



Ghosts of New York

Jim Lewis

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In Jim Lewis's wondrous novel *Ghosts of New York*, encounters among strangers result in unexpected relationships, and a montage that celebrates a city of manifold graces.

Lewis's observant, gradual stories are linked by recurrent characters and figurative ghosts, which arise in people's impressions of a city that's marked by history. From its Dutch roots, architecture, and timeless waterways, to its industrious lives and lost loves, outward signs of wealth, and personal memories, these New York remnants comprise a teeming backdrop that one woman likens to a "civilization that's been lost for thousands of years and then reappears."

Against this shifting vastness, surprising, intimate situations unfold. A man in debt, who was betrayed by his too-trusting nature, contemplates suicide. A former New Yorker returns as a visiting artist, their nocturnal wanderings inspiring passages that are both rhapsodic and elegiac. A West African guest speaker recalls her reception; years later, her son bears the weight of his family legacy. In a standout sequence that's spliced across time, a musically gifted boy is, in a prophetic twist, nicknamed "Caruso" and grows into a local celebrity.

Mixed in length, from a sketch comprised of a list of dead New Yorkers, to an extended, first-person departure set around a man who reminisces about love and loss during his academic years, these stories relish city seasons and backgrounds. They're unabashed in their extended descriptions of passersby, who often wear striking clothing and make photo-worthy gestures, such that peripheral details accrue into their own spectacle.

The stories omit realistic grit, but nonetheless delve deeper than a romantic paean would: they burrow into their characters' psyches with delicate, idiosyncratic deliberateness—wearying when it leads to too much introspection, and startling when it hits the right emotional notes.

Ghosts of New York is a subtle, dexterous novel in short stories.

KAREN RIGBY (March / April 2021)

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