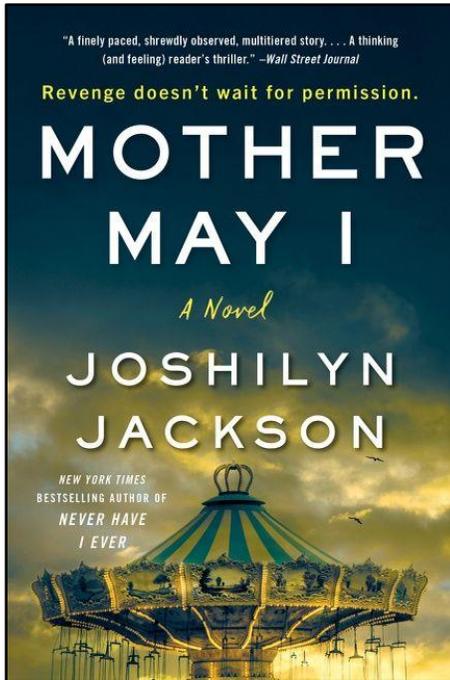



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*** NOW AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK ***

MOTHER MAY I

By Joshilyn Jackson

New York Times and *USA Today* Bestselling Author

An Amazon Best of the Month Pick

Finalist for the SIBA Southern Book Prize

An Indie Next Pick and Library Reads Hall of Fame Pick

William Morrow | Paperback Reprint | April 5, 2022 | \$16.99

Named a Best and Most Anticipated Book by *Wall Street Journal*, *BuzzFeed*, *Parade*, *Country Living*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Augusta Chronicle*, *She Reads*, *BookBub* and more!

“Jackson crafts a finely paced, shrewdly observed, multi-tiered story which moves with ease between past and present. Older events that prompt current actions are uncovered; pressing issues of class, race and sexual abuse are viscerally dramatized. *Mother May I* is a thinking (and feeling) reader’s thriller, a literary beach read.” — ***Wall Street Journal***

“An addictive domestic suspense” — ***Parade***

“*Mother May I* will leave you breathless.” — ***PopSugar***

“Within this story Jackson weaves careful and insightful commentary on mothering, privilege, trauma, and forgiveness, elevating it above your average psychological thriller.” — ***CrimeReads***

“Gripping... the dark secret at the novel’s heart rings all too true. Jackson knows how to ratchet up the suspense.” — ***Publishers Weekly***

“The tension is skillfully built... a thriller with a sharp #MeToo edge.” — ***Kirkus Reviews***

“Suspense readers will enjoy plot twists and motivations that hit close to home... the novel’s depth lies in exploring the role of a mother to protect and teach her children... Fans of Mary Kubica and Hank Phillippi Ryan will appreciate the mixture of suspense with complex characters.” — ***Booklist***

On April 5, William Morrow is proud to release the paperback edition of **MOTHER MAY I**, an addictive novel by *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author **Joshilyn Jackson**, who *Entertainment Weekly* has dubbed “a master of domestic suspense.” In this gripping page-turner, a mother must decide how far she is willing to go to protect her child and the life she loves. It’s an unforgettable tale of power, privilege, lies, revenge, and the choices we make, ones that transform our lives in unforeseen ways.

Jackson’s previous novel, *Never Have I Ever* (2019), was her first flat-out thriller and garnered praise from *People Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *PopSugar*, *Time*, and more. With **MOTHER MAY I**, Jackson once again displays her masterful talents for crafting unforgettable characters and surprising twists.

Growing up poor in rural Georgia, Bree Cabbat was warned by her single mother that the world was a dark and scary place. Bree rejected her mother’s fearful outlook, and life has proved her right. Having married into a family with wealth, power, and connections, Bree now has all a woman could ever dream of: a loving lawyer husband, two talented teenage daughters, a new baby boy, a gorgeous home, and every opportunity in the world.

Until the day she awakens and sees someone peering into her bedroom window—an old gray-haired woman dressed all in black who vanishes as quickly as she appears. It must be a play of the early morning light or the remnant of a waking dream, Bree tells herself, shaking off the bad feeling that overcomes her. Later that day though, she spies the old woman again, in the parking lot of her daughters' private school... just minutes before Bree's infant son, asleep in his car seat only a few feet away, vanishes. It happened so quickly—Bree looked away only for a second. There is a note left in his place, warning her that she is being watched; if she wants her baby back, she must not call the police or deviate in any way from the instructions that will follow.

The mysterious woman makes contact, and Bree learns she, too, is a mother. Why would another mother do this? What does she want? And why has she targeted Bree? Of course, Bree will pay anything, do anything. It's her child. To get her baby back, Bree must complete one small—but critical—task. It seems harmless enough, but her action comes with a devastating price, making her complicit in a tangled web of tragedy and shocking secrets that could destroy everything she loves. It is the beginning of an odyssey that will lead Bree to dangerous places, explosive confrontations, and chilling truths.

Bree will do whatever it takes to protect her family—but what if the cost tears their world apart?

