



Red Hook Road

By Ayelet Waldman

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As lyrical as a sonata, Ayelet Waldman's follow-up novel to *Love and Other Impossible Pursuits* explores the aftermath of a family tragedy.

Set on the coast of Maine over the course of four summers, *Red Hook Road* tells the story of two families, the Tetherlys and the Copakens, and of the ways in which their lives are unraveled and stitched together by misfortune, by good intentions and failure, and by love and calamity.

A marriage collapses under the strain of a daughter's death; two bereaved siblings find comfort in one another; and an adopted young girl breathes new life into her family with her prodigious talent for the violin. As she writes with obvious affection for these unforgettable characters, Ayelet Waldman skillfully interweaves life's finer pleasures—music and literature—with the more mundane joys of living. Within these resonant pages, a vase filled with wildflowers or a cold beer on a hot summer day serve as constant reminders that it's often the little things that make life so precious.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Pat Conroy Reviews *Red Hook Road*

Pat Conroy is the author of nine previous books: *The Boo*, *The Water is Wide*, *The Great Santini*, *The Lords of Discipline*, *The Prince of Tides*, *Beach Music*, *My Losing Season*, *The Pat Conroy Cookbook: Recipes of My Life*, and *South of Broad*. His newest book, *My Life In Books*, will be published in September. He lives in Fripp Island, South Carolina. Read his review of *Red Hook Road*:



In her latest novel, *Red Hook Road*, Ayelet Waldman has nailed the indelible mark that the state of Maine leaves on all visitors who fall for its subtle, insinuating glamour. *Red Hook Road* is a terrific novel, and might even be a great one. The structure of the book seems perfect to me; the first sentence sets up and readies us for the immense powers of the last one. It tells the stories of two families as different as the Montagues and the Capulets, but with the same tragic and irreversible destinies playing out around them. The hardscrabble, working-class Hewins are native Mainers, the kind of family that keeps Maine vibrant during the cold months when the summer people return to their big-city homes. The Kimmelbrods are a sophisticated Jewish family from Manhattan; they are as cultured and passionate as the Hewins are no-nonsense and taciturn, as taciturn as lichens growing on the rocks of a church garden. Jane Hewins is a quintessential woman of Maine with an unviable sense of self and a home-bound integrity that could earn her a place on a Maine license plate along with a moose, a lobster, or a loon. Her big-city counterpart is Iris Copaken, a character who represents the highest level of Jewish culture. Iris has been vacationing with her family in Red Hook since birth, and Jane Hewins has cleaned the Copaken's summer house for many years. The novel begins when Jane's admirable son marries Iris' delectable daughter; and great storm clouds form on the far horizon as Down East Maine meets the Upper East side in a glorious clash of the Titans.

Ayelet Waldman's prose style is lovely and fresh. There is a brilliant scene that I've returned to again and again: The great violinist, Emil Kimmelbrod, finds the undiscovered talent of a small girl, Samantha Phelps, and brings out her instinctive mastery of rhythm, modulation, and perfect pitch. With language and example, Ayelet teaches me everything I didn't know and can never know about music. It was like discovering a lost part of my life where I'm not only untalented, but unteachable. Each encounter of Kimmelbrod and Samantha in the book was exciting for me. Had I not read this book, I wouldn't have understood that I've never really "heard" classical music before.

The structure of *Red Hook Road* is so perfect that I didn't initially notice the sacred reverence for the beauty of wood both families share. The people of coastal Maine are aficionados of wooden boats, and their harbors fill up with boats that perform the same service as the highest works of art. The same joy of perfect

woodwork manifests itself in Kimmelbrod as he cradles his Dembovski or considers the famous violins of Giussupe Guarneri del Gesu. You learn in this book that there is a strange kinship in the mahogany fittings of yachts and the lacquered pear wood of violins--*Red Hook Road* is an intricate dance between art and nature, between foreignness and belonging, between still waters and storm.

There are love stories being told all over this book, and like all great love stories, these are volatile and enduring and bright with astonishment. These characters now take up residence in the city I've built out of the books I love. This book made me happy, and happy to be alive. It took me out of my home on the coast of South Carolina, placed me in the town along *Red Hook Road*, and changed me the way good books always do.

Ayelet Waldman on *Red Hook Road*



There comes a moment at every literary event, a moment every author dreads, when the lights go up and the Q&A starts. The vast majority of the Q is fine (I can't speak for the A, you'll have to be the judge). What book am I reading now, when did I first want to become a writer, how do my children feel about the title of my last book. I like those Qs. I like especially the Qs that haven't been asked before, the ones that give me a chance to depart from my practiced answers. I'm not as fond of the Q that begins with some version of, "I hated this book, but not as much as I loathed your last one," but I can handle that. (I find it usually helps to agree with the person and to suggest alternatives. Ian McEwan never disappoints.) The Q I loath and despise, the Q every single writer I know loathes and despises, is this one:

Where, the reader asks, do you get your ideas?

