

The background of the cover is a dark, moody photograph of a window. The window is a double-hung style with a dark wood frame and is divided into six panes. It looks out onto a dense canopy of green trees. To the right of the window, a portion of a world map is visible, rendered in a dark, textured style. The title text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

the  
making  
of  
christina

MEREDITH JAFFÉ

the author of *the fence*



# Blurb

Interior designer Christina Clemente is caught off guard by an intense affair with her charismatic client, Jackson Plummer. He quickly becomes both the cure to Christina's loneliness and a surrogate father to her young daughter Bianca.

When Jackson suggests moving to a rundown farm in the mountains, Christina soon forgets her initial hesitation and absorbs herself in restoring the rambling century-old house, Bartholomews Run, becoming obsessed with solving its mysterious history.

But while living on the isolated farm, her once effervescent child transforms into a quiet sullen teenager and Christina increasingly struggles to connect with her.

Because Bianca has a secret.

And the monstrous truth threatens to destroy them all.

# Author Biography

Meredith Jaffé is the author of *The Fence*, a presenter and facilitator. For four years she wrote the weekly literary column 'The Bookshelf' for the online women's magazine *The Hoopla*. Her reviews, author interviews, feature articles and op-ed pieces have appeared in *The Hoopla*, *Australian Author*, the *Guardian Australia* and *The Huffington Post*.

Meredith regularly facilitates events at writers' festivals, including Sydney, Newcastle and St Albans Writers' Festival. As a keen believer in the power of literacy, she volunteers at The Footpath Library where she manages their annual EPIC! writing competition for schoolchildren. She is currently working on her next novel in between riding her horses and enjoying farm life with her family on the beautiful NSW south coast.

*The Making of Christina* is her second novel. Find out more about Meredith Jaffé at [www.meredithjaffe.com](http://www.meredithjaffe.com)

# Plot and Structural Summary

Christina Clemente is forty-five and living in regret with her mother Rosa on the family farm. Christina receives an unexpected visitor from her guilt-ridden past: Sarah Plummer. Sarah, the ex-wife of Christina's former lover Jackson, is dying of breast cancer. She is there to seek redemption for the part that she played in supporting Jackson in the trial that ultimately saw him imprisoned for fourteen years.

Sixteen years earlier, Christina – a single mother supporting her two-year-old daughter Bianca – is an interior designer for Peterson Partners. She takes on a new client, surfwear millionaire Jackson Plummer. Jackson is charismatic and larger-than-life, and although Jackson has a wife and three children, Christina soon finds herself seeking his glowing approval while redesigning his Forty Baskets house, and speculating about their undeniable connection. One day, Christina is forced to bring Bianca to a meeting with Jackson and, to her surprise she sees he is a natural with children. Not long after, he takes Christina out for a business lunch and she is thrown into a torrid affair. Jackson is everything she'd wished her ex Jamie could be: a cure to her loneliness, and a surrogate father to Bianca. Over the next few years, their affair deepens and Jackson becomes a stable fixture in their lives. He teaches Bianca to surf and is always there when needed.

Seven years after their affair begins, Jackson announces that he's going to leave his wife and move with Christina and ten-year-old Bianca to the Blue Mountains. Christina's best friend Della thinks she's throwing her life away and Christina's parents are not keen on the idea either. Christina is also uncertain about uprooting their lives in the city, but when she sees a rundown, isolated but beautiful farm called Bartholomews Run – owned by the family of notorious early 20th century painter Bartholomew Rivers – she is immediately enchanted by its potential and its rich history.

Christina throws her heart and soul into restoring Bartholomews Run to its former beauty and applying for heritage-listing. But over the years she finds out that Rivers was not so glamorous. In the hidden rooms of this rabbit-warren house, she discovers that Rivers had conducted an affair with the under-age model of his most famous painting, and the girl had died in mysterious circumstances.

# Plot and Structural Summary

Meanwhile, Bianca becomes increasingly distant. Christina puts it down to the mood swings of a sullen teenager. When Bianca becomes a senior in high school, she begs Christina to be allowed to board at the school through the week. Christina says that it's Jackson's decision, as he controls the finances. Jackson is hesitant and defensive, and ultimately sends Christina away so he can negotiate with Bianca in private. Having established his authority, he allows Bianca to board at the school.

