



Balloon Dog

Daniel Paisner

Koehler Books (Jun 22, 2022)

Softcover \$18.95 (290pp)

978-1-64663-697-6

Daniel Paisner's literary novel *Balloon Dog* revolves around a sculpture heist—though its artful characters are also vulnerable to other kinds of theft.

Though he used to be a respected writer, middle age killed Harrison's ambition. Lem, who transports art for a living, dreams of the good life, but it's just out of reach. Shari loved married life—until her husband cheated on her. And Marjorie, Harrison's wife, misses the bygone days. Her children are growing up. Still, though they all feel washed-up, these four people surprise each other, forming connections and finding love that they didn't think was possible.

The book begins with separate threads focused on each of the characters, written in stream-of-consciousness style. They monologue; they indulge in obscenities; in conversation, they are brazen. But just when their self-obsessed, cynical separateness threatens to become oppressive, curious links between them are revealed, resulting in unexpected shifts.

The cast of characters has changes of heart as they meet one another, and their growth is dramatic and potent. Lem and Harrison negotiate a deal. Harrison comes clean to his wife. Shari empathizes with her husband. They become more honest and heartfelt with others, too, and their renewed investment in their relationships pays off.

The story concentrates on people's inner work; its action is minimal. The sculpture itself is captured in terms of its weightless, inconsequential absurdity, which juxtaposes with the foursome's self-awareness. There are mammoth realizations throughout, and the book's enigmatic ending proffers a full sense of the sculpture's meaning. Left in a holding cell, destiny unknown, it invites inquiries into what unforeseen forces move and inspire others.

Balloon Dog is a risk-taking and uplifting literary novel that brings art into the everyday.

MARI CARLSON (July / August 2022)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.