

Two White Queens and the One-Eyed Jack

Heidi von Palleske

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Heidi von Palleske's peculiar *Two White Queens and the One-Eyed Jack* is a novel in which nothing is incidental and aberrations abound.

The audience is required, from the get-go, to do some of the driving in this story; the reader's early exposure to the distressing, compelling stories of the real-life inspirations behind the book ensure that there's no turning back. As fast as Johnny, as a child, falls from a tree, readers are plunged into unsettling scenes and relationships. Broad strokes indicate who's who and what's going on; these come through the perceptions, life experiences, and blind spots of whichever individual seems to be closest to the action at any given moment. The rest is left for the reader to fill in.

Over time, as new people and relationships are introduced, and familiar ones are revisited, readers are forced to modify their initial impressions, all in order to conform to the ever-expanding perspectives of a multitude of narrators, all of whom operate from different vantage points. Because of their freakish appearances, strange ways, and horrific pasts, these characters suffer from dysfunctions and agonies common to anyone who's cruelly rejected by their community's norms.

Albino twins and bound boys find themselves in believable relationships against historical backdrops that are rendered with integrity. Their physical afflictions and artistic endeavors inform how they perceive the world; they also become central to the story. As their lives weave in and out of one another's, and their alienation becomes the norm, each is forced to confront their abnormalities, and to choose whether to regard them as a blessing or a curse.

Quirky and meticulous, *Two White Queens and the One-Eyed Jack* is a literary novel of substantial merit.

LINDA THORLAKSON (March / April 2021)

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