

Mercy (A Novel)

To Download this book in many format Visit :

<https://wocoentala.org/source1/55ae02480b0e99de6a16d113189dcdcf>

Police chief of a small Massachusetts town, Cameron McDonald makes the toughest arrest of his life when his own cousin Jamie comes to him and confesses outright that he has killed his terminally ill wife out of mercy.

Now, a heated murder trial plunges the town into upheaval, and drives a wedge into a contented marriage: Cameron, aiding the prosecution in their case against Jamie, is suddenly at odds with his devoted wife, Allie -- seduced by the idea of a man so in love with his wife that he'd grant all her wishes, even her wish to end her life. And when an inexplicable attraction leads to a shocking betrayal, Allie faces the hardest questions of the heart: when does love cross the line of moral obligation? And what does it mean to truly love another?

Praised for her "personal, detail-rich style" (Glamour), Jodi Picoult infuses this page-turning novel with heart, warmth, and startling candor, taking readers on an unforgettable emotional journey.

Jodi Picoult received an AB in creative writing from Princeton and a master's degree in education from Harvard. The recipient of the 2003 New England Book Award for her entire body of work, she is the author of twenty-six novels, including the #1 New York Times bestsellers *House Rules*, *Handle With Care*, *Change of Heart*, and *My Sister's Keeper*, for which she received the American Library Association's Margaret Alexander Edwards Award. She lives in New Hampshire with her husband and three children. Visit her website at JodiPicoult.com. Chapter One

In the moments before, she laid a hand on his arm. "No matter what," she said, giving him a look, "you cannot stop."

He turned away. "I'm not sure I can even start."

She brought his hand to her lips, kissed each finger. "If you don't do it," she said simply, "who will?"

For a long while they sat side by side, staring out a streaked window at a town neither of them knew very well. He watched her breathing pattern in the reflection of the glass, and tried to slow his own heart until they were equally matched. The quiet dulled his senses, so that he became fixated on the clock beside the bed. He would not blink, he told himself, until the next minute bled into the last.

With a fury that surprised him, he turned his face into the bow of her neck, trying to commit to memory this softness and this smell. "I love you."

She smiled, that crooked little curving of her mouth. "Now," she said, "don't you think I know that?"

In the end, she had struggled. He wore the scratches like a brand. But he had held the pillow to her face; calmed her by whispering in her ear. My love, he had said, I'll be with you as soon as I can. At the words her arms had fallen away; then it was over. He had buried his

face in her shirt, and started himself the very slow process of dying.

For the hundredth time that day, Cameron MacDonald, Chief of Police in Wheelock, Massachusetts, closed his eyes and dreamed of the Bay of Biscay. If he got it just right -- the thrum of silence in the station, the afternoon light dancing over the corner of his scarred desk -- he could make himself believe. There was no Smith and Wesson jabbing into his side; there was no mountain pass outside the window; hell, maybe he wasn't even Cameron MacDonald anymore. He opened his mind as wide as he could, and let himself tumble into the beautiful blue of it.

He blinked his eyes, expecting the bobbing shoreline of Prest, or the sweet scent of the Loire Valley that you could carry in your pocket when you were within a reasonable distance, but he found himself staring at the pale, pasty face of Hannah, the secretary at the police station. "Here's the file," she said. "He was indicted." She turned to leave, but stopped for a moment with her hand on the door. "You sure you're not coming down with something, Chief?"

Cam shook his head, as much to clear it as to convince Hannah. He smiled at her, because if he didn't, he knew she'd be on the phone with Allie and within a half hour, his wife would have him drinking a tea made of nettle roots and feverfew.

He put the file down, glancing longingly at Gall's Buying Guide catalog for public safety equipment, inside which he'd stuffed a Travel magazine. Hannah was right -- there was something wrong with him. It was the same thing that happened every year since he'd returned to Wheelock, as was expected, to become police chief after his father's death. He was suffering from wanderlust, complicated by the tension of knowing that he was rooted to this town by something as simple as his name.

