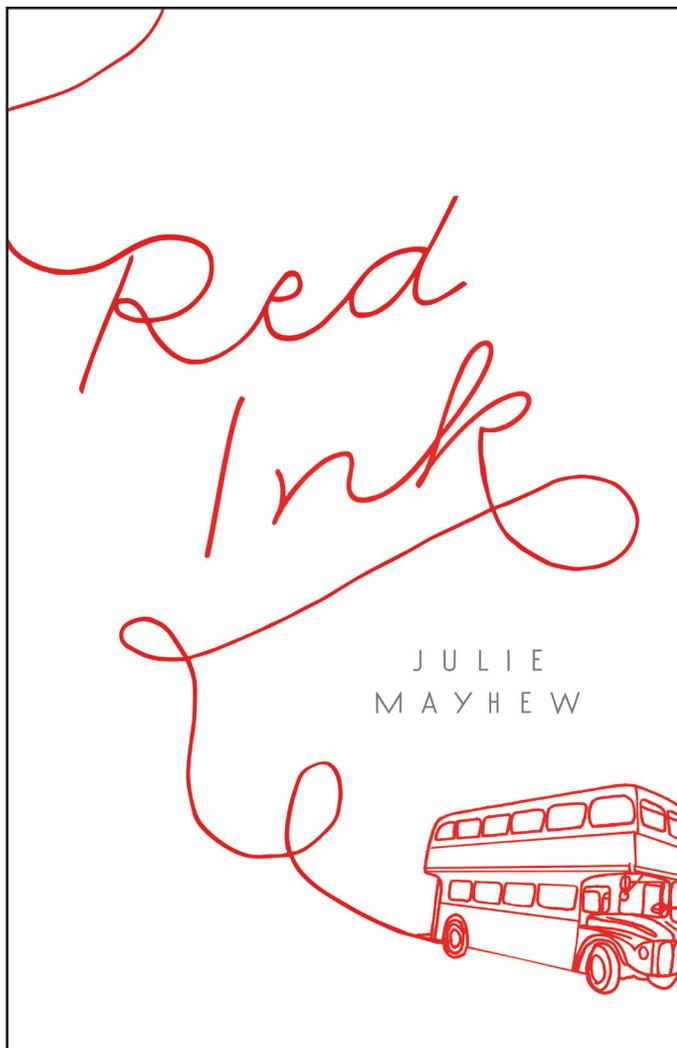


RED INK

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A NOTE FROM AUTHOR JULIE MAYHEW

The very first idea for the book came on a trip to Crete. I was there with my then-boyfriend (now husband) driving around the potholed roads of the Akrotiri Peninsula in a tin-can rented car when we passed a melon farm and got stuck behind a truck. It was piled high with a giant pyramid of melons just as Maria describes it in the book, “with no net or tarpaulin to hold them in place.” We followed it for miles, and the driver didn’t drop one piece of fruit. It was incredible—so, of course, the image stuck with me.

A couple of years later, I was taking a Meisner acting training course. (I got into acting while working on my journalism degree and went on to study at drama school and work as an actress.) My acting tutor claimed you could use the Meisner technique when writing as well as acting. I was curious—and skeptical. But I was willing to give it a go. In the first workshop we had to write the first word that came into our heads (mine: *melon*—I think I’d had some for breakfast!), then write a scene with that as the first word of the first sentence, but in a spiral, not in straight lines, so our brain didn’t fall

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into its usual patterns. I realize this sounds incredibly random and slightly bonkers, but in that workshop I wrote, almost word-for-word, the scene where Melon is in a changing room trying on bras with her mum.

The next scene I wrote was Melon's first meeting with Amanda. As you can tell from the way the book is structured, my brain doesn't work in a straightforward A-to-B kind of way; it jumps from here to there to "oh, look, what's that?" So from then on, the order in which the scenes appear in the book is the order in which I actually wrote them.

I started to work seriously on the book after having my first son. For one, it seemed to focus my time. Give me a whole day to write, and I will faff about for hours; give me an hour-long baby nap, and I will bash out a good five hundred words. But only after having a child of my own did I understand clearly the main theme of the book—that parents are humans like everyone else, flawed and guaranteed to make mistakes. What I find fascinating from Goodreads and blogger reviews is how teen readers think Maria is an awful woman, while

adult readers really sympathize with her and find Melon the more irritating character. I've started to encourage mothers and daughters to read it together. It's sort of sad that we don't really understand our parents until we become parents, or at least adults ourselves.

I returned to Crete to help me write the last chapters and fill in the details, visiting the peninsula, the monastery, Chania's harbor, and Maria's beach (incidentally, with two American women I befriended while I was out on the island). I stayed with a Cretan family and celebrated Greek Easter with them, which I found hugely emotional (even though I wasn't raised religious) as we all carried a flame back home from the church. I took the boat trip that Melon takes, visited the museum and churches mentioned in the book, and even saw a dead frog being lifted from the pool by a young tanned boy who I'm sure Melon would have liked! Vassilis, whom I stayed with, was a horticulture graduate, and he gifted me the explanation of why the tree in the garden of the monastery was weighted with both lemons and oranges, which became a key symbol in the book.