ADDITIONAL PRAISE

"Joshilyn Jackson does it again with this explosive, white-knuckle read about a mother who will stop at nothing to protect her family. Terrifying, timely and thought-provoking, I couldn't tear my eyes away."

— **Mary Kubica**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Other Mrs.*

"All the things we love about Joshilyn Jackson come together with panache in *Mother May I*: subtle yet scalding insights on the nature of privilege, compelling, vibrant characters, and the wily plot and breakneck pace of a thriller. *Mother May I* sets a new standard for the genre: it's razor-sharp, merciless, and masterful."

— **Rose Carlyle**, #1 internationally bestselling author of *The Girl in the Mirror*

"Chilling, thought-provoking, and hauntingly written, *Mother May I* kept me on the edge of my seat with its breathless race against time. Joshilyn Jackson's latest riveting thriller starts with a bang and doesn't let up, asking how well you truly know the people around you—and how far you're willing to go for the ones you love. A true page-turner that will stick with me for a long time."

— **Megan Miranda**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Girl from Widow Hills*

WATCH A VIDEO MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR: <https://bit.ly/30uyLmX>

ABOUT THE BOOK:

MOTHER MAY I

On Sale: 4/5/22

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E-Book ISBN: 9780062855367 | Audio ISBN: 9780063092068 (Read by the author)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

JOSHILYN JACKSON is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of ten novels, including *gods in Alabama*, *The Almost Sisters*, and *Never Have I Ever*. Her books have been translated into more than a dozen languages. A former actor, Jackson is also an award-winning audiobook narrator. She lives in Decatur, Georgia, with her husband and their two children. She serves on the board and works as a volunteer teacher for REFORMING ARTS, a non-profit dedicated to bringing liberal arts higher education to Georgia prisons designated for women.

Learn more at joshilynjackson.com or follow Joshilyn on social media:

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A conversation with Joshilyn Jackson, author of **MOTHER MAY I**

Q: MOTHER MAY I is your tenth novel, congrats! Can you tell us in your own words a little bit about this book?

JJ: It's the story of a young mother, Bree Cabbat, who briefly looks away from her youngest child—and he's gone. It's every parent's worst nightmare. We've all had that moment. For ninety-nine-point-near-infinity percent of us, our kid saw a bird and squirted off sideways, and that dizzying, stomach-drop horror is resolved to the good in three seconds.

Bree is not so lucky. Her son has been taken. Because this is a Joshilyn Jackson novel, I think you've already guessed that this is not about anything as simple as money. In this book, the past has a pulse, and teeth, and it has caught up to Bree Cabbat.

The woman who took the baby is a mother herself, and while what she asks from Bree seems like a small, simple (if highly illegal) task, the consequences will send Bree on a dangerous journey that will change the way she understands the world and could cost her and her family everything. Both of these women will stop at absolutely nothing when their children's lives are at stake, and yet there is no world in which they can both get what they want.

Q: What was your inspiration for MOTHER MAY I?

JJ: I serve on the board and (when we are not in the middle of a pandemic), as a volunteer teacher with a nonprofit called Reforming Arts. Our mission is to offer college level coursework and degrees to incarcerated people in Georgia's Women's prisons. We work in partnership with many other institutions and groups, including Georgia State University. We also have a program that assists re-entering citizens as they leave prison and try to create connected, sustainable, livable lives in a system that is stacked against their success.

My students have been eclectic in terms of age, race, and orientation, but they have one thing almost universally common; they grew up in poverty. Many have lived their whole lives in extreme, unimaginable poverty: food insecure, lodging insecure, homeless, in foster care. And a great many of them are now mothers themselves.

My paternal grandparents were working class, my maternal grandparents were poor. I saw my parents work their way into the middle class as I grew up. They sent me to college and helped my husband and I buy our first home—a tiny two-bedroom condo that cost five figures. We are now firmly middle class, and my children have a lovely range of opportunities. The children of my students get one or two chances as they come up, and that is if they are very lucky and have people actively working to help them find support and resources. They are much more likely to end up in prison than my children.

I wanted to explore that disparity, that desperation. Desperation drives people into awful, awful acts. *Mother May I* began with the idea of two women who both grew up working class and rural, right on the knife-edge of poverty. One lost her husband, and she and her daughter slid into poverty. One, via scholarships and then an advantageous marriage, is now quite wealthy. And yet both these women love their children with the same fierce devotion. Both of these women would do anything to help them—and this is the hinge that puts them direct opposition.

Q: MOTHER MAY I deals with complicated, contemporary issues like privilege, opportunity, complicity, trauma, and justice. Why do you think it's important to explore such nuanced themes in fiction?

JJ: Story is how I explain the world to myself. It's how I process my own thoughts and beliefs. Story is how I navigate the questions that are too large to have a simple answer. Writing and reading are how I expand my empathy and my worldview.

That said, it's not my job as a novelist—or a reader, or a human!—to resolve the world's troubles. It's my job to explore them, not to preach. I write the exact kinds of books I like as a reader: page-turners, with characters I really care about, that both entertain and invite thought and discourse.