Wheelock looked like other small western Massachusetts towns: the center consisted of a simple white church and a lending library, a joint building for fire and police, the local coffee shop, and a dotting of old men who sat on stone benches and watched their lives slouch by. But what made Wheelock different from Hancock and Dalton and Williamstown was the fact that had it not been for a twist of fate, nearly every family in Wheelock would still be living in Scotland.

At first you wouldn't notice. But then you'd see that the town restaurant served its specials on "ashets," not plates; that its serviceable stocky white china was decorated with the fat square rose of Bonnie Prince Charlie. You'd attend a marriage at St. Margaret's, and realize that the ceremony still ended with a blood vow. You'd drive through the winding side streets and see the name MACDONALD painted on an alarming number of mailboxes.

And if you happened to travel to the Scottish Highlands, you'd notice that a small town called Carrymuir on the banks of Loch Leven was an uncanny twin to Wheelock, Massachusetts.

In the 1700s, the Clan MacDonald was the largest and most powerful clan in Scotland.

spread from the western isles through the main Highlands. One particular sect of the clan lived in Carrymuir, a small town north of Glencoe which was nestled between two jagged crags of mountains. In spite of the rampant clan warfare in Scotland, Carrymuir had never been defeated, built as it was in a natural, easily defended fortress.

Clann was the Scottish Gaelic word for children, and a clan was made up of relatives, some more distant than others, who happened to live on a given piece of land. The clan chief, or laird, had the power of life and death over his tenants and tacksmen, but the authority wasn't quite as one-sided as a king's. After all, the chief's subjects were his brothers and nephews and cousins, and the trust and respect they offered up to him came at the price of his protection and his promise to care for them.

Cameron MacDonald of Wheelock, Massachusetts, had been named for his great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, a legendary soldier who had fought in the battle of Culloden, where the English routed the Highlanders. Cameron had heard the story over and over as a boy: When his namesake realized that Bonnie Prince Charlie's Highland army didn't stand a chance against the English soldiers, he tried to save his clansmen from being killed in battle. He secured their honorable discharges by promising, in exchange, his own remarkable skill in a fight to the death against the British. But he hadn't died, as he had expected. And after Culloden, when the victorious English came through Scotland burning towns and slaughtering livestock and raping village women, the first Cameron MacDonald realized he had to again save his clan.

So while he went to jail as a Jacobite prisoner, he arranged for the families of Carrymuir to leave, one by one, on packets bound for the American colonies. Which explained why, when most Scots were being hanged or sold as indentured servants to the West Indies, this small sect of Clan MacDonald remained intact and resettled in the wilderness of Massachusetts.

They found a spot that looked like home, with a brace of rolling mountains and a narrow body of water that was more of a pond than a lake, and sent word back to Scotland about this place. Wee loch, they wrote. It's set by a wee loch.

And eventually, the laird and his family came over too, leaving a trusted uncle to watch over the land in Scotland. They traded the comfortable kilt for trousers; they proudly flew the Stars and Stripes; they accepted the Americanized name of the town. And as a natural extension of inbred responsibility, the man who was the figurehead of the Clan MacDonald also became Wheelock's police chief.

In 1995, that position belonged to Cameron MacDonald II, having been handed down from his great-grandfather to his grandfather to his father, passing along the same line of succession as the honorary title of clan chief. He'd be the first to tell you that things had changed. Obviously, although he was considered the chief of a clan and duly noted in the Scottish records, he was no longer directly responsible for the welfare of the townspeople. At least three-quarters of the town had never even seen the lands in Scotland that technically belonged to them. Hardly anyone spoke with a burr; fewer still knew more than a

smattering of Gaelic.

On the other hand, old habits died hard. There was no tarnished silver bowl or royal edict that proved that Wheelock was MacDonald land, but it was theirs just the same, in the way that their ancestors had laid claim to that narrow pass in the Scottish Highlands. It was land, quite simply, they'd lived on forever.

