



## Pain

**Zeruya Shalev**

**Sondra Silverston, Translator**

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In Zeruya Shalev's searing contemporary novel *Pain*, an Israeli woman who survived a terror attack is forced to address the wounds that will not heal.

Ten years ago, Iris survived a bus bombing. Scraped off of molten pavement, she endured months of surgeries to repair her shattered pelvis and other breaks and burns. But Iris proved resolute in pushing past the incident: a woman who's survived heartbreak doesn't let herself get moored by something as impersonal as a bomb.

But on its anniversary, Iris is reminded of the attack. Her pain comes flooding back, though it's rooted in memories not outwardly central to the bombing itself. Instead, Eitan, the boy whose abandonment of Iris unfurled toward the moment of the explosion, is the phantom limb she can't stop feeling. When Iris encounters Eitan now—the head doctor at a clinic that assists with pain—it seems to be an invitation to reconsider her life since him, family and all.

In this treatment of enduring wounds, the Bethlehem policeman who planted the bus bomb is a footnote; more looming are the horrors of lost love. Iris speaks of her early connection to Eitan in biblical terms: theirs is a story that rivals the patriarchs', theirs a connection that keeps the fates moving. When Eitan leaves, it nearly kills her. When he returns, she is reborn.

The reunited lovers strike up an affair, blotting out concerns regarding Iris's stalled marriage, troubled son, and distant daughter. When elements of their love come to seem a generational curse rather than a blessing, Iris is compelled to make a lasting choice. Strained sympathies give way to more salient truths about the commitments that we make and the peace that's found within them.

With its heady musings on what makes love pure, *Pain* is a blistering novel that pits passion against ordinary commitments.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (November / December 2019)

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