

Play

Jess Taylor

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In Jess Taylor's unfiltered novel *Play*, guilt and memories overshadow a woman's strength and resilience.

As a child, Paul had an unbreakable bond with her cousin Adrian. Together, they imagined into existence The Lighted City, a haven where they could escape their troubles. Yet within this realm, Paul also had disturbing encounters that would haunt her for years to come.

In Paul's adulthood, Adrian is deceased. Paul struggles with complex post-traumatic stress disorder—and with the effects of childhood experiences in The Lighted City. Though she hopes for peace and personal growth, Paul cannot reconcile her past with her now normal life. Recurrent flashbacks to her youth compound the existing challenges she faces, including navigating romantic and interpersonal relationships while striving to secure stable employment.

Paul finds solace in her art. She's both a creator and a teacher. But art was also one of her earliest means of self-discovery—and an indicator of the strangeness in her relationship with Adrian. PTSD complicates art, too, though, disrupting routine activities like attending an art gallery to support a client's work (there, a painting brings her back to dark memories of The Lighted City). In such moments, the boundaries between reality and imagination waver, pulling Paul back into the grip of her trauma.

Paul's narrative is divided into three distinct periods: her childhood, the days before and after Adrian's death, and her present. The latter is marked by cognitive processing therapy sessions. While the frequent shifts in her timeline threaten to obscure pivotal plot points, they also serve as a vital tool for her introspection, showcasing her mental health evolution and illuminating her path toward healing.

In the novel *Play*, the intricacies of a woman's childhood dreams cause her pain in adulthood, forcing her to address the remnants of her youth.

DANICA MORRIS (May / June 2024)

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