On the stormy night that Christina receives preliminary heritage-listing approval, she receives a phone call from Bianca's headmistress asking Christina to come immediately. Bianca reveals that she has been sexually abused by Jackson for the last five years, and that she fears she has fallen pregnant. Wracked with guilt, Christina immediately jumps to action to put Jackson behind bars. After a long and arduous battle in the courtroom, Jackson is found guilty.

The novel swings between Christina's past and present. The present Christina is terrified that Bianca, who is travelling the world, won't come home for Christmas. Chapter after chapter, she relives her past and becomes convinced that Bianca won't come home.

When Bianca ultimately does come home for Christmas, Christina is disappointed to hear that her daughter will be leaving again shortly. But she realises that she must first reconcile with her past grievances to move toward the future.

# Plot and Structural Summary

## QUESTION 1

*'He had a talent for taking strengths and turning them into weaknesses. In Jackson's hands, that she was hardworking, loyal and a peacemaker by nature became a weapon.'* (Page 165.)

*'She said that there was a pattern to predatory behaviour. Winning trust was important, creating dependency vital. Separating the victims from familiar locations and support networks, such as career, family and friends, allowed the predator to isolate and control his victims.'* (Page 197.)

Were Jackson's actions premeditated? What were the signs of this premeditation? Discuss the title *The Making of Christina* and the ways Jackson manipulated Christina to control and exploit both her and Bianca. How did Jackson mould Christina into the person he needed her to be?

## QUESTION 2

*'Any moment Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire would exit the cabana and dance cheek to cheek poolside . . . His obvious joy swelled Christina's heart. She knew how he felt. On her first visit she had been flabbergasted that such a house could have gone untouched for so long. The second time she came here, her veins fizzed with its potential. Stumbling across Bartholomews Run expanded her vision beyond the humble quest to find a family nest befitting Jackson's status.'* (Page 95.)

The house, Bartholomews Run, symbolises different things for Christina, Jackson and even Bianca. What does moving into this house symbolise for each character? How do their views of the house change throughout the novel? How does the author use the setting of Bartholomews Run as a metaphor for Christina's life and a manifestation of her frame of mind?

## QUESTION 3

*'Christina put the photos aside; she could no longer bear to look at them. This new painting of Genevieve was unnerving. Christina had completely misunderstood Rivers' intentions. She had thought The Ravishing of Sophia was Rivers both idealising virginity as well as capturing that moment before it was gone. However, now Christina knew that it was Genevieve who had posed for Sophia, it cast a whole new light on the painting and the man.'* (Page 188.)

# Plot and Structural Summary

There are many parallels between the Rivers subplot and Christina's main narrative. Discuss the ways this reflects and enhances the main story. How do the similarities between Bartholomew Rivers and Jackson deepen our understanding of Jackson's monstrous character, predatory sexual behaviour and the psychology of narcissism? How does Christina's perspective on Genevieve's abuse reflect what is happening to Bianca?

# Thematic Summary

*The Making of Christina* explores the themes surrounding child abuse. Please be aware that some of the following themes may be distressing to discuss but they are aimed at increasing understanding, awareness and debate around this significant issue.

## Blame and mothers turning a blind eye

### QUESTION 4

*'Christina doesn't want to hear about Sarah's pain. She is as much to blame as Christina. Perhaps more so because she was his wife for all those years before. Years when Sarah saw or heard nothing ...'* (Page 5.)

*'Jackson's encouragement motivated not by philanthropy but by the need to distract her, for her to be so consumed that she would not see what was happening under her own nose.'* (Page 121.)

*'What are you trying to say? Jackson was raping my daughter in front of me and I ignored it?'* (Page 245.)

How does the author explore the idea that a portion of society believes mothers are to blame for the abuse of their children in a domestic situation? Why is it that people sometimes leap to the conclusion that mothers know that their children are being abused and do nothing about it? What do Christina's thoughts and actions say about why she would blame herself for what happened? Even Christina herself is quick to blame Sarah for being blinded to Jackson's true self. Discuss the significance of Sarah standing by Jackson in court in this context.

