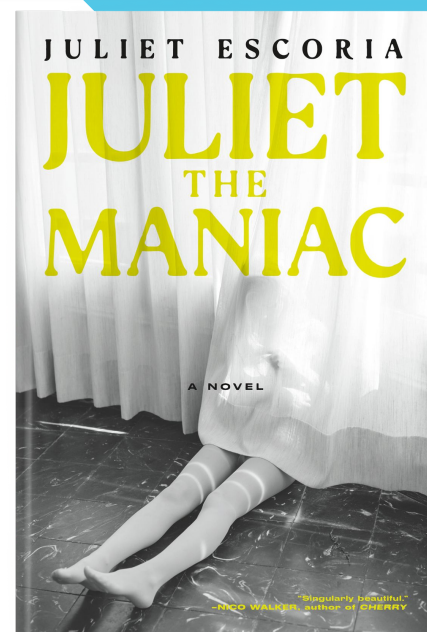


# JULIET THE MANIAC

Juliet Escoria

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“For fans of Ottessa Moshfegh, *Juliet the Maniac* is a worthy new entry in that pantheon of deconstruction ... Dazzling.”

— *The New York Times Book Review*

“To read *Juliet the Maniac* is to confront our shared faith in the flawed logic of life’s meaning, and by so doing, become worthier of our humanity ... a gift to any reader who has ever lost control, sighted a horizon and began moving toward it.”

— *The Washington Post*

## INTRODUCTION

**Lingering just underneath Southern California’s sunny, sandy beach culture, one young woman struggles to survive herself as she hurtles through the mid 90’s and tries to make sense of her on-and-off relationship with recovery.**

Juliet knows she should be poised for success. She knows her honors English teacher shouldn’t be changing her grades from F’s to C’s out of pity, knows she shouldn’t be snorting coke and chain-smoking at the Palms, knows she shouldn’t be hallucinating shadowy, Joan-of-Arc-like messages from God. But there is something dark and violent inside of her fourteen-year-old heart that makes it impossible for Juliet to stop self-destructing. The two forced hospitalizations didn’t help her, neither did the outpatient facility for gay, depressed art kids—maybe Redwood Trails therapeutic boarding school will?

Through her Dideon-esque lens, Escoria captures the brutality of girlhood—its fleeting, toxic friendships, the monstrous ways anger transforms, and the constant feeling of being close to normal, but not normal at all.

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. Juliet’s voice is unrelenting, raw, and honest. How does her voice drive the narrative? Does it change over the course of the novel?
2. Consider the power dynamics present within Redwood Trail—for example, the power the technicians had over the residents. How do you think this affected Juliet and the other Redwood Trail’s attendees? Despite the internal issues regarding the workings of Redwood Trail, do you think it genuinely aided the residents in recovery? Why or why not?
3. If you were Juliet’s parents, what would you have done? Do you think she needed to be sent to an institution, and if so, do you think her parents had the right to choose to send her to one?

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4. Discuss the social pressures weighing on Juliet and other characters throughout the novel; namely, gender, class, and education. How did these forces interact with Juliet's mental illness? What role do these pressures play in the daily lives and recoveries of the characters in the book?
5. Think about Juliet's friendships with Nicole, Holly, Alyson, and Christina. Are there any similarities between the girls or Juliet's feelings towards them? How did Juliet's relationships with women change, and change her, throughout the book?
6. How do you feel about the way the novel portrays mental illness? Did any of Juliet's descriptions of her illness particularly stand out to you?
7. Discuss Escoria's use of short chapters and images. How do you think they extend and balance the narrative?
8. Examine the popular phrase, "It gets better." Do you believe Juliet would agree with its sentiment? Throughout Juliet's journey, was there ever a time where you weren't concerned for her well-being? Was there ever a point where you thought things might be getting better?
9. How would you characterize Juliet's relationship to romance and dating? Does romance help or hinder her recovery? Consider Juliet's relationship with Luke—were you surprised their relationship was allowed at Redwood Trail?
10. What is Juliet's relationship to honesty and confession? Do you believe that Juliet is an honest person, or even has the capacity to be? Would Juliet consider herself to be honest?
11. What do you think the lambs and the garden represented at the end of the story? How do these symbols connect to Juliet's understanding of care and nurturing?
12. How does the book's portrayal of Juliet's mental illness echo or differ from previous representations of mental illness in popular media? Do you think that recent books and media have changed their portrayals of mental illness, and if so, how?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Juliet Escoria** is the author of the poetry collection *WITCH HUNT* and the story collection *BLACK CLOUD*. She lives in West Virginia with her husband, the writer Scott McClanahan.

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