At age thirty-five, Cameron MacDonald knew he would stay in Wheelock for the rest of his life; that he would be the police chief until he died and passed the office to his firstborn son. He knew these were things he did not have a choice about, no more than he had a choice about tossing off the choking obligation of being the current laird. Sometimes, in the very still parts of the night, he would tell himself that an honorary title did not mean today what it meant two hundred and fifty years ago. He'd reason that if he picked up his wife and moved to Phoenix for the climate, everyone would take it in stride.

Then he would remember how Darcy MacDonald, his third cousin's daughter, had tripped right on Main Street when Cam was no more than three feet away, talking to the town barber. She'd had seventeen stitches in her knee because he hadn't moved quite fast enough, or been in the right place at the right time. In fact, some days he felt that every arrest, every conviction, was a reflection of something he'd done wrong as a leader.

He'd press up against the soft, snoring curl of his wife, Allie, because she was as solid as any truth he could spin. And he'd try to push himself back into sleep, but his dreams were always of chains, link after link after link, which stretched across the vast Atlantic.

When Allie Gordon was in high school, she was not the most popular girl in her class. She was nowhere even close. That honor belonged to Verona MacBean, with her cotton-candy puff of hair and her Cover Girl mascara and her pink mohair sweater molded like skin to what the boys referred to as the Hoosac Ridge.

And today, fifteen years out of nowhere, Verona MacBean herself stepped into Glory in the Flower and ordered three large centerpieces for a library luncheon to be given in her name.

"Verona!" Allie had immediately recalled the name. There was something disconcerting about seeing her classmate dressed in a severe beige suit, her hair scraped into a knot at the back of her head, her cheeks flat beneath a sheer layer of foundation. "What brings you to town?"

Verona had made a little clicking noise with the back of her teeth. "Allie," she said, her voice just as thin and breathy as it had been in high school, "don't tell me you're still here!"

It was not meant as an insult, it never was, so Allie simply shrugged. "Well," she said, drawing out her words and savoring them like a fine French delicacy, "since Cam's here to stay..." She let her voice trail off at the end, peeking up at Verona from the order form she was filling out. Then she stared her in the face. "You did hear about Cam and me, didn't you?"

Verona had walked over to the refrigerated case, as if inspecting the quality of the flowers she had already commissioned. "Yes," she said. "I seem to recall something about that."

A few minutes later Verona had left, specifying the exact time for the centerpieces to arrive (it was an author's luncheon; it wouldn't do to have wilted roses for an author who, as she put it, was just coming into bloom). Allie had walked to the back room of the flower shop, where she kept her foam and moss and desiccants, her raffia and wire. She stood in front of the tiny mirror over the bathroom sink, assessing her complexion. Then, rummaging through a bookshelf, she found her high school yearbook -- kept solely for putting together names and faces that walked into the shop. She let the book fall open to Verona's page. It was much easier to believe that she, Allie, had grown older and wiser, while Verona MacBean, in glossy black and white, was trapped in time. It did not matter that Verona had gone on to Harvard and then to Yale, that her first book -- philosophy -- was the talk of the town. It only mattered that in the long run, Allie Gordon had married Cameron MacDonald, which no one in Wheelock would have guessed on a long shot.

On the other hand, it was no great surprise when Verona MacBean became Cameron MacDonald's steady girlfriend in the fall of 1977, although Cameron was a high school senior and Verona was a freshman. They were both undeniably beautiful, Verona in a collectible doll sort of way, and Cam towering over nearly everyone else in the school, his wide, strong shoulders and bright shock of hair always easy to spot.

Allie fell in love with his hair first. She used to sit in the school library bent over a slim volume of Plath's poetry, waiting for him to come through the double glass doors that blocked off the bustle of the hall. He came in every day during the period she worked at the counter checking out books for the grateful, understaffed librarian. She'd straighten the shelves behind the spot where he sat down, imagining her fingers weaving through that hair, separating it so the strands that looked like fire prised off into reds and rangy yellows. At the end of the class period, she would pick up the books he'd left behind and tuck them back in their Dewey decimal places, trying to hold on to the heat Cam's hands had placed on the protective plastic covers.

