



Puccini's Ghosts

Morag Joss

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CWA Silver Dagger Award winner Morag Joss peers into the soul of a wounded family in this haunting, harrowing masterpiece of psychological suspense. With equal parts subtlety and menace, Joss takes us on a dizzying journey toward a collision between fantasy and reality—and an astounding moment of revelation that shatters illusions, hopes, and lives forever.

The year is 1960. The place is a Scottish seaside town utterly devoid of culture and charm. Here, Lila lives as the third player in her parents' dramatically embittered marriage. Until her flamboyant, irrepressible uncle George shows up from London and her family decides to squander a windfall on the most preposterous of causes: a civic production of the Puccini opera *Turandot*.

Lila knows nothing of opera and little of her uncle or the dashing young man he hires to sing the role of Calaf. But Lila does know passion. Because it's coursing through her veins—and rushing blindly, wildly all around her. Now a girl on the verge of womanhood is about to blunder into a grown-up world where secrets are kept and exposed, hopes soar and wither, and where crimes petty and great exact the most chilling punishments of all.

Masterfully paced and spellbinding till its final, haunting scene, **Puccini's Ghosts** is a piercing look into the fierce darkness that lurks behind seemingly ordinary lives.

Puccini's Ghosts Details

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Author : Morag Joss

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From Reader Review Puccini's Ghosts for online ebook

Emily says

I was really disappointed with this book. When I read the summary, my excitement soared because the book was about opera (one of my passions) and the mysteries of life. Each chapter alternated between the past and the present- at times they were blurred. The plot was slow and not as captivating as I'd hoped. It wasn't a bad book, just not one I'd recommend.

Theresa Leone Davidson says

Morag Joss is one of my favorite authors but her novels are dark, with little included to lighten them even the slightest, and this novel is no exception. It is about a family and their attempt to put on an opera (Puccini's unfinished 'Turandot'), the first of its kind in the remote town of Burnhead in Scotland. Every character has secrets and the sense of foreboding starts in the first chapter and doesn't stop until the end, when the harshest secrets are revealed in the worst possible ways. Except for the father, Raymond, and to some extent, the narrator (our main character, Lila), no one is really a sympathetic person, at least not until the end, when you realize most of the characters are just sad and pathetic, not hateful. Very well written but VERY depressing.

purplemagnolia says

NOTE: I DIDN'T CHOOSE THIS BOOK, BUT RATHER GOT ASKED TO REVIEW IT BY MY EDITOR WHEN I WAS WRITING FOR MY UNIVERSITY NEWSPAPER QUITE A FEW YEARS AGO NOW.

This haunting novel tells the story of Lila's fifteenth summer. Free from school, Lila's summer looks unremarkable, with only her mother's hysterics and frequent playing of Puccini's Turandot to break the monotony of life in small town Burnhead, on the west coast of Scotland. Everything changes, however, when her Uncle George, a music teacher from London, arrives. Sensing that something needs to happen, he decides a stage an amateur production of Turandot, a difficult show even for experienced opera companies.

Turandot is an opera of passion, love, death, and sacrifice, and as Lila is drawn into the production, she finds herself becoming lost somewhere between opera and life. This is the summer when Lila first sings, and first falls in love. Self-absorbed and longing for escape, Lila barely notices the production for the chaos it is becoming, swept up in her plans for a future that cannot be.

When Lila Du Cann the retired opera singer returns home to Burnhead to bury her father she is confronted again by the memories of that fateful summer. Reliving her memories she reveals to us the story of that summer in 1960, and the madness of Turandot.

This novel is creatively and beautifully told, with amazing imagery which truly enables the reader to take part in the story. However I found that while, the story itself did draw me in and kept me reading, I did not actually enjoying the book. It was well written and an excellent read, but not an enjoyable one. I am not able to place my finger on exactly what it is that I did not enjoy about this book, I think perhaps it was a combinations of story itself, and the themes and issues dealt with; the unhappiness, longing and

claustrophobic love of the Duncan family is something I am not familiar with and could not quite understand.

I personally found this book difficult to relate to and a little too dark and grim for my taste. However, I am sure there are many who this book would appeal to, and who would be able to connect with it. It explores the relationships of this family with what can only be called insight, and gently exposes the characters for what and who they are. It is certainly not a light hearted book, but deals verily and deftly with a grimmer side of human nature. All in all, it is a good read, but an odd read.

Debbie says

Really 3.5. I like this author, but I felt this book was too long. You have to wait quite a while for the creepy ending.

Rita says

It's different from the other Morag Joss books, she usually writes crime novels set in Bath. I liked this a lot though. It went backwards & forwards in time, the main story was set in 1960 when Lila was 15 & believed herself in love for the first time, the rest is in the present when Lila (now in her fifties) has to arrange her father's funeral. I'd recommend this to anyone who likes Kate Atkinson novels & other novels about dysfunctional families.

Lynn says

I liked this book quite a bit. The author handles plot very well and she did a good job of creating tension by moving back and forth in time. I think too much hinged on a revelation that wasn't much of a revelation, and a few things that felt important were left unexplained. It was very well written, but the ending was a little flat. The majority of the book was good, though.

