



That Time of Year

Marie NDiaye

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A family holiday takes a turn for the strange and tragic in Marie NDiaye's novel *That Time of Year*.

On the last day of their summer vacation, Herman's wife and son go missing. His only chance of finding them, according to his sole ally in the village they're staying in, is to blend in with the villagers. Herman does his best, but answers are slow to come. By the time they reach his ear, it is far too late to alter his or his family's fate.

There is something uncanny about the village where Herman has summered the past ten years but never, before now, remained past August. The Stepford-like locals are always friendly but have no apparent interest in finding their missing visitors. The village itself, a pure idyll during the summer, transforms into a gloomy, rain-sheathed world unto itself as soon as the clock ticks over to September.

Even Herman himself, despite his situation, expresses more concern about the weather than for his family's safety. He stands helpless and alone before the village's strict bureaucracy and stricter pressure to conform to their incurious ways. At first, everything makes him uncomfortable, his outsider status relegating him to the fringes of society despite his self-perceived superiority. But it doesn't take long for this new way of existing to lock him in its grasp, to the point where the idea of leaving fills him with dread. Even the reappearance of his wife and son cannot undo the changes brought about by their disappearance.

Herman's story is compelling, inevitable, and, much like the village, easy to get lost in. *That Time of Year* is a hypnotic novel about the spell cast by a village on its inhabitants, willing and otherwise.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2020)

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