



True Love and Other Dreams of Miraculous Escape

Micah Perks

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Micah Perks's *True Love and Other Dreams of Miraculous Escape* contains plot twists inside of plot twists. Interconnected short stories reveal how characters' inner battles to find love and to be loved create a world of conflict, joy, and sadness. Elements of surrealism pair with authentic dialogue; stories are by turns poignant and amusing.

In "King of Chains," a reporter, Albert, interacts with Harry Houdini; the story is spellbinding, if more disconnected from the collection's other stories. Most stories take place within a short span of decades, moving in and out of the lives of Albert's grandchildren, Sadie and Isaac, in both tangential and pivotal ways.

In "Lost in Père Lachaise Cemetery," Sadie and her long-estranged lover reunite for a walk in romantic Paris, but her anxiety about her children being there mixes with her frustrations over his disappearance years before. Through their desperate search for the missing children, a new kind of love emerges.

The intense energy of the stories' conflicts, from potential kidnapping to potential murder, propels them forward, even when nothing has actually happened. Stories like "To My Best Friend Who Hates Me" explore the depths of betrayal with originality and surprising humor. Shifts in tone happen often and keep the collection fresh, as with the prophetic and folkloric "There Once Was a Woman Who Longed for a Child," which chronicles a desperate pursuit for children through infertility.

The stories rely on effective, curt dialogue and internal monologues, with engaging glimpses into many different minds. Characters experience odd circumstances, such as the unexpected midnight arrival of a neighbor's sister in "Miraculous Escapes," but remain grounded, as with a neighbor's constant updates about what he observes on a website in "Good Neighbor."

Romantic and dramatic, the linked stories of *True Love and Other Dreams of Miraculous Escape* are subtle and engaging.

LAURA LEAVITT (September/October 2018)

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