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TITLE INFORMATION

MAGIC FLUTE

Patricia Minger

She Writes Press (376 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

Tragedy puts a young flutist on a new and challenging path.

When readers first meet Elizabeth Morgan, the main character in Minger's first novel, she's a promising young classical flute player with plenty of talent and even more ambition. She dreams of the limelight, even though she knows that the spotlight seldom shines on wind instrument virtuosos. Her stepmother, "Madly," is a successful art connoisseur, and her father, David, has published "five lavish collections of photography in the last fourteen years." But the parental influence of most lasting import in the tale is posthumous: Liz's mother, Margaret, who gave up a much-admired career as an opera singer when she became a mother (as Minger prettily puts it: "The next year Margaret Moran had handed her career back to the gods who had bestowed it upon her, and Liz had been born"). Liz is consumed by her hunger for fame, but her dreams are destroyed when she's involved in a horrific car crash and her hands are injured. Despite "artificial joints, reconstructed tendons, grafted nerves," the damage won't heal completely, and Liz is forced to contemplate a life without flute playing. It doesn't soften her flinty personality—Minger does a very subtle and remarkable job of creating a pitiable protagonist without making her sympathetic—nor does it long quash her drive, which resurfaces, now attached to following in her mother's footsteps and entering the opera world. The author describes that sphere and its outsized personalities with fluid readability, handling the abundant technical and insider details so naturally that readers should feel educated rather than excluded. Liz moves from America to Wales and auditions for opera productions with a company in Cardiff, where she meets Giles Offeryn, the troupe's brilliant and charismatic music director. Throughout the book's expertly paced latter half, the increasing romantic sparks between Liz and Giles alternate with the behind-the-scenes tensions of the soprano facing one demanding stage role after another. The result is a thoroughly adult-feeling romance plot with an unforgettable main character set in an absorbingly realized world of performance art.

A smart and uplifting tale of personal and musical renewal; an impressive debut.

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