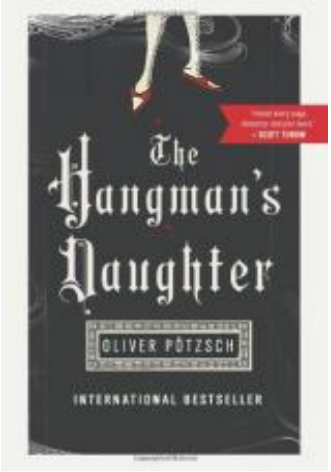
ReadingGroupGuides
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The Hangman's Daughter

Oliver Pötzsch, translated by Lee Chadeayne



About the Book

Magdalena, the clever and headstrong daughter of Bavarian hangman Jakob Kuisl, lives with her father outside the village walls and is destined to be married off to another hangman?s son --- except that the town physician?s son is hopelessly in love with her. And her father?s wisdom and empathy are as unusual as his despised profession. It is 1659, the Thirty Years? War has finally ended, and there hasn?t been a witchcraft mania in decades. But now, a drowning and gruesomely injured boy, tattooed with the mark of a witch, is pulled from a river and the villagers suspect the local midwife, Martha Stechlin.

Jakob Kuisl is charged with extracting a confession from her and torturing her until he gets one. Convinced she is innocent, he, Magdalena, and her would-be suitor to race against the clock to find the true killer. Approaching Walpurgisnacht, when witches are believed to dance in the forest and mate with the devil, another tattooed orphan is found dead and the town becomes frenzied. More than one person has spotted what looks like the devil --- a man with a hand made only of bones. The hangman, his daughter, and the doctor?s son face a terrifying and very real enemy.

Taking us back in history to a place where autopsies were blasphemous, coffee was an exotic drink, dried toads were the recommended remedy for the plague, and the devil was as real as anything, **The Hangman?s Daughter** brings to cinematic life the sights, sounds, and smells of seventeenth-century Bavaria, telling the engrossing story of a compassionate hangman who will live on in readers? imaginations long after they?ve put down the novel.

Discussion Guide

1. Why do the orphans refuse to tell the townspeople what they witnessed? How does this mistrust shape their fate? Do you think they made the right choice?

2. What do you think of Sophie and her actions?

3. The man referred to as ?the devil? compares himself to Jacob Kuisl: ?You?re like myself?Killing, that?s our business?we?re?more alike than you?d think? (p. 379). Explain why you agree or disagree with this. Discuss the similarities and differences between the two.

4. How does the town of Schongau function as a character in the story?

5. Many of the book?s central characters are real historical figures. Does knowing this affect the way you read the novel?

6. Were you surprised to discover the identity of ?Moneybags?? Who had you suspected? Do you think justice was served?

7. Why do you think Oliver Pötzsch chose the title The Hangman?s Daughter?

8. Jakob Kuisl?s ?holy of holies? is a ?small study filled to the ceiling with dusty files and old books about what an executioner is and does? (p. 433). What would your holy of holies contain?

9. At twelve Jakob Kuisl vows: ?Never would he follow in his father?s footsteps; never in his life would he become a hangman? (p. 12). Discuss what you think happens later in life to change his mind.

10. Jakob Kuisl is described as ?An angel with a huge sword. An avenging angel? (p. 163). Discuss why the hangman is both respected and feared? Do you think that regardless of his profession, he is an honorable man?

11. How do you think the Schongau witch trials differ from the more familiar Salem witch trials?

12. ?Jakob Kuisl, too, knew all about potions and was suspected of sorcery. But he was a man. And he was the executioner? (p. 48). Why are these important distinctions? Both Jakob and Martha are viewed as outsiders in their community, but discuss some of the differences between the executioner and the midwife.

13. ?If you want to know who is responsible for anything, ask who benefits from it? (p. 127). Did Johann Lechner?s handling of events hinder or help the investigation? Why does he think the Landgrave should be convinced the witch controversy has been contained? Do you think his actions are based solely on greed or for the welfare of Schongau?

14. Is holding one person responsible, whether guilty or not, justified if it saves a community? Where else have you seen a situation like this?

Author Bio

Born in 1970, Oliver Pötzsch is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Hangman?s Daughter* series and has worked for years as a scriptwriter for Bavarian television. A descendant of one of Bavaria?s leading dynasties of executioners, Pötzsch lives in Munich with his family.

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