



Dear Reader,

The idea for *The Mother Act* came to me one difficult afternoon in early motherhood when I wanted to walk out on my kids.

I'd become a mother after years of ambivalence. I had few models of women who successfully combined motherhood and an artistic vocation, and I was terrified that becoming a mother would mean losing myself. Once my daughters arrived, I felt invalidated by societal approval of my choice to mother, beleaguered by the disproportionate burden of labor placed on me versus my husband, and silenced by glib assumptions about the most complex experience of my life.

I loved my two daughters (who, I can't emphasize enough, were and are incredible humans). I wanted to give them a nurturing and secure upbringing. But I was a stay-at-home parent alone for weeks at a stretch with a baby and a toddler while my actor husband worked out of town, and my intellectual life, creative dreams, and personal identity felt wholly colonized by the simultaneous under- and over-stimulation of domesticity. In one piercing moment on this particular afternoon, I felt how thoroughly this mothering life had sabotaged everything I'd worked so hard to create and become. I visualized myself walking out the door, boarding a bus headed somewhere far away, and starting over as a solo, unfettered person.

The catch: I could never choose the pain of abandonment for my girls. And that's when the idea landed. I would write a novel in which a mother does act out that escape fantasy—and a daughter lives with the fallout.

From the start, the story was inherently two-sided, an unsolvable dilemma with two irreconcilable perspectives: a woman prioritizes her own thriving; a young girl suffers as a consequence. I wanted to give full voice to them both. I drew on my front-row seat to my husband's profession and made both mother and daughter actors who ultimately use their craft to make sense of their relationship.

I wrote this story with some trepidation about the unspeakable sentiments I was allowing to live on the page. My hope is that in doing so, I've opened a pathway for others, especially women, to feel affirmed and seen—whether they're joyfully child-free, on the fence about parenting, in love with their kids but frustrated by one-note depictions of motherhood, or trying to outrun the long shadow cast by their own mothers. If you resonate with any of that, I hope you'll find yourself reflected, expanded, and, above all, entertained by these pages.

Because did I mention this novel is a romp? Despite its weighty themes, *The Mother Act* is fun, propulsive, even a bit frothy. The characters are entertainers, after all, and what would a novel about actors be without a bit of comedy and drama?

Warmly,

Heidi Reimer

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“Wholly engrossing, beautifully crafted, and uncanny in its depiction of family intrigue and the life of the artist, this is a rare treasure of a book about both motherhood and daughterhood. I savored every page of this spellbinding debut. Reimer is truly a writer to watch.”

—**Fiona Davis**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Spectacular*

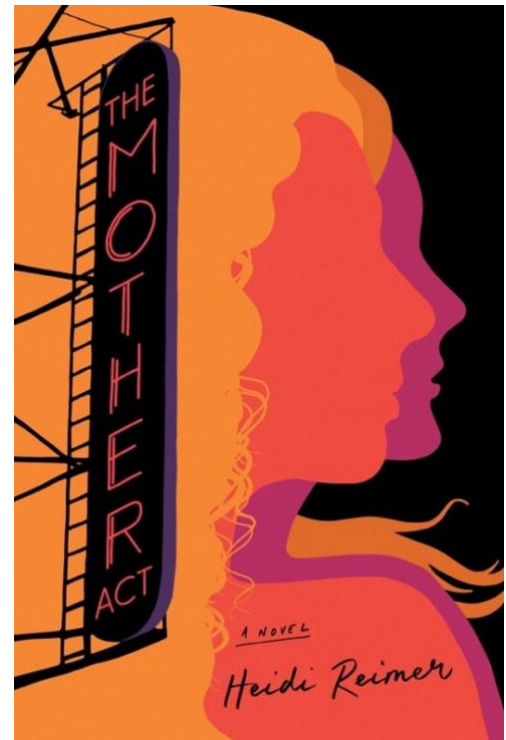
THE MOTHER ACT

by Heidi Reimer

“Mesmerizing, poignant, and elegantly wrought, this is the best novel I’ve read in ages! Do yourself a favor and read *The Mother Act*—then share it with your book club, your best friends, and the women you love talking to most.”—**Marissa Stapley**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Lucky*

“*The Mother Act* is an incisive and at-times raw exploration of what it means to be both a mother and an artist, and the fallout that comes when you have to choose. Readers are in expert hands with Reimer’s storytelling. Provocative and profound, this is a beautiful take on the mother-daughter story.”—**Karma Brown**, #1 international bestselling author of *Recipe for a Perfect Wife*

“Explosive, gripping, and insightful, *The Mother Act* depicts the fraught mother-daughter relationship in all its messy, poignant complexity. Reimer explores the fascinating and painfully intimate nature of performance, the friction between love and duty, and the contradictions of motherhood. Her novel is a soaring ode to both the page and the stage, honoring all the bookish theatre-lovers who have only ever felt at home in imagined worlds. *The Mother Act* deserves a standing ovation.”
—**Caitlin Barasch**, author of *A Novel Obsession*



Set against the sparkling backdrop of the New York City theatre world, **THE MOTHER ACT** by **Heidi Reimer** (Dutton; on-sale April 30, 2024) is an emotionally complex, clever, and deliciously dramatic debut, told in six acts from the alternating points of view of an actress who refused to abandon her career and the daughter she chose to abandon instead.

