



# Natasha: And Other Stories

By David Bezmozgis

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Now a Major Motion Picture

**A dazzling debut?and a publishing phenomenon?the tender, savagely funny collection from a young immigrant who has taken the critics by storm**

**Winner of the Commonwealth Writers' First Book Prize for Canada and the Caribbean, the Toronto Book Award, Reform Judaism Prize for Jewish Fiction, Koffler Centre of the Arts' Helen and Stan Vine Canadian Jewish Book Award for Fiction, the City of Toronto Book Award, the Jewish Quarterly-Wingate Prize for Fiction, and the Moment Magazine Fiction Award**

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Few readers had heard of David Bezmozgis before May 2003, when *Harper's*, *Zoetrope*, and *The New Yorker* all printed stories from his forthcoming collection. In the space of a few weeks, America thus met the Bermans?Bella and Roman and their son, Mark?Russian Jews who have fled the Riga of Brezhnev for Toronto, the city of their dreams.

Told through Mark's eyes, the stories in *Natasha* possess a serious wit and uniquely Jewish perspective that recall the first published stories of Bernard Malamud and Philip Roth, not to mention the recent work of Jhumpa Lahiri, Nathan Englander, and Adam Haslett.

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## **Natasha: And Other Stories** By David Bezmozgis Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

David Bezmozgis became an overnight star when he published stories in the holy trinity of American magazines for fiction lovers: *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, and *Zoetrope*. With the publication of his first book, *Natasha*, he has been compared to Chekhov and Philip Roth, and the comparison is more than just promotional copy. *Natasha* follows the experiences of a family of Russian Jews who settle in Toronto and set about reinventing themselves. The loosely connected stories are narrated by the son, Mark, who attempts to understand not only his new world but also his parents. As the book progresses, his growth into the frustrations of adolescence mirrors his family's disappointments as they attempt to escape their old lives in the immigrant ghetto and create new identities. Bezmozgis calls the stories "autobiographical fiction," as they are largely inspired by his own family's past, but make no mistake, these are fully realized works of literature, complete with an attention to language and an eye for detail that invoke the best of minimalist writing. Bezmozgis doesn't reinvent the form here--he sticks to traditional themes such as the search for self and cultural dislocation--but he tells his stories with a grace and quiet sensitivity that's so rare these days it's practically an endangered species.

And there are a couple of literary masterpieces in *Natasha*. The title story, which relates Mark's sexual experimentation with a cousin by marriage during a summer spent dealing drugs, manages to be both a touching coming-of-age tale and one of the freshest inversions of the suburban dream in years. "The Second Strongest Man," a story of the reunion of Mark's family with a Russian weightlifter, manages to conflate the decline of the Russia with the emptiness of North American life in its tale of aging men whose time has passed them by. Bezmozgis divides his time between Canada and the U.S., but *Natasha* is international in the scope of its subjects--modern Russia, Toronto's immigrant communities, Judaism, various translations of the American dream. It's the literature of globalization, and Bezmozgis has proven himself to be a global writer. --Peter Darbyshire, *Amazon.ca*

### From Publishers Weekly

Like the author of this remarkable debut collection of seven linked stories, the protagonist, Mark Berman, emigrated with his parents from Latvia to Toronto in 1980. Bezmozgis writes with subtlety and control, moving from Mark's boyhood arrival in Canada to his adult reckoning with his grandparents' decline, rendering the immigrant experience with powerful specificity of character, place and history. "This was 1983, and as Russian Jews, recent immigrants, and political refugees, we were still a cause. We had good PR," he writes in "Roman Berman, Massage Therapist," about the humiliations of turning to well-meaning but condescending Canadian Jews for financial help. Bezmozgis also considers North American Jewish identity, as in "An Animal to the Memory," which interrogates the centrality of the Holocaust-and victimhood-to the Jewish sense of self. His stories are as compassionate as they are critical. In "Minyan," Mark attends synagogue with his grandfather: "Most of the old Jews came because they were drawn by the nostalgia for ancient cadences, I came because I was drawn by the nostalgia for old Jews. In each case, the motivation was not tradition but history." The collection's strength lies in how Bezmozgis layers the specifics of Russian-Jewish experience with universal childhood and adolescent dilemmas. The title story, about Mark's sexual escapades with his 14-year-old cousin by marriage, evokes both his stoner, suburban "subterranean life" and the numbing exigencies of Natasha's adolescence in Russia. In "Tapka," about the fate of a cosseted dog, Bezmozgis captures the insecurity and loneliness of recent immigrants while suggesting a child's guilty psychology with utter believability. These complex, evocative stories herald the arrival of a significant new voice.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—Arriving with his family from Latvia in 1980, six-year-old Mark Berman embarks on his life in Toronto. In a series of seven interrelated stories, he shares his experiences in his new land. He begins with a poignant tale of adjustment and a neighbor's dog; describes his coming of age with a 14-year-old, sadly sophisticated Russian cousin by marriage, Natasha; and, finally, relates how as an adult he moves his newly widowed grandfather into a retirement home. These stories are both universal and yet very much of a time and place. Mark is defensive about his father's status and belligerent in his Jewish school, spends his teen years stoned on pot, and watches as the members of his small, close family age and die. His family bears the physical and emotional scars of World War II and years of Soviet oppression. He is very much an immigrant, yet observes the sterility of suburbia with a jaded eye. His love and respect for his parents waxes and wanes through adolescence and young adulthood. Quietly compelling, the stories will attract teens through the commonality of feeling, yet give them a wider perspective either of a life they don't know or a way to communicate a life they might be living. This small treasure trove of characters will stay in readers' minds for a long time.—*Susan H. Woodcock, Fairfax County Public Library, Chantilly, VA*  
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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Karen Johnson:**

The feeling that you get from Natasha: And Other Stories may be the more deep you searching the information that hide inside the words the more you get enthusiastic about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to comprehend but Natasha: And Other Stories giving you excitement feeling of reading. The author conveys their point in particular way that can be understood simply by anyone who read the idea because the author of this book is well-known enough. This kind of book also makes your own vocabulary increase well. That makes it easy to understand then can go together with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We recommend you for having this particular Natasha: And Other Stories instantly.

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#### **Elaine Moore:**

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your children, there are many kinds of book that exist now. The authors nowadays always try to improve their proficiency in writing, they also doing some investigation before they write on their book. One of them is this Natasha: And Other Stories.

**William Rice:**

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