



Jagged Little Pill: The Novel

Eric Smith

Alanis Morissette

Diablo Cody

Glen Ballard

Amulet Books (Apr 26, 2022)

Hardcover \$19.99 (304pp)

978-1-4197-5798-3

A collaboration project between Grammy award-winning musician Alanis Morissette, screenwriter Diablo Cody, producer Glen Ballard, and Eric Smith, *Jagged Little Pill* takes on the promises and shortcomings of contemporary social justice movements.

Frankie and Nick are a microcosm of a modern Connecticut family: he holds his family's aspirations in his Harvard-bound, mistake-evading hands; she, her white family's Black adopted daughter, evades conversations about her sexual orientation—and about feeling like she can't fit in. Frankie's best friend, Jo, might be becoming something more than a friend, but is contending with her own family's homophobia, and Nick longs to go a step farther with impossibly cool Bella.

A party where the drinks flow freely changes the teenagers' trajectories, though. The next morning, they all awake to a social media firestorm, ignited by a shocking photograph taken without Bella's permission—and that suggests that her consent was violated in ways worse than photographic. While Frankie and Jo organize other students on Bella's behalf, Nick disappoints others' high expectations, hoping to avoid judgment over his absences in Bella's night.

This novel does what the after school specials and cautionary tales of previous generations (embodied by Frankie and Nick's mother's victim-blaming initial reaction) refused to: Bella's assailant is condemned; the novel's heroines and heroes are on Bella's side. The hope of justice is not exaggerated despite such hopeful turns, but a model of the right responses to assault is still secured. And between rallies, Morissette lyrics, and accounts of friendships being formed and tested, notes about LGBTQ+ equality, racial equality, opioid recovery, and the benefits of being brave also wind in.

Working toward community and personal triumphs, *Jagged Little Pill* is a story about what's possible when young people's truths are heard and supported.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May / June 2022)

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