



The Heaven of Mercury: A Novel

Brad Watson

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Shortlisted for the 2002 National Book Award in Fiction: a dark, riotous Southern novel of sex, death, and transformation.

Brad Watson's first novel has been eagerly awaited since his breathtaking, award-winning debut collection of short stories, *Last Days of the Dog-Men*. Here, he fulfills that literary promise with a humorous and jaundiced eye. Finus Bates has loved Birdie Wells since the day he saw her do a naked cartwheel in the woods in 1916. Later he won her at poker, lost her, then nearly won her again after the mysterious poisoning of her womanizing husband. Does Vish, the old medicine woman down in the ravine, hold the key to Birdie's elusive character? Or does Parnell, the town undertaker, whose unspeakable desires bring lust for life and death together? Or does the secret lie with some other colorful old-timer in Mercury, Mississippi, not such a small town anymore? With "graceful, patient, insightful and hilarious" prose (*USA Today*), Brad Watson chronicles Finus's steadfast devotion and Mercury's evolution from a sleepy backwater to a small city. With this "tragicomic story of missed opportunities and unjust necessities" (*Fred Chappell*), "Southern storytelling is alive and well in Watson's capable hands" (*Kirkus Reviews* starred review). "His work may remind readers of William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, or Flannery O'Connor, but has a power—and a charm—all its own, more pellucid than the first, gentler than the second, and kinder than the third" (*Baltimore Sun*).

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