

REVIEW



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The White Space Between **by Ami Sands Brodoff**

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The Holocaust can be a difficult and dark subject, particularly for a Jewish writer. But Ami Sands Brodoff's new novel, *The White Space Between*, is neither hard to read nor depressing. The author's lightness of touch renders it a story of hope; the pain of the past is remade into a force for change. And the critics clearly agree: The book recently won the Canadian Jewish Book Award for Fiction.

At the heart of the novel is a strong mother-daughter bond between Jana, a Holocaust survivor, and her only daughter, Willow. It opens just as Willow has accepted a fellowship in Montreal, the city in which her mother first settled after the war. Willow is on a mission to discover the missing pieces of her past, including a father she never knew. Meanwhile, her mother is called back to Montreal when a Holocaust memorial foundation requests her testimony. Jana has never been able to tell her story, not even to her daughter, but she's moved to record her memories before it's too late. Exploring the past has an unexpected effect on the present and on her daughter's future.

The book is imbued with Brodoff's love of Montreal, her adopted hometown. Sensual descriptions of urban life read like a love letter to the city. "Driving through downtown, balconies and well-kept gardens are a riot of colour," writes Brodoff. "Through the open window, Willow smells apple trees, their rose-tinged blossoms carpeting the road, white petals and cottony puffs blowing like summer snow." And as Jana gains emotional strength from telling her story, the city comes to represent the joy of survival. Together, mother and daughter begin to make new memories in a place that's steeped in the old.

That's the beauty of this novel – it's more about what we pass on to the next generation than about the wrongs inflicted on the previous one. Crucially, Brodoff sees this process as a very female one. And, like the novel itself, this practice – the transmission of knowledge from mother to daughter – is not only deeply powerful but wonderfully feminist, too.

Review by Alice Lawlor

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