Sadie Jones, a larger-than-life actress and controversial feminist, catapulted to fame with her scathing one-woman show, *The Mother Act*, all about her one truth: she never wanted to be a mother. No one feels this more deeply than Jude, the daughter Sadie left with her husband when Jude was a toddler. Sadie created her career centered around her maternal rage, while Jude toured with her father’s Shakespearian theater company through her childhood, desperate for validation from the mother she barely knew. As the years go on, with only infrequent visits

between the two where they attempt to act as a mother and daughter should, their relationship strains.

Now, two decades later, Jude is a talented actress in her own right, and her fraught relationship with Sadie has come to a very public head. Sadie has invited Jude to the sold-out premiere of her latest play, one that exposes their entire relationship for the public to view and to judge. With years of love, resentment, and misunderstanding laid bare, the questions loom: What are the costs of being a devoted mother *and* a devoted artist, and who gets to decide if the collateral damage is justified?

Heidi Reimer is an editor and novel-writing coach at Sarah Selecky Writing School, and her works have appeared in *The New Quarterly*, *The M Word*, *Body & Soul*, and more. **THE MOTHER ACT** was inspired by a particularly challenging day she experienced in early motherhood. As a stay-at-home-mother with a baby and a toddler, with her actor-husband working out of town, Reimer was struck by how this mothering life had extinguished her other creative and intellectual pursuits—and for a single instant, she imagined leaving it all behind. Instead, while making dinner for her children, she took feverish notes, pulling her experiences of her own childhood as the eldest of six kids in a religious community, her knowledge of her actor-husband’s career, and the never-ending work of motherhood into a literary masterpiece—one that examines the trials, triumphs, and sacrifices of motherhood; the thin line between self-prioritization and self-centeredness; and how a single action can cause a tumultuous, reverberating avalanche.

For fans of feminist reads with bold takes on motherhood, such as *The School for Good Mothers*, and for readers of books about theatre and acting, such as *Trust Exercise*, **THE MOTHER ACT** is equal parts stylish page-turner and provocative exploration of womanhood from the perspectives of a mother and daughter who want at once very different and very similar things. Incredibly nuanced and brilliantly written, **THE MOTHER ACT** is sure to be a story that lingers in readers’ heads long after they finish the final page.

THE MOTHER ACT by Heidi Reimer

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Also available as an eBook and audiobook

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About the author:



Heidi Reimer is a novelist and writing coach. Her writing interrogates the lives of women, usually those bent on breaking free of what they’re given to create what they yearn for. Her front-row seat to the theatre world of her debut novel *The Mother Act* began two decades ago when she met and married an actor, and her immersion in motherhood began when she adopted a toddler and discovered she was pregnant on the same day. She has published in *Chatelaine*, *The New Quarterly*, *Literary Mama*, and the anthologies *The M Word: Conversations about Motherhood* and *Body & Soul: Stories for Skeptics and Seekers*.

ABOUT DUTTON: Dutton is an imprint of the internationally renowned Penguin Random House, the world’s largest trade book publisher. Dutton is home to many bestselling and award-winning fiction and nonfiction authors such as Sean Carroll, Robyn Crawford, Abi Daré, Fiona Davis, Eric Jerome Dickey, Joseph Finder, Lisa Gardner, Steven M. Gillon, Hank Green, Tami Hoag, Andre Iguodala, Jonathan Karl, Alex Kershaw, Denise Kiernan, Bernice McFadden, Jason Mott, Megan Mullally, Nick Offerman, Mark Owen, Riley Sager, Adriana Trigiani, Jonathan Tropper, Jeff Tweedy, Craig Unger, and Carl Zimmer, among others. Penguin Random House is dedicated to its mission of nourishing a universal passion for reading by connecting authors and their writing with readers everywhere.

More praise for THE MOTHER ACT:

"A dazzling debut and beautifully crafted mother-daughter love story. *The Mother Act* hooked me from the first page to the last as I willed Sadie and Jude to find their way back to each other."

—Bernadette Jiwa, author of *The Making of Her*

"Sensational... this gorgeous, engaging novel made my heart rethink itself over and over. Jude and Sadie are unforgettable characters, and their story crackles with powerful chemistry. I read it all in a weekend, and didn't want to put it down. I love this book, I love this book, I love this book, 153 times plus more!"

—Sarah Selecky, Giller-nominated author of *This Cake Is for the Party and Radiant Shimmering Light*

"Like a set of nesting dolls, *The Mother Act*—with remarkable acuity—unpacks notions of motherhood, daughterhood, and personhood to arrive at essential questions about what it means to love and be loved, to be vulnerable, and human, all the while employing the framework of a theatrical performance whose effect is truly dazzling."

—Kerry Clare, author of *Asking for a Friend*

"From their soaring theater-world achievements to the squalid humiliations of new motherhood, Reimer's characters explode off the page in scene after scene of spiky tension and carnivalesque misbehavior. With raw insight and razor-sharp wit, *The Mother Act* asks us to consider the price we make women pay for true artistic freedom. An urgent—and urgently funny—book."

—Sarah Henstra, Governor General's Award-winning author of *The Red Word*

"Heidi Reimer's clear-eyed take on a complicated mother-daughter relationship is both emotionally exacting and highly entertaining. An honest, endearing family story for any theater fan, or for anyone who has ever been or had a mother. I devoured this book."

—Aja Gabel, author of *The Ensemble*