

BOOK CLUB KIT



A Note from the Author

I've always been fascinated by the way people tell stories. What their word choice, cadence, and points of emphasis reveal about who they are, what they've been through, what they value. Each member of my family had their own way of putting words to what they'd seen and known. I can still hear the sound of the falling tree that broke my great uncle's back. Feel the shock my grandmother, who was a sleepwalker, felt when she woke up one night in the woods. See the shotgun my great grandfather brandished when a lynch mob tried to claim his son. A story that only my father, who was a boy at the time, could find the humor in.

Told in multiple voices and framed by the Devil's various attempts to redeem himself, my novel, *The Devil Three Times*—a story about family, the transformative power of love, and the meaning of freedom—attempts to capture something of the spell their storytelling cast on me. In this novel, the Devil, after making a deal with Jesus to end slavery in exchange for his help returning to heaven, falls in love with an enslaved African woman. After failing to free her, the Devil appears to the woman's descendants in moments of crisis, doing for them what he was ultimately unable to do for her while trying as best he can to get back home.

"Everything you got in you God put there," the Devil tells Walter as he attempts to pray away the feelings he has for his brother's wife. "He wouldn't have put it there if he didn't want you to act on it."

In writing *The Devil Three Times*, I thought a lot about what it means to be free. How to balance free will with what we as human beings owe both one another and those who came before us. Writing this book has given me my answer and my hope is that reading and discussing it you'll find yours too. To help facilitate this, I'm including the recipe for an 1856 Chocolate Old Fashioned, courtesy of Uncle Nearest—a distillery named for Nathan "Nearest" Green, the formerly enslaved man who taught Jack Daniels how to make whiskey—and a recipe for blackberry cobbler, a dessert my father couldn't get enough of. Enjoy!

RICKEY FAYNE

1856 CHOCOLATE OLD FASHIONED

- 2 oz Uncle Nearest 1856 Premium Aged Whiskey
- ½ oz Barsmith Simple Syrup
- 4 dashes Hella Cocktail Co. Mexican Chocolate Bitters (Hella Cocktail Co. Aromatic Bitters where Mexican Chocolate isn't available)
- Lemon peel (garnish)

Add all ingredients to a rocks glass with ice. Stir for 30-60 seconds until desired dilution is reached. Squeeze lemon peel over drink (peel side facing drink) and drop in glass.



LISTEN TO RICKEY FAYNE'S THE DEVIL THREE TIMES PLAYLIST

For the crumble topping:

- ½ cup brown sugar
- ¾ cup flour
- ¾ cup chopped pecans
- 1 cup salted butter, melted
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg

For the filling:

- 6 cups mixed berries
- ¼ cup sugar
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- ¼ all purpose flour

Can be baked in individual ramekins for your book club, in a 9" cake pan, or in a 2 quart casserole.

YETUNDE'S BERRY CRISP

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Mix together all the ingredients for the berry filling.

Pour the berry filling into an oven-safe baking dish greased with butter.

Combine the ingredients for the topping, mixing until the texture resembles crumbles.

Pour the topping mixture over the berries evenly.

Bake for 45 minutes or until golden brown on top.

"You used to eat this by the handful when you were a boy," my mother said, setting the crudely baked pie on the table in front of me. It was not a proper pie but rather a savory-sweet compote of whatever fruit was in season, with a ground nut crust, which my mother cooked directly over the fire until the contents bubbled up and trickled over the sides of the pan into the flames.



Discussion Questions for Your Book Club

- 1) How might the Devil's complicated relationship with God mirror the Laurents' parent-child relationships? And, more broadly, what might this indicate about Black people's relationship with the church and Christianity, in a world shaped by the legacy of colonialism and slavery?
- 2) Yetunde says, "My people were river people." Rivers and, more generally, bodies of water are important settings throughout *The Devil Three Times*. What moments at rivers or near bodies of water were especially memorable to you?
- 3) Lillian and Asa enter into a sexual relationship, and Asa believes himself to be deeply in love with her—even decades later, when they run away together. How does Fayne render the complexity of Asa's experience, with its mix of love and exploitation? What are the unique power dynamics at play in this relationship?
- 4) Asa is taken from his mother and sister and raised in the plantation house as white. Bubba lives most of his life as a white man, though he's actually Asa's son. What does Asa lose as he gains some of the privileges of whiteness? Similarly, what does Bubba gain or lose after coming into the knowledge of his heritage?
- 5) Despite their best intentions, many of the Laurents struggle with addiction. Some are both victims and perpetrators of abuse. What are some cycles that you see repeating throughout the family? Is there a connection between inherited trauma, addiction, and abuse?
- 6) Yetunde's supernatural abilities and her connection to the dead stem from African spiritual practices that predate Christianity. How does the manifestation of these abilities change after Yetunde encounters the Devil and her descendants adopt Christianity? Which elements of those spiritual practices persist, and which are lost over time?
- 7) Louis and Ernestine's obsessive romantic attraction has deadly consequences, as does Cassandra and Porter's calamitous relationship generations later. Does fate or free will bring these lovers together? Are they responsible for their respective demises, or are the outcomes of these relationships their cosmic punishment?
- 8) The Devil says he'll protect Yetunde's descendants, but still they suffer enormously. How do the struggles that the Laurents face change with each generation? What do the 20th-century descendants have in common with Yetunde and her children?
- 9) How do you feel about where the Laurents are at the novel's end, and what might lie ahead for them?