Susan says

I found this book on the free book exchange cart at of our school. It was the last day of school before summer vacation and I was looking for something to read. I had never heard of this author before but the blurb on the back made it sound interesting so I picked it up. WHAT A FIND! Terrific writer, interesting story, deep psychological insights, including mother and daughter stuff that I, for one, never grow tired of. It makes me wonder why I've never heard anyone talking about this author.

Skate Penny says

The book was quite slow, so I got bored with it and put it down, and now, after months of it resting unfinished in my shelf, I've opened it to see what fateful thing happens to Lila's opera and family.

When I left it unfinished, I thought I didn't like the book, but now, after months, that I have revisited it, I see the point wherein I appreciate this novel. (though it might be bec I already forgot how bored I was with this before [don't get me wrong, I love historical and dark dramas, so...])

Profound and poetic. Though I felt that the lives they live are quite dark and overly emotional, I have to affirm that these kinds of setups in living can highly affect the life of a child, that may take away the innocence of a little. I grieve for the characters because talented and smart as they may be, they have failed to live the lives they have dreamed of, and even failed to live the failures they fell into. This novel is yet another narration that tells us that whatever we do, we can hardly find atonement and resolution from the things that happened in the past.

K says

i found this book to be very well written and i think the author did a great job of evoking a creepy, sad and dysfunctional mood. usually that works for me, but i couldn't wait for the book to end. i think the only reason i finished it was to find out what horrible thing befell the family, b/c it was clear something did. there was such buildup, i suppose the ending couldn't help but be a disappointment. also, i found the style to be mostly introspective, and that became wearying after awhile.

Cyndi says

OK, this book, wow - it never let up, it was relentless. This was the most repressed, misunderstood, thwarted group of people on the planet. Their lives are unhappy and wasted from beginning to end. Morag Joss is a lovely writer, but I was ready to pack it in so many times before page 367. Read it, but be forewarned. I gave it 3 stars, but I wish I could add an "at your own risk" marker, too. Sigh.

Aimee says

There was something I simply loved about this book. I do admit that I'm writing this review long after reading the novel, so my memory of it isn't so sharp; but I do recall feeling so sad and yet so happy with almost every aspect of this book. The two time periods, the madness of the narrator, the family dynamics and the overall feel of the world in which the characters lived - it all came together and carefully forged a new favourite book.

I do admit that, initially, I didn't care for the book. Before reading it, I actually intentionally pushed it to the back of my list because the blurb didn't excite me, and I was worried I'd be wasting my time with it. Opera isn't my thing at all, and since the blurb claimed that it would play a large part in the book, I rather wanted to stay away. But after finally forcing myself to read it, I could never look back - it gripped me from the first page, and stayed with me long after finishing. This book truly is a gem, and I'm currently debating whether to read it again now, or wait a few years and experience it "from fresh" again.

Lori says

Morag Joss intrigues me. Her books (at least the two I've read) are billed as suspense, despite the fact that they're mostly character-driven. There's well-paced plot, of course, but not much that you'd expect to find in a typical thriller.

Which may be why I've liked them both so much.

Her main characters are flawed, but in ways that make them more like us than we might want to admit. You know that things aren't going to turn out all right; it's just a matter of when and where. So you go searching for those details.

She's written some more traditional "mysteries" -- maybe I'll go look for those next. I couldn't know (or care) less about Puccini or about opera, but I cared a lot about this one production, in this one place and time. That's a pretty hefty recommendation.

KristenR says

It is rare for me to like a book where I do not like any of the characters (even if I'm not meant to like them). But while I didn't like the characters in Puccini's Ghosts, there was a melancholy that carried me through and compelled me to keep turning the pages.

Della O'Brien says

Enjoyed this. A faded opera star returns to her home town to bury her father. It switches between current day and her childhood or more specifically a very short time frame in her childhood. It's sad but worth a read.

Shilpa says

Lila DuCann is an opera singer who returns to her hometown of Burnhead to complete the last rites of her dead father.

While sorting out papers and stuff in her childhood home, Lila's mind flashes back to the summer of 1960 when she was fifteen.

Through alternate uses of the first and the third pronouns, to distinguish the flashbacks, we come to know that she has lived with boisterously-bickering parents. Her father is a mumbling-fumbling failed lawyer, her mother is a woman who grudges her husband for dreams of being an opera singer and grudges her husband for nipping her glorious opera singing career in the bud. Her only solace is playing endless repetitions of the opera Turandot.

Burnhead is a place with no charm, no adventure and lots of wet, muddy rain and nosy people.

Due to an unintentional comical misunderstanding, Lila leads everyone to believe that her family is staging a production of Turandot.

Slowly Lila's family is caught up in this preposterous idea that they can actually produce the play,

strengthened by Uncle George's impulsive statement that he will stage a play. Lila has worshipped Uncle George, an insane music teacher in London, all her life. He recruits the townspeople in the play, casts Lila's mother as the female lead and Lila as a slave character.

Meanwhile Joe, Uncle George's assistant and on whom Lila develops a crush, comes down to the town to play as the lead singer.

Her obsession with Joe turns so fierce that she has no idea how her mind will destroy every hope, every dream and every moment of their present and carry echoes of that destruction far into the future.

In this book, there is a lot of suspense, much more than in 'Half-broken-Things' and yet it is very easy to find out what exactly it is that Lila discovered, that made her act so cruelly.
