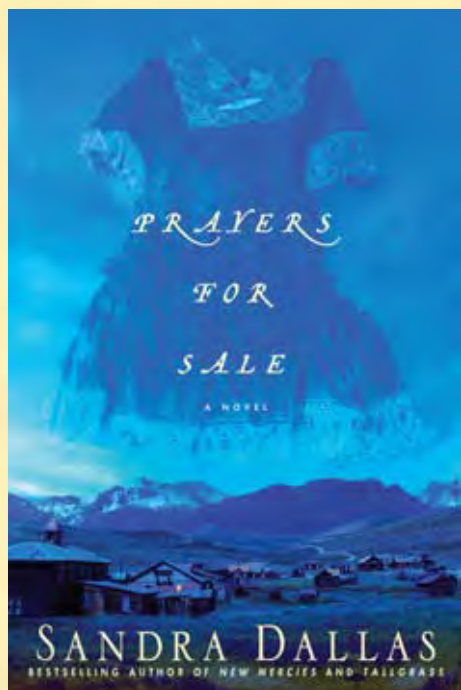




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The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo ∞ Stieg Larsson

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A Quilt of Friendship Stitched Across Generations.

On a cold, snowy evening, a young woman lingers in front of a house pondering a sign that reads, "Prayers for Sale." Inside, an elderly widow, Hennie Comfort, watches and wonders before stepping outside to greet her reluctant visitor. So begins this engrossing tale of a wise older woman with a lifetime of stories to tell, and a 17-year-old with prayers that need answers. Set in 1930s Colorado, it's a novel in which the drama, humor, and passions of one very full life are stitched, with love and understanding, into the fabric of another.



Eighty-six-year-old Hennie has lived in Middle Swan, a gold-mining town in the Rockies, since before Colorado was a state. Nit has recently arrived in town with her husband and her grief, reminding Hennie of her own youthful hopes and sorrows. Finding common ground in their Southern heritage and a love of quilting, an unlikely friendship blossoms as Hennie captivates Nit with vivid memories that reach back to the mid-1800s. "There's something about stitching together," Hennie confides, "that draws a woman out."

As they sew, Hennie recounts her childhood in Tennessee and her tragic marriage to her sweetheart Billy, soon to be lost to the Civil War. She relives the death of their only child and her journey, by wagon train, across the country to start life anew with a man she'd never met. She recalls the unexpected blessing she discovered upon her arrival in Middle Swan and describes the lively cast of gamblers and moonshiners, quilters and "soiled doves" she has come to know. Summoning the feelings, dreams, and satisfactions of Hennie's years of experience as a

woman, mother, and wife, these stirring yarns serve as a healing balm for the lonely, anxious Nit—and help her piece together a new beginning for her own family.

Just as Hennie's tales weave a many-hued cloak of mountain wisdom for the benefit of her young friend, so Sandra Dallas creates for us—through a deft blend of historical detail, authentic voices, quilting lore, and, last but not least, emotional truths—a vibrant quilt of heartbreaking incident and heartwarming compassion.

An Excerpt from *Prayers for Sale*

The stranger looked up, startled, a little frightened. She was a new-made woman, not much more than a girl, and Hennie had never seen her before. “Oh!” the stranger said, clasping and unclasping her bare hands, which despite the poor light, Hennie could see were red and chapped. “I don’t mean to be nosy, but I was wondering how much?”

“How much for what?”

“A prayer.” The girl tightened the triangle of plaid wool scarf that covered her head before she thrust her hands into the pockets of her thin coat.

Hennie was confused for a moment, and then realizing what had confounded the girl, she laughed. “That sign’s been there so long, I forget about it.”

“It says, Prayers For Sale. I’m asking how much do you charge, and is it more if you’re in need than if you’re wanting just a little favor? Do sinners pay more than the righteous? And what if the Lord doesn’t answer? Do you get your money back?”

