

PAPER



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The Hunger Artist Jillian Medoff's heavy anorexic tale.

Jillian Medoff and I are sharing stories about rat boys. The ones who did us wrong. The ones who didn't call.

Between the two of us, we have a lot to say.

"I was doing medical writing about breast implants. I was really, really large-breasted—I mean, incredibly large-breasted—and was so self-conscious that I would go to these trade shows and talk about implants and I was constantly hunched over. Men in the industry would look at me and say, 'Now, are yours a manufacturer's sample?'" The 33-year-old writer laughs and sits up a little straighter in her chair. "Now I've had a breast reduction. They look great!"

With the success of her first novel, *Hunger Point* (HarperCollins/ReganBooks), Medoff isn't slouching anymore. The saga of Frannie, an outrageous and outraged 26-year-

old who tries to cope with her sister's eating disorder and her own addiction to the aforementioned "rat boys," *Hunger Point* delivers one of the most fully realized narrators to come along in years—a sultry, suburban Holden Caulfield. It also details, in sections alternately hilarious and harrowing, the turbulent relationships women forge with their own

Jillian Medoff's body of work



bodies. It's subject matter that every man who cares about women should study. It's also territory the author understands firsthand.

The eldest daughter of a salesman who moved his family 17 times in 16 years, Medoff became anorexic at 12 and bulimic at 14. "When you're raised as a girl, you look around and all you see are skinny models in cool clothes; all these lifestyles on TV that you're never gonna get," she recalls. "It gets perpetuated as 'You're less than that.' I think Americans in general have a very romanticized vision of what life should be versus what life is." Following bouts with depression, drugs and destructive relationships, Medoff was hospitalized twice in her early 20s. With therapy, she began to rebuild herself and devote herself to her writing.

Ironically, an über-rat boy ("the boyfriend that we hate!") gave Medoff the push needed to begin her novel after an especially heinous breakup left her feeling bereft and

disconnected. "I needed something to hook into," she explains. "Slowly the book began to creep in, like a lover." After four years of soul searching, self-discipline ("I was like the Gestapo!") and self-doubt ("I sometimes have these feelings of, 'Oh my God, I suck'"), *Hunger Point* was completed.

The general consensus seems to be that *Hunger Point* does not suck. Advance reviews have been glowing. Assistants at New Regency (which optioned the book) even stole galleys and Xeroxed copies for their friends. Still, the self-effacing author refuses to rest on her laurels and has already begun work on a follow-up effort.

"It's called *The Sum of the Parts*," she reports with a radiant smile. "It's about the breast-implant industry and this guy who has to learn to relate to women as people, not just tits and ass."

Rat boys, consider yourselves forewarned. ★

BY DIANA SHAFTER