



Acts of Atonement

S. W. Leicher

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In S. W. Leicher's novel *Acts of Atonement*, a lesbian couple deals with mental illness, cultural isolation, and unexpected reunions.

Serach grew up Jewish; Paloma is Colombian American. The women built a wonderful life together after Serach's family disowned her for falling in love with a woman. Though they're happy together, they begin to realize that there is something missing from their lives. Then, after a sudden tragedy, their happiness comes crashing down. Both women are forced to reckon with the cultures they left behind and that they never truly felt a part of, including the parts of those cultures that they do not agree with and that caused them harm.

Serach bonds with an old friend, Frayda, who helps her to cope with rejection and to better understand the diverse expressions of Jewish identity. Indeed, Frayda—a widow who is sometimes tactless and overbearing—becomes a highlight of the story as she reveals her unexpected past. Meanwhile, Paloma joins an organization to support underprivileged Latina girls in her old neighborhood, only to find herself tempted by the organization's strange and wealthy benefactor.

Though the cast is flawed, its characters are also appealing. Other people help to reveal Serach and Paloma's true natures as the story progresses, for better or for worse. In the novel's clever, satisfying conclusion, Paloma takes control at last, having learned to use strict cultural traditions to her advantage to bring everyone closer together—a perfect ending to a complex, touching story about the difficulties of navigating one's identity.

Acts of Atonement is a novel about accepting yourself and others for who they are, not who you want or expect them to be.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May / June 2022)

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