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Library Journal

BY JODI PICOULT

Mad Honey
(co-authored with
Jennifer Finney Boylan)

Wish You Were Here
The Book of Two Ways

A Spark of Light
Small Great Things

Leaving Time
The Storyteller

Lone Wolf
Sing You Home
House Rules

Handle with Care
Change of Heart
Nineteen Minutes

The Tenth Circle
Vanishing Acts
My Sister's Keeper
Second Glance

Salem Falls

Plain Truth

Keeping Faith

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Picture Perfect

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AND FOR THE STAGE

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Austenland: A New Musical

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JODI PICOULT

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OTHER
NAME**


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Image page 498 (left): John de Critz (attr.), Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton in his youth, c.1592, Cobbe Collection, Hatchlands Park.
Image page 498 (right): Hilliard, Nicholas (1547–1619), Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton. Watercolour on vellum on card with three hearts showing on the verso, height 41mm, width 32.5mm, 1594. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge/Art Resource, NY.

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*For Elyssa Samsel and Kate Anderson:
adopted daughters, beloved collaborators, gifted songwriters,
and most important,
fierce women*

NOTE: The Emilia chapters are peppered with references to actual Shakespearean plays and poetry.

They are listed in the back of this novel, in case you would like to check to see how many you caught.

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here.

—Lady Macbeth, *Macbeth*



O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the marketplace.

—Beatrice, *Much Ado About Nothing*



To whom should I complain? Did I tell this,
Who would believe me?

—Isabella, *Measure for Measure*



My tongue will tell the anger of my heart
Or else my heart concealing it will break.

—Katherine, *The Taming of the Shrew*



Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like them.

—Emilia, *Othello*

**BY ANY
OTHER
NAME**

CONTENTS

[COVER PAGE](#)

[PRAISE](#)

[ALSO BY THE AUTHOR](#)

[TITLE PAGE](#)

[COPYRIGHT PAGE](#)

[DEDICATION](#)

[NOTE](#)

[MELINA: MAY 2013](#)

[EMILIA: 1581](#)

[MELINA: JULY 2023](#)

[EMILIA: 1582](#)

[MELINA: AUGUST 2023](#)

[EMILIA: 1588-1592](#)

[MELINA: SEPTEMBER 2023](#)

[EMILIA: 1592](#)

[MELINA: SEPTEMBER 2024](#)

[EMILIA: 1592-94](#)

[MELINA: SEPTEMBER 2024](#)

[EMILIA: 1596-1604](#)

[MELINA: SEPTEMBER 2024](#)

[EMILIA: 1604-1611](#)

[MELINA: JUNE 2027](#)

[EMILIA: 1618-1645](#)

[MELINA: DECEMBER 2027](#)

[AUTHOR'S NOTE](#)

[ACKNOWLEDGMENTS](#)

[SHAKESPEAREAN REFERENCES](#)

[SOURCES AND RESOURCES](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHOR](#)

MELINA

May 2013

Many years after Melina graduated from Bard College, the course she remembered the most was not a playwriting seminar or a theater intensive but an anthropology class. One day, the professor had flashed a slide of a bone with twenty-nine tiny incisions on one long side. “The Lebombo bone was found in a cave in Swaziland in the 1970s and is about forty-three thousand years old,” she had said. “It’s made of a baboon fibula. For years, it’s been the first calendar attributed to man. But I ask you: what *man* uses a twenty-nine-day calendar?” The professor seemed to stare directly at Melina. “History,” she said, “is written by those in power.”

THE SPRING OF HER SENIOR year, Melina headed to her mentor’s office hours, as she did every week. Professor Bufort had, in the eighties, written a play called *Wanderlust* that won a Drama Desk Award, transferred to Broadway, and was nominated for a Tony. He claimed that he’d always wanted to teach, and that when Bard College made him head of the theater program it was a dream come true, but Melina thought it hadn’t hurt that none of his other plays had had the same critical success.

He was standing with his back to her when she knocked and entered. His silver hair fell over his eyes, boyish. “My favorite thesis student,” he greeted.

“I’m your *only* thesis student.” Melina pulled an elastic from her wrist and balled her black hair on top of her head in a loose knot before rummaging in her backpack for two small glass bottles of chocolate milk from a local dairy. They cost a fortune, but she brought Professor Bufort one each week. High blood pressure medication had robbed him of his previous vices—alcohol and cigarettes—and he joked that this was the only

fun he got to have anymore. Melina handed him a bottle and clinked hers against it.

“My savior,” he said, taking a long drink.

Like most high school kids who had notched productions of *The Crucible* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* on their belts, Melina had come to Bard assuming that she would study acting. It wasn’t until she took a playwriting course that she realized the only thing mightier than giving a stellar performance was being the person who crafted the words an actor spoke. She started writing one-acts that were performed by student groups. She studied Molière and Mamet, Marlowe and Miller. She took apart the language and the structure of their plays with the intensity of a grandmaster chess champion whose understanding of the game determined success.

