

Wiseman, Eva. *Puppet*. Toronto: Tundra Books. 2009. Print.

Worthy of its numerous awards, *Puppet* delivers an intriguing narrative of a notorious “blood libel” case in Hungary. Negotiating cultural divides and morality, the protagonist explores her own beliefs to make sense of the horror she personally observes in her community. Loosely based on historical events, Wiseman explores a tragic incident of anti-Semitism and the crippling effects of blind hatred.

Set in Hungary during the late 19th century, the story is told from the perspective of Julie, a teenager whose mother is dying of cancer and whose alcoholic father is prone to violence. Julie’s love of her mother and sister sustains her throughout the adverse conditions she faces. Although aware of a latent tension based on religious differences in her quaint village, Julie is accustomed to anti-Semitic sentiments but does not comprehend the potential seriousness of the issue. Julie seems indifferent and confused by the comments she hears; her family has been helped by the Jewish doctor in town and she believes them to be good people regardless of their religion.

When Julie’s friend, Esther, disappears one morning, the community seeks suspects and sets their sights on the synagogue. Driven by malicious detectives, members of the community conspire to accuse five Jewish men of using the girl’s blood for a Passover ceremony. Morris Scarf, a Jewish boy, is coerced into accusing his father and four other men of “blood libel;” although the accusation will save him from abuse at the hands of his captors, it separates him from his family and religious community. Julie witnesses, first-hand, the manipulation and abuse used to coerce testimony from Morris and his brother. She does what she can to stop the gossip and coercion, however as her community falls apart around her, Julie struggles to deal with her own tragedies. Losing her mother, separated from her sister, and removed from her home by her abusive father, Julie bonds with Morris through their respective suffering. Julie pursues work in a nearby town, where Morris is being held and does what she can to help him. Wiseman weaves the tragedies of Julie and Morris together through a series of too-convenient coincidences that are easy to overlook as the tension builds. As Julie learns about the balance of survival and morality, she finds the inner strength to stand up for her beliefs—whatever the cost.

Wiseman’s choice of historical incident is fascinating and her retelling is compelling. As a protagonist, Julie is an intelligent and resourceful young woman; she survives the abuses rained upon her, rises to continual challenges, and stands up for truth. I would recommend this book for teens able to cope with scenes and suggestions of violence, and those interested in the history of Judaism in Europe.

Highly recommended: 4 out of 4 stars

Reviewer: Jorden Smith