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**Melody**

**Maysonet**

My teenage years were by far the most difficult period of my life, but reading was one of the things that helped me get through. I didn’t read light and fluffy books. Those kinds of stories didn’t speak to me. Instead, I was drawn to dark themes and troubled characters.

In my day, there weren’t that many young-adult authors to choose from, so even though I read the occasional Judy Blume book (thanks to her, I didn’t *want*to grow up too fast) and all of S. E. Hinton (her books opened my eyes to an even harsher world than I was accustomed to), most of what I read could be found in the adult section of the library. I loved World War II books and still do, and *Watership Down* by Richard Adams was—and will continue to be—my all-time favorite book. I also read a lot of poetry—the darker, the better.

My absolute favorite poet is William Blake. When I was a teenager, his *Songs of Innocence* *and of Experience* spoke to me in a way that nothing else could. Blake was someone who knew how quickly the world robs us of our innocence.

That beautifully sad theme of innocence vying with experience has stayed with me since I first read Blake in high school, so it’s no surprise that my favorite young-adult books (*Crank* by Ellen Hopkins and *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson) delve deeply into that time in our lives when innocence turns to experience, whether we want it to or not.

Those are the kinds of stories I like to write, too. In my debut young adult novel, ***A Work of Art****,* the main character is an artist who battles with innocence and experience. And in the book I’m writing now (as yet untitled), the main character is a poet who longs to replace her own life’s experiences with someone else’s.

When I was a teenager, I used to fantasize about the kind of life I have now—never believing that such a life was within my power. But even though my life is full of joy, it’s the dark themes and troubled characters that speak to my heart. I know what it is to be unhappy. I know how it feels to glean slivers of hope from something you read. I thank those writers who helped me through my teenage years. My goal now is to pay it forward, to give hope to someone who’s maybe going through something and needs to know they’re not alone.

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Melody Maysonet was born in Alaska, but grew up in Illinois. A former English teacher at a community college, she later moved to Seattle, where, under the name Melody Alder, she became editor and columnist for Wizard’s of the Coast’s *The Duelist* magazine. She currently lives with her husband and son in South Florida where she’s a volunteer teacher at an outreach homeless shelter, but she devotes most of her time to writing fiction for young adults.

**www.MelodyMaysonet.com**

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