

Displaced Persons: Stories

Joan Leegant

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In the funny and harrowing short stories of Joan Leegant's excellent collection *Displaced Persons*, characters navigate myriad forms of displacement, from putting a new life together after divorce to finding their place in an adopted country.

The book includes two sets of stories, the first taking place in Israel and the second in the United States. In "The Baghdadi," an American woman teaching in Israel meets a Jewish man from Iraq. As the two discuss their problems and what brought them to the country, they become unlikely sounding boards for each other's difficulties with reconciling estranged members of their families. "Beautiful Souls" builds a feeling of low-level danger as two American teenagers on vacation with their families go exploring on their own in the Old City of Jerusalem. They wind up in a restaurant where they draw unwanted attention and feel an unspoken tension that the locals understand. In "Remittances," the international nature of modern Judaism, from a trend of Jewishness being hip in Germany to relations between waves of immigrant communities in Israel, is the backdrop for a narrator figuring out where she fits in, even as the Israeli Law of Return shapes an evolving nation.

The US half of the collection includes the heartbreaking story "Hunters and Gatherers," in which a troubled son drifts in and out of his mother's life and home without warning; she questions her parenting choices and whether her acceptance helps. In the melancholy entry "The Innocent," a woman takes her widowed father to visit an address in the city to right an old wrong and learns much about his past. Here and elsewhere, complicated people work to make the best of their challenging relationships.

The short stories in *Displaced Persons* address difficult issues of Jewish identity and social expectations about marriage and family with complexity.

JEFF FLEISCHER (May / June 2024)

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