



Erica Jong
and Molly Jong-
Fast in 1999

MOLLY JONG-FAST ON MOM—AND MURDER

Molly Jong-Fast, 32, is the daughter of novelists Erica Jong (*Fear of Flying*) and Jonathan Fast (*The Golden Fire*). Here, she dishes about her childhood and her wickedly satiric serial-killer novel, *The Social Climber's Handbook*, which somehow calls to mind both *Gossip Girl* and *American Psycho*. —SARA VILKOMERSON

What was it like growing up in such an illustrious family?

Molly Jong-Fast My mother had a terrible divorce from my father that went on for about 10 years. They were only married 18 months. Now they love each other and have a great relationship. It's actually a little bit irritating. Because, you know, I'm 32, and it can do me no good now.

When you were a kid, did you have any sense of how famous your mother's books—like *Fear of Flying*—were?

Jong-Fast I feel like writerly fame is a weird fame because it doesn't

necessarily translate to all people. Though there *were* these yenta-y women in their 60s who would be like, "Erica Jong! You taught me about the orgasm!" It's really terrible, as a kid. Oh, yeah. You have no idea.

Was it strange to read the sexually explicit content of her books?

Jong-Fast I read 200 pages of *Fear of Flying* and was like, "Oh, Lord, help me." [Laughs] My mom was really of the *Our Bodies, Ourselves* generation. I remember I got my period for the first time and she was like, "This is a great teachable moment." I wanted to die.



You became a wife and mother in your mid-20s. How did your mom, who is such a feminist icon, feel about that?

Jong-Fast I think it was hard for her, like I was saying I reject our bohemian upbringing. But I love being a mom. My mother's generation, they felt that children might trap them, and they had to rebel. My mother didn't have any more [kids]. When she would get mad at me, she'd say, "I'm adopting a Chinese baby who will love me."

How did your own writing career come about?

Jong-Fast I went to Barnard, Wesleyan, and NYU for a semester each. But I had a terrible alcohol and cocaine problem. I went to Hazelden—an amazing place—and have been sober for 13 years. My mother was beside herself [about my not going back to college], and to shut her up, I told her I was going to write a book. And I did—*Normal Girl*.

What inspired you to write a serial-killer novel this time around?

Jong-Fast My favorite writer is Patricia Highsmith. She's got a really dark sensibility. I love *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, so that was some of the inspiration. *The Young Poisoner's Handbook* was a movie that inspired me—it's Australian, and very cool. *Dexter*, too.

You've set your book on the Upper East Side, where you grew up and now live.

Jong-Fast It's a Stepford world. There are a lot of women who don't work and men who are the breadwinners, and it's interesting to see how the marriages work, the trades people make for money. I'm not sure if I would make those trades, but who's to say? That's something I've learned from parenting and being sober—anytime I'm self-righteous, I'm screwed.

So there's a lot of true-life detail in the novel?

Jong-Fast This is not a memoir! I haven't killed anyone. But wouldn't this be the perfect cover?