It's a simple question, and my usual response is a kind of helpless, "I don't know." But I do know. I'm just embarrassed to tell you. I get my ideas from you, or from your mother, or from someone else I run across to whom something bizarre or sad has happened, someone whose life is miserable, but in an interesting way. "Write What You Know," goes the old adage, but once you've written about what an unloved geek and freak you were in high school (and every writer I know claims to have been the most unhappy teenager who ever lived. Where were these people when I was sitting alone at the lunch table at George Washington Jr. High? I'd like to know. Couldn't we have been sitting together?), once you've mined the exciting tale of your grandmother/grandfather's immigration to America from Russia/Italy/China/Vietnam, once you've spent an entire novel complaining about how much it sucks to have to wake up in the middle of the night with the baby, then what?

I'll tell you what. Other people's misfortune. That's where we get those ideas that inspire us (and, we hope,

you). Most writers spend their lives standing a little apart from the crowd, watching and listening and hoping to catch that tiny hint of despair, that sliver of malice, that makes them think, Aha, here is the story.

My new novel, *Red Hook Road*, began many years ago as a short article in the newspaper. A bride and a groom (or was it the groom and the best man?) were killed on their way from the church to the reception, when a speeding car smashed into their limousine. The horror of that happening on that day, at that moment, when you are about to embark on a completely new life, where everything is possible and the future is all that is on your mind... that stuck with me for years. I'd think of it time and again, as anyone would.

A normal person thinks about that tragedy, and maybe gets sad all over again. A writer thinks of it and wonders, "Can I use this?"

Until one day, you can, and you do. --*Ayelet Waldman*

(Photo © Reenie Raschke)

From Publishers Weekly

Waldman (*Love and Other Impossible Pursuits*) delivers a dense story of irreparable loss that tracks two families across four summers. After John Tetherly and Becca Copaken die in a freak car accident an hour after their wedding, their families are left to bridge stark class and cultural divides, and eventually forge deep-rooted bonds thanks to the twin deities of love and music. Becca's family is well off, from New York, and summers in Red Hook, Maine, a small coastal town where John's blue-collar single mother, Jane, cleans houses for a living. They interact, awkwardly, over how to bury the couple, the staging of an anniversary party, and over Jane's adopted niece, whose amazing musical talent makes a connection to Becca's ailing grandfather, a virtuoso violinist, who agrees to give her lessons. Becca's younger sister, Ruthie, a Fulbright scholar, meanwhile, falls in love with John's younger brother, Matt, the first Tetherly to go to college, before he drops out to work at a boatyard and finish restoring his brother's sailboat, which he plans on sailing to the Caribbean. Though Waldman is often guilty of overwriting here, the narrative is well crafted, and each of the characters comes fully to life. (*July*)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Critics diverged over Waldman's dissection of the aftermath of tragedy, loneliness, and grief. While some felt drawn in by the intriguing plot, characters, and portrait of grief, no matter how bleak, others felt hoodwinked by an overly depressing, clichéd story of fairytale romance and family relationships gone terribly awry. The ending ("a sudden loss of narrative control that sends the story careening into melodrama," according to the *Washington Post*) also left something to be desired. Yet almost every reviewer praised Waldman's sharp eye for detail--from her descriptions of Maine, boat building, and classical music to her commentary on social and class conflict. In sum, *Red Hook Road* is probably best for those who want an emotional, tearful read.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Patricia Diaz:

Have you spare time for the day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity to get spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a go

walking, shopping, or went to the actual Mall. How about open or even read a book titled Red Hook Road? Maybe it is for being best activity for you. You recognize beside you can spend your time together with your favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with the opinion or you have other opinion?

Karl Irwin:

Book is definitely written, printed, or descriptive for everything. You can learn everything you want by a book. Book has a different type. To be sure that book is important matter to bring us around the world. Next to that you can your reading proficiency was fluently. A guide Red Hook Road will make you to be smarter. You can feel a lot more confidence if you can know about every little thing. But some of you think that open or reading the book make you bored. It is not make you fun. Why they could be thought like that? Have you looking for best book or acceptable book with you?

Susan Arnold:

Typically the book Red Hook Road has a lot info on it. So when you make sure to read this book you can get a lot of help. The book was authored by the very famous author. Tom makes some research previous to write this book. This book very easy to read you may get the point easily after reading this book.

Helen Christopher:

What is your hobby? Have you heard that question when you got pupils? We believe that that problem was given by teacher with their students. Many kinds of hobby, Every person has different hobby. Therefore you know that little person like reading or as reading through become their hobby. You need to know that reading is very important along with book as to be the thing. Book is important thing to include you knowledge, except your personal teacher or lecturer. You get good news or update regarding something by book. Amount types of books that can you choose to adopt be your object. One of them is niagra Red Hook Road.

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