



★ Seasons of Purgatory

Shahriar Mandanipour

Sara Khalili, Translator

Bellevue Literary Press (Jan 25, 2022)

Softcover \$16.99 (208pp)

978-1-942658-95-5

Ordinary people are haunted by loss and grief in Shahriar Mandanipour's short story collection *Seasons of Purgatory*.

In these stories, death is a constant companion. For some, it has already come and gone, leaving survivors to cope as best they can. For others, it paces in the shadows, waiting for the right moment to strike. Either way, the results are immutable and devastating. Even those not directly impacted by death find themselves struggling to move ahead as the grief of others threatens to overwhelm them as well.

Several stories have animal themes; they explore humanity's inhuman side. "Mummy and Honey" shows a family, strangled by tradition and wealth, menaced by an elusive viper in their ancestral home. A dog's gruesome end also seals the fate of a young soldier and his fiancée in "Shatter the Stone Tooth." These animals serve as representations of what the characters love or hate most: freedom, or acceptance, or memories that they cannot process.

In other stories, the dead themselves become totems of sorts: in "Seasons of Purgatory," Iranian soldiers believe that the corpse of an enemy soldier whom they failed to rescue is watching over them, while "King of the Graveyard" follows an older couple in search of their son's grave.

Each story is told with an intimacy that makes every loss and tragedy feel closer, more real. Occasional dips into speculative fiction enhance the sense that the characters are dominated by unseen forces far larger and more powerful than they are. They are forever shackled to the past, as helpless and as hopeless as the dead.

Seasons of Purgatory is a stunning collection of stories about Iran's traditions, its violent recent history, and how the memory of both influences daily life.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (January / February 2022)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.