

Graywolf Press announces



**PICKING BONES FROM ASH
BY MARIE MUTSUKI MOCKETT**

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**THE GORGEOUS DEBUT NOVEL FROM MARIE MUTSUKI MOCKETT WHO “SUCCEEDS WHERE
MANY OTHERS FAIL: MAKING THE READER CARE” (PUBLISHERS WEEKLY)**

“*Picking Bones from Ash*], so firmly anchored in a sensuous reality, veers into a dream world. A reader has the sense that even the author was driven by her most powerful character: the original mother, raising her daughter alone, shunned by villagers, forced to make decisions that haunt her descendants.”

—LOS ANGELES TIMES

“Solid and graceful...Mockett combines the best elements of a mystery story, ghost story, magical realism and the complex difficulties in deciding what is ‘best’ for our elders and offspring.”

—STAR TRIBUNE

“Mockett presents a well-written and notable story of three generations of strong-willed women, each in search of something just out of their grasp; the sacrifices they make for their daughters; and the unseen repercussions of choices made long ago.”

—BOOKLIST

“A book of intelligence and heart. As Mockett reveals, the ghosts of our mothers are always within us.”

—AMY TAN

No one knows who fathered eleven-year-old Satomi, and the women of her 1950s Japanese mountain town find her mother’s restless sensuality a threat. Satomi’s success in piano competitions has always won respect, saving her and her mother from complete ostracism. But when her mother’s growing ambition tests this delicate social balance, Satomi’s gift is not enough to protect them. Eventually, Satomi is pushed to make a drastic decision in order to begin her life anew. Years later, Satomi’s choices echo in the life of her American daughter, Rumi, a gifted authenticator of Asian antiques. Rumi has always believed her mother to be dead, but when Rumi begins to see a ghost, she wonders: Is this the spirit of her mother? If so, what happened to Satomi?

Picking Bones from Ash explores the struggles women face in accepting their talents, and asks what happens when mothers and daughters dare to question the debt owed each other. Fusing imagination and suspense, Marie Mutsuki Mockett builds a lavish world in which characters journey from Buddhist temples to the black market of international antiques in California, as they struggle to understand each other across cultures and generations.



MARIE MUTSUKI MOCKETT was born in California to a Japanese mother and an American father. A graduate of Columbia University, she lives in New York City with her husband. This is her first novel.

OCTOBER 2009, Fiction, 304 pages, 6 x 9, \$24.00, Hardcover (978-1-55597-541-8)

MORE PRAISE FOR PICKING BONES FROM ASH

“Deeply preoccupied with girls, talent, and power.”

—MAUD NEWTON

“A voice so authentic and eloquent it is hard to believe this is Mockett’s first novel.”

—LARGEHEARTED BOY

“*Picking Bones from Ash* drew me in from the first sentence.”

—THE FEMINIST REVIEW

“[A] poignant debut novel. . . . Amidst greediness, rationalism and misguided hope, [Mockett] beautifully illustrates the fervent presence of ancient and recent pasts.”

—POP DAMAGE

“I don’t know when I last read a novel with two such captivating heroines as Marie Mutsuki Mockett conjures up in her intricate and absorbing novel *Picking Bones From Ash*. Like Satomi and Rumi, Mockett is ‘fiercely, inarguably, and masterfully talented.’ An immensely satisfying debut.”

—MARGOT LIVESEY

“*Picking Bones from Ash* beautifully interweaves the stories of three women with their own individual strengths. . . . I definitely recommend you take this unique journey through these women’s lives.”

—THE UNDOMESTIC GODDESS

“Marie Mockett is a remarkably engaging writer who manages to pull her audience into the protagonists’ worlds from her first sentence. Her evocative descriptions of Japan conjure up images of a geography and culture rarely experienced by Westerners. . . . that linger in the mind long after the reader has turned the final page.”

—THE F WORD (UK)

“Marie Mockett brings postwar Japan into the 21st Century with sensitivity and grace, drawing the lives of three women to illuminate the tension between two cultures. *Picking Bones from Ash* is a lovely book.”

—KIT REED

“In Marie Mockett’s first novel—which ranges in confident and lovely prose from a mountain town in mid-century Japan to an antiques business in contemporary San Francisco—temples, ghosts, and oni demons aren’t inert markers of exoticism: they’re embedded in a lived web of human relationships and everyday tasks. Beginning in a world as solid as Jane Smiley’s *A Thousand Acres*, *Picking Bones from Ash* takes the reader down a rabbit-hole as matter-of-factly supernatural as that of Haruki Murakami’s *Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. This wiry and delicate novel, as grounded as it is surreal, goes down like a tall glass of water. Except it’s spiked: like Rumi, the younger of Mockett’s two heroines, you will be haunted until you finish this book.”

—ELLIS AVERY

“Remarkable and arresting, this debut has the pleasures of a fairy tale and a novel at the same time. Mockett probes the family mythology of a very peculiar line of talented Japanese women who may or may not be descended from the Princess of the Moon, and spins the tale of how they survived post-war Japan, modernity and life in America. A spellbinding new talent.”

—ALEXANDER CHEE

“Mockett has made an impressive debut with *Picking Bones from Ash*. Here, she creates a fully-absorbing world with vivid characters who search for what was painfully lost to them. Mockett is a beautiful writer.”