About the Author

Prayers for Sale is Sandra Dallas's eighth novel. Her debut, *Buster's Midnight Café*, was a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection; the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* called it "country music between covers." Her subsequent works of fiction include *The Persian Pickle Club*, *The Diary of Mattie Spenser*, *Alice's Tulips*, *The Chili Queen*, *New Mercies*, and *Tallgrass*. Mastering the period detail and ambiance of historical settings from the Civil War through World War II, Dallas has introduced readers of her bestselling books to an unforgettable series of women who know how to harvest friendship—and happiness—in the fields of hardship. Fellow novelist Jane Smiley has rightly called Dallas's "a quintessential American voice."



Born on a farm in Virginia, Dallas grew up immersed in history, thanks, she says, to her mother. "After we moved to Denver in 1945, Mom made sure we saw inside the seedy old Windsor Hotel on Larimer Street. So I suppose it's not surprising that the past is more interesting to me than the present or the future." A veteran journalist who spent many years as the Denver bureau chief for *Business Week*, Dallas employed her seasoned skills at researching to provide the historical background and create the authentic characters that give such substance to the world of *Prayers for Sale*.

Sandra Dallas currently lives with her husband in Denver. In addition to her novels, she has written numerous works of non-fiction, including *The Quilt That Walked to Golden*, an account of how mountain women, from the Overland Trail to contemporary Colorado, have recorded their lives in patchwork heirlooms.

Get the most out of *Prayers for Sale* with these reading group discussion questions.

1. The sign outside Hennie's house says "Prayers for Sale," yet she doesn't sell prayers. Why does Hennie keep the sign?
2. Although they're decades apart in age, 86-year-old Hennie and 17-year-old Nit become fast friends. What qualities do they have in common? What makes them compatible?
3. As Hennie begins her story for Nit, she says, "Back then, I wasn't Hennie Comfort. In those days, I was called by the name of Ila Mae Stubbs." What other transformations has Hennie made in the intervening years? What about her has stayed the same?
4. As in her previous novels, Sandra Dallas did extensive research on the dialects and period details of the era in which *Prayers for Sale* is set. Did the rich evocation of a gold-mining town and the quilting lore, for instance, contribute to your interest in Hennie and Nit's relationship?
5. Hennie's voice drives the novel, and is filled with phrases and expressions uncommon today. What does Dallas's commitment to verbal authenticity add to her portrait of Hennie? What expressions did you find especially memorable?
6. Quilting plays a central role in fostering Nit and Hennie's friendship. Towards the end of the book, Nit says, "Quilts are like lives. They're made up of a lot of little pieces." Do you think this is true? Does the structure of the book reflect this perspective?
7. Were you surprised by the book's final scene? What would you have done, if you were in Hennie's shoes? Would Hennie's life have been different if she had done so earlier?
8. Have you read other novels by Sandra Dallas? Which characters do you recognize from her previous books?

Praise for *Prayers for Sale*

FROM OUR BOOKSELLERS

"Sandra Dallas takes us back to a time when we knew and cared about the ones around us, and reminds us of what community really means."

Patricia Rogala, Birmingham, AL

"A delightful story of an unlikely friendship between two women of very different generations. A perfect read for those who enjoyed *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*."

Margie Turkett, Annapolis, MD

"Like her quilts, Hennie's story is pieced together with the many and varied threads of her life story. And all of it is done with love!"

Dorothy Newmark, Freehold, NJ

"Hennie has sass. She can look at her life and be happy with the choices she has made, but at 86, she still has the desire to do more than quietly retire."

Sue Gerth, Cedar Rapids, IA

FROM REVIEWERS

"This satisfying novel will immediately draw readers into Hennie and Nit's lives, and the unexpected twists will keep them hooked through to the bittersweet denouement."

Publishers Weekly

"Like the lives narrated, this novel, by the author of *Tallgrass*, runs the gamut of heartache, hardship, and happiness."

Booklist

"Forgiveness and redemption are the themes of this gentle novel about hardscrabble lives."

Kirkus Reviews

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Prayers for Sale

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