

## MARY JANE CLARK

### *Dying for Mercy: Questions for Book Clubs*

**General themes for discussion:** *Italy's rich artistic and religious history, the effects of religious conversion, children with disabilities, the worldwide appeal of St. Francis of Assisi, crimes buried in the past, puzzles, political ambition, marital infidelity, suicide, the public's insatiable appetite for sensationalism.*

1. Eliza Blake tries to have it all: being a good mother, spending quality time with her daughter Janie; and never missing a beat as a TV news anchor. How do you feel Eliza's career affects her parenting, and vice-versa? How do you, and the women you know, deal with juggling responsibilities at home and work?
2. Friendship can often cloud one's judgment. How do you suppose Eliza's relationship with Valentina affected her pursuit of the truth behind Innis's death?
3. Given how much Clay, Peter and Fitzroy had to hide, do you think they did enough to keep their sins a secret? What did you eventually think of Innis and his elaborate plan to bring people to justice?
4. Private clubs can generate a sense of privilege for members, but a lot of jealousy for outsiders. What did you think of Susannah? How have you reacted when you've met people like her? How did you feel about Bill's reaction to the club's rejection of his sick wife's request?
5. Bill's brother Marty paid an awful price for his infidelity. What kind of woman did you believe Valentina to be throughout the book? What did you think of Bill's silence over the years about his brother's disappearance?
6. What did you think of the manner of Innis's death? A person's religious conversion can change his personality, too. Do you think there might have been signs that Innis's friends and family could have noticed? Suicide can be so painful for those left behind: do you suppose that most people who take their own lives intend to make loved ones suffer?
7. How did you react to Eliza's deepening relationship with Mack? Both Mrs. Garcia and Janie seem to want Mack and Eliza back together again. Given their troubled past, how do you feel about their future?
8. Have you ever been to Italy? What were your favorite places to visit? How have you been affected by the religious and artistic treasures you've seen?
9. What did you think about the puzzle house? Did you find Innis's ingenuity intriguing? How did you ultimately feel about the religious imagery, and the stigmata, throughout the story? What was your favorite puzzle piece?
10. What did you think of Eliza's decision not to publicize the pictures she took in the greenhouse? Given how difficult it is to keep one's private and public lives separate, do you think other news anchors might have made a different decision? What do you think about our 24-hours news cycle, and the need to fill air time with any and all information about the rich and famous?
11. The drive to win at all costs in politics has been the cause of many a politician's downfall. What did you think about what Valentina and Innis's colleagues did in order to gain the Governor's house? Do you suppose that there are dark secrets in most politicians' closets?