—MIN JIN LEE, author of *Free Food for Millionaires*

EXTENDED BIOGRAPHY OF MARIE MUTSUKI MOCKETT

Marie Mockett was born in Carmel, California to a Japanese mother and American father. Her mother and father met in Vienna, Austria, where both were studying music. Because German was the only language her parents shared in common, Marie grew up speaking Japanese with her mother, and German with both her parents, only learning English once she started school. Through numerous trips to Japan, Marie developed a deep love of her mother's homeland. Her father, an Asian art collector and restorer, taught her the value of beautiful things.

Marie graduated from Columbia University with a degree in East Asian Languages and Civilizations. Her work often focuses on the intersection between spirituality and modernity, and the manner in which Japan and America, the world's two richest countries, have responded to unprecedented materialism and success.

Past honors for her work include a Pushcart nomination, semi-finalist for the James Jones First Novel contest, finalist for the Katherine Anne Porter Short Story Competition and Rona Jaffe Award nomination. Her essay, *Letter from a Japanese Crematorium*, originally published in *Agni* 65, was cited as notable in *Best American Essays 2008*. *Picking Bones from Ash* is her first novel. In her spare time, Marie loves to take dance class, read, travel, study languages, knit, and enjoy old and new friends. She and her husband are expecting their first child in early 2010.

Los Angeles Times

October 18, 2009

Discoveries: 'Picking Bones From Ash' by Marie Mutsuki Mockett

By Susan Salter Reynolds

Picking Bones From Ash

Marie Mutsuki Mockett

Graywolf Press: 284 pp., \$24

Some fiction makes the world a little smaller; illuminates the dark corners, puts the taste of, say, breakfast in a small mountain village of Japan in the mouth of the reader (rice balls, in a ryokan, made by your mother the night before). Art school in Tokyo; vermilion leaves in autumn, cherry blossoms falling on city streets after a rain. In this debut novel, a little girl grows up in a small village with her mother. The other women in the village are suspicious of the mother's beauty; they ban her from the public bath. But the daughter is a talented piano player and this earns the little family some respect. The mother tells her daughter that she is a moon princess. She warns her about the forest demons. She teaches her about elegance and objects: "Given a choice between two kinds of tea bowls -- a gaudy and greenish Kutani teacup or a wabi-sabi style Shino -- she would always choose the latter." The girl grows up, goes to Paris, has an American daughter. The past, her ancestry, becomes a kind of fable, but the objects, her mother's aesthetic taste, make her an excellent authenticator of Asian antiquities. The ghosts of her ancestors appear at night -- mysterious women in red and silver kimonos; many-armed deities. The novel, so firmly anchored in a sensuous reality, veers into a dream world. A reader has the sense that even the author was driven by her most powerful character: the original mother, raising her daughter alone, shunned by villagers, forced to make decisions that haunt her descendants.

October 24, 2009

Family history is key to ‘Bones’

A solid and graceful novel about mothers and daughters, set in Japan and San Francisco.

By **Matthew Tiffany**, Special to the *Star Tribune*

PICKING BONES FROM ASH

By: Marie Mutsuki Mockett.

Publisher: Graywolf Press, 304 pages, \$24.

Review: *A skillfully written debut novel explores the bonds linking three generations of Japanese women, and the tensions created by expectations—of each other, of society and of using one’s talent to clear away obstacles. “Picking Bones From Ash” by Marie Mockett*

The first sentences of Marie Mockett’s debut novel could be read as a challenge to herself, setting out as a writer: “My mother always told me that there is only one way a woman can be truly safe in this world. And that is to be fiercely, inarguably, and masterfully talented.” If this is the standard Mockett has set for herself, “Picking Bones From Ash” meets it easily.

Satomi, coming of age in 1950s Japan, finds safety for herself and her single mother in a mastery of the piano. Satomi’s natural talent provides shelter from the rumors and anger that circulate around her mother: unmarried, beautiful and owner of a pub, she is a target for the jealous wives in town. As Satomi navigates her teenage years, her mother relents to social pressure and marries a widower with daughters of his own. Only when disaster strikes does Satomi recognize the fissure between herself and her mother, with terrible consequences.

The story line then shifts to 1980s San Francisco, where a girl named Rumi lives with her father, Francois — a seemingly minor character from the prior story line, but apparently Rumi is the daughter of Francois and Satomi, whose death remains an off-limits topic in their household. Rumi, under the tutelage of her father, is learning the art and commerce of antiques dealing; she is also learning of her own inarguable talent — she can hear the stories of inanimate objects. One such story leads Rumi to believe the ghost of her mother is calling her to Japan, to sort out both of their histories and debts owed to the family matriarch. As the story lines converge, Mockett combines the best elements of a mystery story, ghost story, magical realism and the complex difficulties in deciding what is “best” for our elders and offspring.

The characters in a multi-generational/multicultural story can at times seem to be ancillary to the settings, and what happens with them has to play second fiddle to the elaborate descriptions of lands foreign and times long passed. Mockett strikes a delicate balance — the imagery evoked here provides that multigenerational friction and insights into a foreign culture, but never at the expense of her characters and their inner struggles. The cultural and generational differences aren’t ignored, but rather provide a sturdy framework for a more universal story — mothers and daughters and the insoluble imprint they leave on each other.

Matthew Tiffany is book reviews editor for IdentityTheory.com. He blogs at condalmo.wordpress.com.