

## Acts of Assumption

**S. W. Leicher**

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“Love is an earthquake ... It overturns all sorts of assumptions,” and from *Acts of Assumption*'s opening three-part definition of *assumption*, S. W. Leicher plays with its mental, physical, and cultural forms, chronicling what brings two women together from very different starting points until they're wholly taken in by their love for one another.

Raised in New York City's Orthodox Jewish community, Serach knows she's caught between the women's roles she feels disconnected from and her love for the rites reserved for men. The daughter of a Colombian single mother, Paloma grew up in the same city, but between her Catholic education and latchkey home life, she's become street-smart and tough.

When their paths converge in an oncology ward, the attraction is instant. Acting on that attraction changes them: Serach moves toward autonomy, and Paloma relaxes into attachment. Navigating their way into a relationship inevitably means unpacking the baggage of their respective religious heritages, childhood experiences, sexualities, and what it means to call each other family.

The novel is largely concerned with Serach's and Paloma's personal histories and their journey toward each other, but it ends with a coda for Shmuly, Serach's beloved only brother. Although there's a persistent interest in the bonds of family, a focus on Shmuly in the closing section gives him the final word in a way that recasts and undercuts the women's stories. Still, Serach's and Paloma's voices are so imminently engaging and alive that witnessing their well-being seems imperative.

In its broad strokes, *Acts of Assumption* traffics in familiar material, covering many of the expected beats. But in one aspect, the novel makes a radical departure: it always assumes Serach's and Paloma's wholeness, despite the toll of living against expectation, and their right to a happy ending—together.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (January/February 2019)

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