



The Pale of Settlement

Margot Singer

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In settings from Jerusalem to Manhattan, from the archaeological ruins of the Galilee to Kathmandu, *The Pale of Settlement* gives us characters who struggle to piece together the history and myths of their family's past.

This collection of linked short stories takes its title from the name of the western border region of the Russian empire within which Jews were required to live during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Susan, the stories' main character, is a woman trapped in her own border region between youth and adulthood, familial roots in the Middle East and a typical American existence, the pull of Jewish tradition and the independence of a secular life.

In "Helicopter Days," Susan discovers that the Israeli cousin she grew up with has joined a mysterious cult. "Lila's Story" braids Susan's memories of her grandmother—a German Jew arriving in Palestine to escape the Holocaust—with the story of her own affair with a married man and an invented narrative of her grandmother's life. In "Borderland," while trekking in Nepal, Susan meets an Israeli soldier who carries with him the terrible burden of his experience as a border guard in the Gaza Strip. And in the haunting title story, bedtime tales are set against acts of terrorism and memories of a love beyond reach. The stories of *The Pale of Settlement* explore the borderland between Israelis and American Jews, emigrants and expatriates, and vanished homelands and the dangerous world in which we live today.

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