

★ **The Poison Girl****Suzanne Manizza Roszak**

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In Suzanne Manizza Roszak's radiant novel *The Poison Girl*, a brilliant, determined girl escapes the maledictions of her jealous father.

Just after Bice was born, her beleaguered mother died. Her father—perhaps blaming himself; perhaps merely wanting to control the deceased's facsimile—did not register Bice's birth. Instead, he set about making the girl's presence untenable to others.

In time, Bice's father relocated his family to a suburb "designed for averageness" where their presence was ignored. Her brother escaped them, but carried his guilt with him; her father planted a toxic garden to deepen his control over his youngest. When the sight of her father tearing apart a poisoned bird shakes Bice from her stupor, small rebellions follow, including autodidacticism via the library, a perspective-broadening friendship, and her own breaking away.

Though it edges toward tragic territory, the novel escapes mere heartbreak thanks to its heroine's singular determination. Condemned to exist in an "interminable," "blank white space," and having been denied safe pathways to love, she nonetheless seeks out companions. She determines to become a mother—and does so. Her story is one of incandescent reversals: hobbled by a cruel father, she protects her own child with ferocity. Sure few will believe what's been done to her, she nonetheless rages against her condition, her sense of fairness keen:

The problem with popular notions of female hysteria is that they lead both girls and women not to be believed when we discover that our lives have been made a nightmare without our consent.

Throughout, Bice readies herself to protect her delicate, self-made sanctuary against those who dare to underestimate her.

The Poison Girl is an extraordinary novel about maternal love in which a woman refuses to let her father's heinous actions determine her future.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (January / February 2025)

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