Q: All of your previous novels have incorporated elements of intrigue and tension, but you have moved firmly into suspense with NEVER HAVE I EVER and MOTHER MAY I. How do you balance the strong female characters you are known for with more "in-your-face" suspense?

JJ: I think I was always secretly writing suspense! I remember so many interviews that focused on how my work was not quite women's fiction, and not quite southern fiction, not quite commercial, not quite literary, not this and not that. I think I was writing Southern Stealth Noir.

But now I have found a genre that fits me like perfect shoes. I love it! I always did like to have a murder or two, with a mystery attached, of course. But my first eight books are definitely paced more like women's fiction. Allowing myself the twin luxuries of a bigger, louder, stronger engine and a sharper, twisty-er, faster plot arc has been in many ways a relief. It's revitalized my joy in my work. That said? These books are still *my* books. I'm a character driven writer, and that has not changed. Big twists and reveals and breathless action can't matter if they happen to people I don't love.

Q: MOTHER MAY I plays with traditional suspense arcs of “dark secrets” and of a “cat-and-mouse” chase by twisting and subverting readers’ expectations. Why was this important for MOTHER MAY I as a story?

JJ: The simple answer is—it’s fun! I love a good twist as much as any reader, and they are also quite thrilling to craft. For me, plot comes last. I know the characters very well, and I know the inciting incident, and I have an end I am walking toward (although I am usually wrong, and the end changes as I write). So when I write a twist or a reversal, it often surprises *me*.

Character and theme are the craft, the work. Plot is the cookie that makes me excited to do that the work. If the twists do not surprise me, how can I expect them to surprise you?

That said, once I discover one, I have to go back and set up for it with foreshadowing and such, because I hate a cheap twist that does not emerge from character and theme. I want the reversals and twists to matter on more than one level.

Q: Many aspects and experiences of motherhood play out through the novel. Without giving anything away, can you talk a bit about how this drives the story?

JJ: The main character is a mother whose child has been taken by a woman who is also a mother. Both of them love their children enough to kill or die for them, and they truly understand this.

I have a protagonist and an antagonist who see each other very clearly, and who also respect each other. But they are on a deadly collision course, and they understand this too. They cannot both get what they want, and yet they can’t help but feel a weird, connected empathy, even as they work to utterly undo each other. I have a lot of empathy for my antagonist—even though she gives me nightmares. It’s my favorite complication in the book.

Q: Why did you decide to include theater as an element in this novel? Has this always been a passion of yours?

JJ: Oh, yes! My first degree was in theatre. As a young woman, I worked professionally as a voice actor and in summer stock and dinner theatres and booked a few commercials. My husband is a theatre person, too. We met doing a summer of Kaufman plays. The first time I saw him, he was up on stage, learning sword-fighting. *En Garde!* How could I not marry him?

One of the nicest perks of my job is that I get to come to New York sometimes to meet with my editor or agent. I always book extra days, crash on a friend’s couch, and see as many plays as I possibly can. Best theatre in the world. I will go to a matinee, grab a quick bite, and then go right into an evening show.

I saw the original casts perform *Wicked* and *Hadestown*. I’ve seen Daveed Diggs play Lafayette and Jefferson and Neil Patrick Harris play Hedwig. Once, during an impassioned monologue, John Lithgow’s spittle hit me on the forehead. These are some of the most treasured memories of my life. My husband and I also love the Atlanta theatre scene; we follow the careers of various playwrights and stage actors here the way some people follow sportsball. It’s one of the things I’ve felt as a huge loss during the pandemic. Live theatre. That feeling of being a part of a group of strangers, sitting close in the dark, together, feeling the same feelings as a story unfolds. Humans need that. We need the kind of art that creates empathy.

Q: In addition to writing your books, you also narrate the audio books. How does this inform your writing process?

JJ: Acting has certainly shaped me as a novelist. My books are so character-driven, and I first learned how to create characters as an actor—taking the skeletons and musculature of brilliant layered characters written by Chekhov and Beckett and Churchill and trying to put skin and hair and true, human faces on them. Now I am in charge of all the layers, which is lovely for a control freak like me, but I don’t know that I would have been able to do it without the acting.

Early on, I was told that it was a bad idea, because authors are almost universally bad at it. But I have theatre training and have worked as a voice actor. I sent in an audition reel for my second novel, and they hired me. Since then, I’ve won awards for my readings, and I sometimes read for other authors including Lydia Netzer, Patti Callahan Henry, and Marybeth Mayhew Whalen—it is such a pleasure!

Q: What do you most hope readers take away from MOTHER MAY I?

JJ: A desire to read more of my books! I always have the same answer to this question, because I have no agenda in terms of takeaways as a novelist. I hope book clubs will talk about the themes and readers will think about the story and the choices the characters made, but I don’t want a small, flat world with simple, fictional solutions to complex, actual problems. I write about people who are very real to me, navigating the moral gray areas as best they can. I try my best to do it in a fun, exciting, gripping way that will also provide an escape—that’s my real agenda.