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REVIEWS

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Mash, Yenta. *On the Landing: Stories*. Trans. Ellen Cassedy. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2018. 186 pp. (9780875807935).

In this extraordinary collection of stories superbly curated and translated from the Yiddish by Ellen Cassedy, Yenta Mash charts a vivid narrative trajectory. The book covers the world of Jewish Bessarabia, expulsion to Siberia, return to Bessarabia post exile (by then part of the Soviet Union), and finally, immigrant existence in Israel.

The specificity of the regional setting is mapped out in the very first paragraph of the opening story of the collection, "The Bridegroom Tree": "Our Bessarabia used to be known far and wide for its roads. They say every cripple has his own unique deformity, and in the same way our roads were one of a kind, unlike those of any region. They were an abomination." In this story, Ester and her family, like Mash herself, are rounded up and deported to Siberia for being "bourgeois elements." From the book's very outset, then, Mash establishes not only the interconnectedness of both the geographic landscape and the polity, but also the power of her unique literary voice: wry, earthy, shrewdly observant.

The harsh landscape plays a determinative role throughout the collection. In the story "Bread," the narrator uses the practice of collecting discarded bread in her new home of Israel to reflect on the devastating consequences of a particular long-ago berry-collecting expedition in the marshes and swamps of Siberia. In the title story, the protagonist seeks to make her way, at great personal peril, out of confinement in Siberia. The central action of the story takes place on the landing as she awaits a boat that may bring her to a life of (greater) freedom.

There is much to praise in this book. Mash deftly portrays the circumstances of Bessarabian Jews in all their upheavals with knowing detail and wisdom. Her characters, both female and male, are never resigned to the situations in which they find themselves. They're always questioning, both the actions of God and the human – often bureaucratic – powers that be.

Ellen Cassedy has done marvelous work combing through Mash's four collections to select these stories and bringing them to life in an English that honors the beauty and texture of the author's vision. Highly recommended for all libraries.

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