

## The Wayward Moon

**Janice Weizman**

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*The Wayward Moon* is a magnificent piece of historical fiction and a startlingly beautiful portrayal of a strong woman in an era when women were expected to be only a man's wife and mother to his children.

In a mesmerizing voice, Janice Weizman tells the story of Rahel, a seventeen-year-old Jewish woman living in a city outside Baghdad, circa 851. Rahel grew up without a mother and was raised by her father, a kind physician who is preparing his only daughter for marriage. As Rahel readies to meet her groom for the first time, her father is killed; in a fit of revenge and self-defense, Rahel kills her father's murderer, a member of a prominent Muslim family. As a Jewish woman wanted for the murder of a Muslim, Rahel knows she can never return to the land of her birth, so with the assistance of her housemaid she runs away.

Disguising herself as a man, Rahel begins a lonely adventure through the deserts of Iraq. She is captured in a slave market and sent to live with a Muslim family as kitchen help. After escaping, Rahel eventually finds refuge in various other places, including a monastery, a remote tavern, and as a housemaid. Suicidal thoughts pervade her mind throughout her travels, but something keeps propelling her forward, including solving the riddle of why her father wanted her to read *Antigone*, the tragedy written by the Greek philosopher Sophocles. Rahel also realizes that she has strayed far from Judaism and wonders if she can ever return to the traditional life that had been in store for her.

Rahel is a flawed but likeable character. She defies convention over and over again, a testament to her strength as a woman. Having prospered in a sheltered and privileged life as the Jewish daughter of a physician, she is forced to live among strangers while in disguise, and what began as an escape gradually becomes a journey of self-discovery. A constant theme in the book is whether we have the power to alter our destinies.

Weizman's writing is stellar, and the book is a must-read for fans of historical fiction. A Toronto native, the author lives in Israel and is cofounder of the literary journal *Ilanot Review*. *The Wayward Moon* is her first full-length novel.

HILARY DANINHIRSCH (Fall 2012)

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