

## Human Love

**Andrei Makine**

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The title *Human Love* (Arcade Publishing, 978-1-55970-857-9) by Andreï Makine seems tragically ironic during the first few pages in which the nameless narrator, held prisoner in a region between Angola and Zaire, watches while a woman gets raped, shot, and her mouth searched for hidden diamonds. But as we dip into the life of professional revolutionary Elias Almeida, we come to see that this book really is about just that, love, and the ways in which revolutions can be, must be, steps towards tenderness.

Seeds of revolution are planted in Elias when his mother is unceremoniously dumped back home after a spell in prison. Her broken collarbone juts out from her emaciated body and Elias is powerless to help her; she dies in her bed. This image recurs again and again as an explanation for his growth into a man who fights, spies, endures torture, and witnesses endless barbarity; his loyalty lies steadfastly with the idea that lives can be made better.

His creed is defined not only by his dead mother but also by his relationship with a Russian woman. She brings him to her child-hood home in frozen Siberia, and there he encounters people whose history is full of atrocities, but who have managed to redefine themselves into creatures of happiness, or something like it.

Makine's prose, first written in French though the author himself is Russian, injects a sense of beauty into even the most horrific descriptions of depravity. We want to look away from the beatings, the rapes, the murders, the children left alone and mentally destroyed, but we can't help but turn page after page after page. This, his tenth novel, is a movement to-ward hope.

(August 18, 2009)

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