

Paradise Field

Pamela Ryder

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A novel in stories, Paradise Field is a strong whole made of fascinating parts.

Pamela Ryder's *Paradise Field* is a novel in stories that stands out for the variety of structures, voices, and styles employed throughout. They convey the relationship between the protagonist and her elderly father. These stories hold up as complete individual works (many were published in their own right), but they coalesce memorably into a meaningful father-daughter narrative.

"Interment for Lawn and Garden: A Practical Guide" begins as a dry third-person explanation of Jewish burial practices before it slips into some specifics about the daughter's burial of her father. This is followed by the title story, one of the collection's strongest. "Paradise Field" is set when the daughter was little, when her father flew planes all over the country and their relationship meant picture postcards, long-distance phone calls, and requests for specific souvenirs that were never delivered.

"Recognizable Constellations and Familiar Objects of the Night Sky in Early Spring" takes the form of a surreal conversation between the daughter and her father's nursing home, in which the since-relocated old man wandered off among the various constellations. "Badly Raised and Talking With the Rabbi" is a conversation between two snarky guests bad-mouthing the daughter at the funeral, written as straight dialogue between the duo.

"The Song Inside the Plate" again flashes back to the daughter's childhood and is a simple dinner scene written from the perspective of a child observing, and where all the pieces fit. "Mitzvah," written in the second person, shows the adult daughter navigating a hospital bureaucracy that confuses her father with a similarly named patient, capturing the frustrating conversations with the front desk and the daughter's concern about proper care and treatment.

Every one of Ryder's stories is a strong contribution to this patchwork novel. The stories don't shy away from the difficult times in the characters' past, the challenging realities of aging and taking care of an elderly parent, or even the assigned responsibilities of shopping for an appropriate coffin or following tradition when dumping dirt in the grave. *Paradise Field* is a strong whole made of fascinating parts.

JEFF FLEISCHER (September/October 2017)

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