



The Puppeteer's Daughters

Heather Newton

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An aging, celebrated puppeteer throws his daughters' lives into chaos in Heather Newton's gripping new novel.

Walter—a talented puppeteer and a reluctant children's entertainer who achieved global prominence in the latter role—has three daughters whom the world knows about. His eldest, Jane, was a teenager before he achieved fame, and she resents the baubles she missed out on as a result. His middle daughter, Rosie, was the product of an affair; she still feels awkward in Walter's storied spaces. And his youngest daughter, Cora, now runs his entertainment empire.

While the sisters each have their own issues with their roles, they find themselves facing the additional, mutual complication of Walter's unearthed will, which makes new demands of them: that Jane embrace puppets. That Cora live a little. And that Rosie lose weight. Any sister who fails loses her inheritance.

While these stipulations set the stage for a story about a controlling father who manipulates his daughters just like he does his marionettes, the truth is more nuanced than this. Walter is less cruel than clumsy—a father who loves his girls, without knowing how to do so perfectly; a man who never shook off his impostor's syndrome, no matter how far he rose. To free themselves, the sisters have to upend the will's presumptions, asserting truths that it forgets: that they've always been enough, in and of themselves.

As each sister works her way toward a delayed coming-of-age, the novel proves to be enthralling. Jane learns to let go of her resentments. Cora lets herself be imperfect, opening up to love. And Rosie accepts that her appearance was never the problem—it's unhealed wounds that keep her moored.

The Puppeteer's Daughters is a heartwarming story about self-acceptance, forgiveness, and the strings sometimes attached to family love.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (July / August 2022)

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