



# The After-Room

## MAILE MELOY

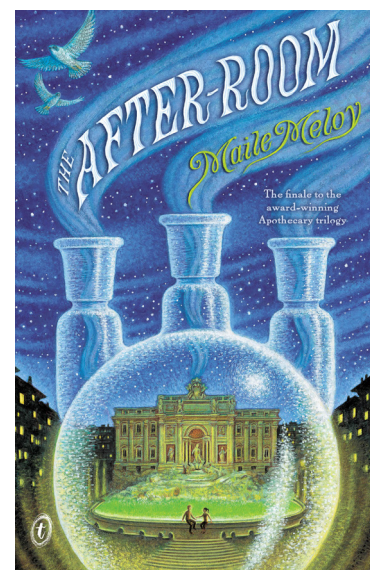
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### SYNOPSIS

It's 1955, and Janie Scott and Benjamin Burrows are trying to live a safe, normal life in America. Benjamin is missing his father, the apothecary, very much, and a mysterious, unscrupulous magician introduces him to the After-room, a place where the dead can be contacted, but a place full of danger and uncertainty. As Benjamin is drawn to search for his father, Janie knows she must save him from slipping away into the land of the dead.

Meanwhile, their friend Jin Lo washes up on a remote island with an American spy and finds herself on the trail of a deadly nuclear threat. She's on the other side of the world and she needs help—but it seems the only way Janie and Benjamin can reach her in time is to travel through the perilous After-room.

As Janie races desperately to keep Benjamin safe, she finds the problem at the source of the nuclear threat and, through the After-room, a way to solve it and rescue Jin Lo—and show Benjamin that a life with the living, with friendship and love, is where he belongs.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maile Meloy is the award-winning author of several short-story collections and novels for adults including *Both Ways Is the Only Way I Want It* and *Liars and Saints*. *The After-Room* is the third and final novel in the Apothecary series for young adults.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT MAILE MELOY

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### AUTHOR'S NOTE: WHERE WE LEFT OFF

*The Apothecary* begins in 1952, when fourteen-year-old Janie Scott has to leave her friends and her school in sunny Los Angeles for cold, forbidding London. But soon she meets a stubborn, opinionated boy named Benjamin Burrows, the local apothecary's son, who's on the trail of a Russian spy.

When Benjamin's father disappears, leaving behind an ancient book called the Pharmacopoeia—with instructions for making truth serums, an invisibility bath, and an elixir that allows people to fly as birds—Janie and Benjamin are drawn into a cold war intrigue and a plot to thwart a nuclear disaster. They get help from Pip, a London pickpocket, and from two of the apothecary's co-conspirators: the Chinese chemist Jin Lo, and the Hungarian physicist Count Vili, who each have their own extraordinary powers.

At the end of *The Apothecary*, Janie has to return to her parents. Benjamin's father takes away her memory of the last weeks, for her own safety. But it's agonizing to feel herself forgetting Benjamin, and to know that the most important thing in her life is gone. Benjamin, on the run with his father, can't bear the separation either. He sends Janie her diary so she can start to piece her memories together.

*The Apprentices* begins with Janie at sixteen, in boarding school in New Hampshire, working on a science experiment. She's struggling to do the kind of magic that she's seen is possible, but without any help or guidance. On the other side of the world, Benjamin develops a way to communicate with her. He sends her a glassine packet of powder; when they both take the powder, it creates a mental connection and allows them to see through each other's eyes.

Janie's science experiment, meanwhile, has drawn sinister attention, and just as Janie and Benjamin have found each other again, she's kidnapped and taken to an island in Malaysia. Benjamin calls on Pip to help find her, and to keep their secrets from falling into the wrong hands.

The victory in *The Apprentices* comes at a terrible price, and Benjamin loses his father. He feels responsible



for his father's death, and unworthy of his role as the protector of the Pharmacopoeia. Count Vili helps Janie and Benjamin get safely home to Janie's parents in Ann Arbor. But they feel trapped back in childhood there, after a life chasing nuclear catastrophe.

As *The After-Room* begins, Benjamin is consumed by guilt and grief, and Janie feels abandoned. High school homework and her father's jokes don't help. They've lost their sense of destiny and purpose, and their allies are scattered. Count Vili is in Europe, Pip is in London, and Jin Lo is somewhere in the China Sea, chasing a boat loaded with uranium.

But the apothecary took Benjamin's mind-connection powder before he died, and Benjamin keeps having strange dreams. He can still see through his father's eyes, in flashes. But now it's a connection to the land of the dead...

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What strategies does the author use to explain the back story of the first and second novel in the series, *The Apothecary* and *The Apprentices*? Scan the text and highlight any passages of exposition.
2. '*Maybe he could let his father go, but he couldn't lose Janie.*' P.327  
  
*'As fervently as her parents wanted to make a living as writers again, and as unfair as their treatment in Hollywood had been, she knew they wanted to get a job on their own merits.'* P.144  
  
Explain what Benjamin and Janie learn about their parents throughout the course of the novel and how they respond to these insights.
3. What is the overall message of friendship that is presented in the novel? Provide examples from the text to support your view.
4. The author notes in *Where We Left Off* (above) that Benjamin is consumed by guilt and grief, and Janie feels abandoned at the start of the novel. How do they attempt to overcome these feelings? Do you think they made good choices? To what extent are they successful? Provide examples from the text.
5. The famous English poet John Keats (1795-1821) is a character in *The After-Room*. Research his life and explore reasons why you think the author chosen to include him in the novel.
6. *The After-Room* is set in 1955 during a period known as the Cold War, when the threat of a nuclear war was very real. How does the author present this in *The After-Room*?