She wrote a modern *Pygmalion*, where the sculptor was a pageant mom and the statue was JonBenét Ramsey, but it was her version of *Waiting for Godot*, set at a political convention where all the characters were awaiting a savior-like presidential candidate who never arrived, that caught the attention of Professor Bufort. He encouraged her to send her play to various open-submission festivals, and although she never was selected, it was clear to Melina and everyone else in the department that *she* was going to be one of the few to *make it* as a produced playwright.

“Melina,” Bufort asked, “what are you going to do after graduation?”

“I’m open to suggestions,” she replied, hoping that this was where her mentor told her about some fabulous job opportunity. She wasn’t naïve enough to believe that she could survive in New York City without some sort of day job, and Bufort had hooked her up before. She’d interned one summer for a famous director in the city—a man who once threw an iced latte at a costume designer who hadn’t adjusted a hem, and who took her to bars even though she was underage because he preferred to drink his lunch. Another summer, she’d been behind the cash register at a café at Signature Theatre and behind a merch booth at Second Stage. Professor Bufort had connections.

This whole business ran on connections.

“This is not a suggestion,” Bufort said, handing her a flyer. “This is more of a command.”

Bard College would be hosting a collegiate playwriting competition. The prize was a guaranteed slot at the Samuel French Off-Off-Broadway Short Play Festival.

The professor leaned against the desk, his legs inches away from Melina's. He set down his chocolate milk, crossed his arms, and smiled down at her. "I think you could win," he said.

She met his gaze. "But ... ?"

"But." He raised a brow. "Do I have to say it? *Again?*"

Melina shook her head. The only negative comment she ever received from him was that although her writing was clean and compelling, it was emotionally sterile. As if she had put up a wall between the playwright and the play.

"You are good," Bufort said, "but you could be *great*. It's not enough to manipulate your audience's feelings. You must make them believe that there's a reason *you* are the one telling this story. You have to let a bit of yourself bleed into your work."

And therein lay the problem: you couldn't bleed without feeling the sting of the cut.

Melina began to pleat the edge of her T-shirt, just to avoid his gaze. Bufort pushed off the desk and circled behind her. "I've been acquainted with Melina Green for three years," he said, drawing close. "But I don't really *know* her at all."

What she loved about playwriting was that she could be anyone but herself, a technically Jewish girl from Connecticut who had grown up as the least important person in her household. When she was an adolescent, her mother had had a terminal illness, and her father was struck down by anticipatory grief. She learned to be quiet, and she learned to be self-sufficient.

No one wanted to know Melina Green, least of all Melina herself.

"Good writing cuts deep—for both the playwright and the audience. You have talent, Melina. I want you to write something for this competition that makes you feel ... vulnerable."

"I'll try," Melina said.

Bufort's hands came down on her shoulders, squeezing. She told herself, as she did whenever it happened, that he meant nothing by it; it was just his way of showing support, like the way he had pulled strings to get her jobs in the city. He was her father's age; he didn't think about boundaries the way that younger people did. She shouldn't read into it.

As if to underline this, suddenly, he was no longer touching her. Professor Bufort raised the chocolate milk again. "Show me what scares

you,” he said.

THAT YEAR MELINA LIVED IN an apartment above a Thai restaurant with her best friend, Andre. They had met in a sophomore playwriting class and bonded over the fact that *Our Town* was overrated, that the musical *Carrie* was underrated, and that you could both love *Phantom of the Opera* and find it uncomfortably rapey.

As soon as she walked through the door, Andre looked up from where he was watching the Real Housewives. “Mel! Vote on dinner,” he said.

Andre was the only person who called Melina by a nickname. Her name, in Greek, meant *sweet*, and he said he knew her too well to lie to her face every time he addressed her.

“What are my options?” Melina asked.

“Mayonnaise, Vienna fingers, or take-out Thai.”

“Again?”

“You’re the one who wanted to live over Golden Orchid because it smelled so good.”

They looked at each other. “Thai,” they said in unison.

Andre turned off the television and followed Melina to her bedroom. Although they’d been living in the apartment for two years, there were still boxes on the floor and she’d never hung up any art or strung fairy lights around the headboard the way Andre had. “No wonder you get shit done,” he murmured. “You live in a cell.”

Like her, Andre was a playwriting major. Unlike her, Andre had never actually finished a play. He would make it to the end of the second act and decide he needed to revise the first before he could finish, and then get stuck endlessly rewriting. For the past semester he’d been working on a retelling of *King Lear* with a Black matriarch who was trying to decide which of three daughters deserved her secret recipe for gumbo. He’d based the main character on his grandmother.

He handed her the mail, which today consisted of a manila envelope addressed to her in her father’s messy handwriting. The relationship between Melina and her father had decayed during her mom’s illness to the point where putting any weight on it was too tender, but in his own sweet and distant way, he tried. Lately, he had gotten interested in genealogy, and