The truth was that Cameron MacDonald did not know Allie Gordon existed for most of the time they had lived in the same town. She was far too quiet, too plain to attract his attention. There was only one incident in high school where Cam had ever truly come in contact with her: during a blood drive, they had been lying beside each other on the donor tables, and when she sat up and hopped from the stretcher to get her promised juice and cookies, the world spun and went black. She awakened in Cam's arms; he'd jumped off his own table to catch her as she fell, unintentionally ripping the intravenous from the crook of his elbow so that when Allie went home that afternoon, she realized that Cam's blood spotted the back of her blouse.

Allie had trouble convincing herself that the reason they had gotten married years later did not have to do with the fact that after college, they were two of the few who had come back to Wheelock. Cam had returned because it was expected of him, Allie because there

was nowhere else she really wanted to be.

If she stood on the bottom ledge of the refrigeration unit for the fresh flowers and craned her neck in a certain way out the window, she could see Cam's office at the police station, even make out his shadowy form hunched over his desk. It was the reason she'd chosen this particular real estate space when she opened the flower shop eight years ago.

She saw that he was in, not out on patrol, and decided now was as good a time as any to bring him his arrangement and tell him about Verona. She crawled down from the ledge, rubbing her hands against her knees to warm them up, and closed the sliding glass door of the cooler. Absently, she ran her fingers over the sweet chestnut and barberry foliage that made up the greens in the piece she would bring over to Cam.

Allie knew the language of flowers -- the idea that every bloom stands for some quality of human nature. Bouquets sent from the shop for the arrival of a baby were stuffed with daisies, for innocence, and moss, for maternal love. Valentine's arrangements had roses, of course, but also lilies for purity, heliotrope for devotion, and forget-me-nots for true love. To Cam, she often sent designs that were full of messages she knew he could not understand. She eyed her latest work critically, nodding over the tulips which made up the bulk of the piece. In Persia, a man would give a tulip to his betrothed to show that as red as the flower was, he was on fire with love; as black as its center, his heart was smoldering like a coal.

She filled out the vase with Michaelmas daisies, China asters, and fire thorn. And then, as she always did for Cam's arrangements, she added as many sprigs of purple clover as she could wit...

Other Books

The Quality of Mercy, Barry Unsworth returns to the terrain of his Booker Prize-winning novel Sacred Hunger, this time following Sullivan, the Irish fiddler, and Erasmus Kemp, son of a Liverpool slave ship owner who hanged himself. It is the spring of 1767, and to avenge his father's death, Erasmus Kemp has had the rebellious sailors of his father's ship, including Sullivan, brought back to London to stand trial on charges of mutiny and piracy. But as the novel opens, a blithe Sullivan has escaped and is making his way on foot to the north of England, stealing as he goes and sleeping where he can. His destination is Thorpe in the East Durham coalfields, where his dead shipmate, Billy Blair, lived: he has pledged to tell the family how Billy met his end. In this village, Billy's sister, Nan, and her miner husband, James Bordon, live with their three sons, all destined to follow their father down the pit. The youngest, only seven, is enjoying his last summer aboveground. Meanwhile, in London, a passionate anti-slavery campaigner, Frederick Ashton, gets involved in a second case relating to the lost ship. Erasmus Kemp wants compensation for the cargo of sick slaves who were thrown overboard to drown, and Ashton is representing the insurers who dispute his claim. Despite their polarized views on slavery, Ashton's beautiful sister, Jane, encounters Erasmus Kemp and finds herself powerfully attracted to him. Lord Spenton, who owns coal mines in East-Durham, has extravagant habits and is pressed for money. When he applies to the Kemp merchant bank for a loan, Erasmus sees a business opportunity of the kind he has long been hoping for, a way of gaining entry into Britain's rapidly developing and highly profitable coal and steel industries. Thus he too makes his

way north, to the very same village that Sullivan is heading for . . . With historical sweep and deep pathos, Unsworth explores the struggles of the powerless and the captive against the rich and the powerful, and what weight mercy may throw on the scales of justice.

❓ ❓ ❓ ❓ ❓ . But as the novel opens, a blithe Sullivan has escaped and is making his way on foot to the north of England, stealing as he goes and sleeping where he can."