## Victim-blaming

### QUESTION 5

*'You have to understand, it's about more than Bianca's word against the accused. There will be twelve jurors in there, ordinary men and women, each with their own set of biases and stereotypes. You'd be amazed how many people will believe she wanted a sexual relationship with her stepfather.'* (Page 335.)

Unfortunately, it's not uncommon for the victim to be blamed in cases of sexual abuse. Why is this idea flawed? How has the author portrayed this in the novel? What are your thoughts on this and how is the argument portrayed in the media and in society?



# Thematic Summary

## Institutional child abuse versus domestic child abuse

### QUESTION 6

*'Christina watches her anguish, thinking how right Sarah is. How they were raised in a generation when only little girls were thought of as vulnerable. Before everyone realised how institutionalised and widespread this violence really was.'* (Page 6.)

*'Did you know that across the whole of Australia, around four thousand cases of child sexual assault are reported and proven to be true every single year . . . And the academics reckon the police only hear about ten per cent of cases.'* (Page 259.)

Over the last few years, society's understanding of institutional child abuse has increased as the Child Sex Abuse Royal Commission was established and many institutional cases have come to light. Compare and contrast institutional abuse and domestic child abuse. Why is it so hard for children to prove the abuse? Discuss how the hearsay rule and the delayed complaints of child abuse are obstacles for abused children in the judicial system.

### QUESTION 7

*'Christina had never let Bianca go to anyone's place overnight. It was all very well knowing the mothers but she rarely met any of the dads. It didn't seem right to let a young child stay overnight in a stranger's house.'* (Page 140.)

Discuss this comment and how Christina's perspective on predators and predatory behaviour is ingrained in society. Is it a mistrust of masculinity and men? Or is it a case of assuming that assault is perpetrated by strangers? Is it a bit of both?

## Mother–daughter relationships

### QUESTION 8

*'When Christina thinks of Christmas, all she sees is three damaged women sitting around a table piled with too much food and nothing to say to each other.'* (Page 46.)

*'Every time she tried to interact with her daughter, Bianca ran like a scalded cat. Christina had no basis of comparison, no way of knowing if this was a normal relationship to have with a teenage*

# Thematic Summary

*girl or whether she was a terrible mother. It was a dire truth to admit. She sensed the secrets Bianca kept hidden from her but despaired of a way to unlock them, to return to their once easy relationship. However she came at it, she was forced to acknowledge that around Bianca her failings as a mother were writ large.’ (Page 179.)*

There are two vastly different mother–daughter relationships in the novel. Discuss the similarities and differences between Christina and Rosa’s relationship and Christina and Bianca’s relationship and what it brings to the overarching storyline. Also look at each character individually. Compare and contrast their unique character traits. Why does Christina see herself as so different to Rosa and Bianca? Why has the author chosen to highlight this juxtaposition?

## Financial power in the household

### QUESTION 9

*“I’m not sure I’d marry a man with money, Mary-Lou,” Della said. “It’s different when you earn it yourself or have been together forever and it’s a team effort like you guys and us. But having it handed to you on a plate changes the power dynamic.” Her words cut Christina.’ (Page 110.)*

*‘If I go after him financially, his lawyers might say that the money was what it was all about in the first place. How could I possibly accept a financial settlement from him after everything he’s done? It would be like hush money.’ (Page 159.)*

Discuss the many ways that Christina and Bianca become financially dependent on Jackson over the course of the novel. How does Jackson use money to gain power over Christina?

## Survival and behaviour

### QUESTION 10

*‘Bianca was always a bit of a loner. Christina shakes her head. She keeps doing this, making assumptions about Bianca’s behaviour as if she knows her daughter when the events of the last few years prove otherwise. Bianca being a loner was not a choice; it was survival.’ (Page 157.)*

*‘Christina had reeled from Bianca’s cold confidence. She’d been warned Bianca might fall apart after her confession and to watch out for signs of post-traumatic stress disorder so common in victims of sexual assault. But telling her story seemed to have had the opposite effect on Bianca.*

# Thematic Summary

*After the initial shock of the first few days, Bianca had become calm, focused. Somehow, through genes or circumstance, Bianca had developed a tough inner core.’ (Page 336.)*

Discuss Bianca’s strength of character. The Bianca that we see as a young child and the Bianca we see coming home for Christmas are vastly different. Find examples of how circumstances have developed Bianca’s behaviour and survivalist instinct at different points in the novel. What does this say about the nature versus nurture debate?

