

## ★ The Archivists

**Daphne Kalotay**

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Daphne Kalotay's short story collection *The Archivists* showcases grief and loss alongside sublime moments of human connection.

In "Relativity," an American social worker helps Holocaust survivors access end-of-life services while grappling with the loss of the child who he and his wife so wanted. Trauma and mourning appear elsewhere too: in "A Guide to Lesser Divinities," a woman feels responsible for her best friend's death; in "Seeing," a woman survives an encounter with a sexual predator, is haunted by gruesome images, and deals with catcalling during her daily walks; her life seems to narrow into a series of disempowering interactions.

Interwoven snippets come together with family stories at their heart. Herein, people are complex beings, hiding secrets from others and sometimes themselves. Women date younger men, sometimes going to the extremes of lying about their ages to do so. And queer characters face social consequences or worse for being out.

Even when their circumstances are depressing, though, the stories themselves assume a meditative posture. They flow from sad moments into funny ones. People muddle through house parties, dating applications, career changes, and a pandemic. "A Guide to Lesser Divinities" chronicles, in acute detail, the degrading experiences of contingent academics, from sharing office space to being cornered by eminent scholars who have sexual rather than intellectual engagement in mind. In "The Archivists," scientists work to document the epigenetic effects of trauma on the children of Holocaust survivors, while across the US a retired dancer helps to recreate an archive of dances about the war that could be lost to time.

Transcendent and triumphant, the short stories collected in the *The Archivists* reveal human beings at both their lowest and highest moments; they seek connections, even knowing that love might hurt them the most.

JEANA JORGENSEN (May / June 2023)

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