I did find the book to be reminiscent of Kate Morton's novels, which I love. However, I couldn't overcome a pervasive sense that the author was overreaching, stretching the story if you will, and just generally trying too hard to fit everything together. The book features several racial confrontation scenes set in the present day, and at the risk of incurring some wrath here, the scenes feel like they were written by someone who's researched racial conflict but never truly experienced it. (Not that I would do any better in the telling of it; I, like the author, am a middle-aged white chick, and I have minimal personal experience in this regard). It's an ambitious book with weighty subject matter, but the execution felt too cumbersome to warrant a more highly rated review from me.

Stephanie says

The idea has so much potential- Kate returns to Charleston after her mother's death, hoping to unlock family secrets via her research on the slave revolt of 1822. This, set against the backdrop of the 2015 real-life mass murder at the Emmanuel AME church. But the execution is so clumsy and simplistic. Everyone significant in the story, Kate just happens to bump into on the street on her first day in Charleston: obligatory love interest, check; grand dame of Charleston society, check; potential direct descendants of one of the slaves in the 1822 revolt; check; evasive family attorney who knows more than he's willing to say, check. The scenes set in 1822 are really well-done and engaging, and the pacing of what's revealed in each of those scenes vis a vis what's happening in 2015 is good too. But the 2015 storyline- ugh. The inclusion of the Emmanuel AME murders ended up feeling gratuitous, and the conversations about race and slavery were very simplistic. Disappointing overall, though I did read til the end.

Sarah Armistead says

A Tangled Mercy is the best book I have read in a long time. The writer did a great job of holding my interest and I hated to put it down. She did a wonderful job in her research in Charleston and her writing is easy to read. I loved the way she went back and forth from 1822 to 2015 and how it all tied together. It kept me guessing all along as to the ending which was a pleasant surprise. My favorite books are historical fiction and this is one of the best.

Rita says

Charleston

When I first started this book I felt ambivalent about the way this book is written. Chapter by chapter, the story fluctuates between the years 1822 with the planning of the failed slave revolt and 2015 with Kate Drayton running back to Charleston after the death of her mother to find answers as to why her mother, Sarah Grace, ran away from Charleston many years ago. It may seem confusing at first, but soon I fell into the rhythm. The time spent in 1822 centers around the blacksmith slave, Tom Russell, and how he is tied into Kate's mother's obsession with what happened back then. There is a cryptic notation on one of Sarah Grace Drayton's papers saying "Tom Russell SURVIVED" and Kate wants to discover why this slave from 1822 meant so much to her mother.

Staring out at the water, Kate makes her first Charleston friend, a young boy named Gabe. I enjoyed seeing the interplay between the two of them and watching the friendship grow. Gabe is a gifted child, more at home with adults than with kids his own age. She soon gets to meet Daniel Russell, Gabe's father. Russell, the same last name as that blacksmith slave involved in the 1822 failed slave revolt. This is a story about love, family and putting the jigsaw puzzle that is your life together.

Kate could never understand why her mother, with her in tow, ran away from Charleston which she loved or why her father wanted nothing to do with her. She came to Charleston to get answers on this and also why her mother was obsessed with the failed slave revolt back in 1822, especially with Tom Russell, the blacksmith.

I was horrified to hear a modern day politician say that things were better back in the days of slavery. It's been approximately 150 years since the Civil War and this country still can't get rid of that prejudice and hatred. The author was in the process of writing this book when the nine people were murdered at a church

Bible study. She talked to her editor about it and they decided that it had to be included in this book. I still started to tear up reading about it and realized that this country has actually gone backwards since that atrocity occurred. Like Hitler's Germany and their blaming the Jews for all their problems, many people in this country blame people who are different for the troubles in their lives. *A Tangled Mercy* shows how detrimental slavery was for both the slave and the slave owner.

Many years ago there was a very popular book which was made into a very popular TV miniseries, called *Roots*. I would recommend both the book and the miniseries. Kate Drayton wants to get back to her roots and discovers whether black or white, family is family.

A Tangled Mercy is no action packed thriller. It has secrets that need to be brought to light and they are. It is a thought provoking, well written book, a little confusing at first but once all the secrets are no longer secrets, I felt a sense of well-being.

Joy Jordan-Lake paints a beautiful picture of Charleston that almost makes you want to move there. We all know that the surface may seem beautiful but not so beautiful when you get under the surface. I have no plans to move there.

I received this book in a giveaway from Amazon Kindle in exchange for an honest review.

Rhonda says

Another fantastic historical fiction novel! This one centering on Charleston SC and the story of the Denmark Vesey slave revolt and Tom Russell of 1822. Told in alternating chapters between 1822 characters , and present day 2015 characters centering on Kate Drayton whose searching for answers to secrets from her families past connections to history in Charleston following the death of her mother. It also incorporates the history of the landmark AME Emanuel church, its connection with the slave revolt , and then the 2015 massacre in Charleston at the very same church. I was intrigued and as always touched by reading the struggles of the slaves in Deep South areas, and in awe of the strength and will that lives on despite persecution. This story was a roller coaster of emotion , heart breaking and heart warming , love, loss, hope, compassion and strength . It also weaves in the Grimke sisters , who were wealthy white Charleston residents during the revolt and became some of the bigger abolitionists in the early 1800s . If you're a fan of historical stories; civil rights stories, or just great novels this is a must read ! Kudos to the author for a fantastic job of research and weaving these historical characters and stories so flawlessly to current day events!
