

Boundary: The Last Summer

Andrée A. Michaud

Donald Winkler, Translator

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Atmospheric and haunting, this novel about the lingering effects of violence is impossible to turn away from.

In Andrée A. Michaud's intense *Boundary*, lurid crimes inspire a panoramic exploration of a lakeside retreat and its residents. An unsparing look at retribution troubles the lines between loyalty, memory, and obsession.

Translated from the French by Donald Winkler, the novel circles the fates of Sissy Morgan and Zaza Mulligan, inseparable teenagers known for their carefree beauty. Sections splice between the girls' wanderings, up to the moment of their deaths; Landry, a self-exiled trapper in the 1940s, whose story becomes legend; Andrée, a young bystander who witnesses her neighbors' reactions as they reel with the possibility of a serial killer; and Michaud, a policeman, among others.

The fraying community is expertly captured. Parents who blame themselves for daring to think of Zaza and Sissy as having been "that kind of girl" complicate the portrait of adolescence with their assumptions. Throughout, the loss of innocence resounds, memorably in the way that families who believed that terror could never reach them must reconsider their blindness.

The author, a Quebec native, draws the woods between Maine and Quebec with shocking clarity. Through a careful assemblage of details that include unearthed bear traps, an eviscerated fox, and red hair, the woods come to symbolize a dark refuge for troubled minds. Men whose wartime service haunts them, men who withdraw from society, and the teens themselves, who flee in frustration, each take to the trails. Every site beyond the campgrounds is steeped in foreboding.

Other noteworthy aspects include Michaud, an investigator who can't shake his unsolved cases. His scenes compel through a mixture of his hardened persona and deep compassion. A few characters take especially literary turns, including a forensic examiner who recites Shakespeare before proceeding with his tasks, and a maligned suicide, who, plagued by rumor, transforms into a lone bogeyman. Andrée the narrator also stands out for her perspicacious nature and captivating narration.

Oppressive as the atmosphere becomes, *Boundary* is impossible to turn away from. How a single summer changes the tenor of a place, and how the living must bear the aftermath of one person's devotion, haunt the imagination.

KAREN RIGBY (May/June 2017)

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