## QUESTION 11

*‘Sarah continues, “Anyway, the point is, I assumed it had to be Ash because she was always daddy’s little girl. Because she was highly strung and unpredictable. She fitted the stereotype . . . All the time it was Josh.” Sarah hunches her shoulder as if this will protect her. “I didn’t realise until after the trial when he tried to hang himself.”’ (Page 6.)*

Discuss how Bianca and Josh reacted differently to abuse. Why has the author chosen to do this? What does this say about real-world situations and how different behaviours and symptoms of post-traumatic stress manifest in different people?

## Guilt

### QUESTION 12

*‘Guilt tattoos Christina with the scars and scabs of a rash that came with the first knowing and never left. A kind of braille blistering over her skin, telling her story.’ (Page 1.)*

*“...You must make peace with yourself, Christina, because guilt,” here Sarah clutches the scar which whitens beneath her fingers, “guilt will destroy you and then he has won.” (Page 10.)*

Why is guilt such a powerful emotion and how can it destroy a person? How has guilt shaped who Christina and even Rosa are in the present timeline? What must they do to try to overcome this guilt?

# Thematic Summary

## Closure, resolution and moving forward

### QUESTION 13

*'Christina cries for her mother, for her father, her dead siblings, her lonely childhood, and for Bianca. She is not the brave woman her mother is. Rosa left everything she knew behind to start a new life in a new country with the man she loved by her side. It was Rosa's choice. Whereas Christina had to flee and she had nowhere else to go but home to the farm. It is here she treads water, not wanting to go back, unable to move forward. There is no ocean for her to sail across. She can mulch potatoes and pick beans all day long but this is not her life. It's Rosa's life.'* (Page 240.)

Discuss Rosa's backstory, why she took so long to tell Christina, and the affect it has on Christina's ability to seek closure.

### QUESTION 14

*"No good comes from living in the past, Tina. You can't change it. You must reconcile the truth with your heart."* (Page 49.)

*'It is inevitable that Christina finds herself on the steps of the verandah, watching Bianca drive off into the future whilst she stays anchored here. Christina knows there is no absolution for sins such as hers. She knows that guilt will always be her burden to bear. But as she waves and cries and watches the painted van disappear in its cloud of dust, she also knows that she has raised a magnificent, resilient child. Life will not destroy Bianca. She feels Rosa's hand reach out and grip hers. Life will not destroy any of them.'* (Page 362.)

Throughout the novel Christina is terrified that Bianca will not come home for Christmas but when she does, Christina is disappointed that Bianca will be moving on so soon. Discuss what is stopping Christina moving forward. Why must Christina reconcile with her past grievances to look toward the future? What did the burning of the transcript symbolise for both Christina and Bianca? What does the final paragraph evoke and why?

# Writing Style

*The Making of Christina* is written in third person from the limited perspective of Christina, meaning the author only relays Christina's thoughts, feelings and her knowledge of situations and other characters. Because the perspective is limited, the reader is required to use their intuition to delve into the minds of Jackson and Bianca and use their imagination when witnessing their actions.

The non-linear narrative weaves the two past and present plot lines to mimic Christina's memory recall. When we first meet Christina in the present, we see her voice as grief-stricken and beaten down. When we flash back to the past, before her grief has overtaken her, we see her voice as hopeful yet, in some ways, cautious.

## QUESTION 15

*'The past is a place she'd prefer never to revisit but it dogs her, refusing to let her go.'* (Page 12.)

The Christina of the past is vastly different to the Christina of the present. Discuss why the author chose to use the non-linear narrative device to flash between the timelines? How effectively does this show Christina's journey and development as a character?

## QUESTION 16

*'What's wrong with me, Mama? Why didn't I see what was going on, what kind of man he really was?'* (Page 49.)

*'Five years she lived her fantasy, oblivious to the unpalatable truths that hovered in the periphery of her vision.'* (Page 197.)

How has the author used Christina's limited perspective within the past and present to effectively allow the reader to imagine or understand the behaviours, thoughts and emotions behind the veneer of Jackson and Bianca's characters in the past? Why has the author chosen to do this? Discuss if this would have been as effective in a linear narrative or omniscient third person narration?