



★ **When the Angels Left the Old Country**

Sacha Lamb

□ Levine Querido (Oct 18, 2022)

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Sacha Lamb's *When the Angels Left the Old Country* is a luminescent novel about two incidental supernatural emigres.

In a shtetl too small to warrant its own name, an angel and a demon argue Talmud together, wrapping themselves in the comfort of each other's minds. Centuries pass. Pogroms graduate into even darker territory. One day, they raise their heads and learn that Essie, a shtetl daughter, has disappeared in America. Each for their own reasons: they resolve to rescue her.

Before they board their ship, the demon eats one soul while the angel helps another. The angel, afforded substance by the name on its papers, becomes Uriel; its always companion, Little Ash, becomes Asher. And they both become friends with Rose, who still smarts from a betrayal: her beautiful best friend married another.

Moved along by the piquant, exquisite pains of love unrecognized or unrequited, the story traipses through cosmopolitan European ports on its way to New York, where demonic officials threaten to block the threesome (or worse), and where opportunists wait on the shore to trap immigrants in brutal arrangements. Ash worries as Uriel becomes more human; he wants to keep his friend forever. And Rose becomes intrigued by Essie's picture and tale. Their purest instincts and their inclinations toward mischief will both be required if they're to be menschen in their new land.

Extraordinary details flesh out this absorbing world. Uriel subsists "on the honey-sweet essence of holiness." Ash pores over Orthodox newspapers, which detail "a great deal more misbehavior than the others." In the catacombs beneath Ellis Island, ghosts whisper "in all the languages of the earth." And love emerges in places where angels, demons, and defiant girls did not at first think to look. *When the Angels Left the Old Country* is a sublime novel about the fantastical, freeing nature of love.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (November / December 2022)

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