

(Download PDF) Dayswork: A Novel

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An NPR 2023 Books We Love Pick A Washington Post Notable Book of 2023 A Kirkus Reviews Best Book of 2023 A Chicago Public Library Must-Read Book of 2023 A Paris Review and Seattle Public Library Staff Favorite of 2023 A Nashville Public Library Top Ten Book of 2023 A startlingly original, incantatory novel about marriage, mortality, and making art. In the endless days of the pandemic, a woman spends her time sorting fact from fiction in the life and work of Herman Melville. As she delves into Melville's impulsive purchase of a Massachusetts farmhouse, his fevered revision of Moby-Dick there, his intense friendship with neighbor Nathaniel Hawthorne, and his troubled and troubling marriage to Elizabeth Shaw, she becomes increasingly obsessed by what his devotion to his art reveals about cost, worth, and debt. Her preoccupation both deepens and expands, and her days work extends outward to an orbiting cast of Melvillean questers and fanatics, as well as to biographers and writers among them Elizabeth Hardwick and Robert Lowell whose lives resonate with Melville's. As she pulls these distant figures close, her quarantine quest ultimately becomes a midlife reckoning with her own marriage and ambition. Absorbing, charming, and intimate, Dayswork considers the blurry lines between life and literature, the slippage between what happens and what gets recorded, and the ways we locate ourselves in the lives of others. In wry, epigrammatic prose, Chris Bachelder and Jennifer Habel have crafted an exquisite and daring novel.

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