ForeWord Reviews

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

The Fragrance of Grass
Guy de la Valdene
Lyons Press
978-0-7627-6414-3
(March 2011)

The Fragrance of Grass is a rare and fascinating foray into a lifestyle that has increasingly fallen out of political fashion with the influence of green living and animal rights. Guy de la Valdene is a consummate huntsman who,

having pursued his passion for more than

fifty years, is aware of its changing perception in the public eye. Grappling throughout with his own responsibility as a man who hunts animals for mere sport, his memoir spans five decades and also serves as a discourse on the life of a falconer.

De la Valdene begins his life of sport in the grassy land of his childhood home in Normandy. From the time he was eight years old, the hunting life called him and he pursued every aspect of it with eagerness and dedication. As he journeys through his life, his love of hunting takes him from France to Montana, Florida, Canada, and Scotland to embark on excursions with men of privilege and men of simple means. Mainly a hunter of waterfowl, and particularly the partridge, The Fragrance of Grass delivers a history of guns, birds, hunting laws, and migration alongside de la Valdene's own history. At times this can be too digressive, taking the reader away from the fluidity of his reminiscences among the pastoral rhythms of wildlife. But this is a book for the hunting aficionado, not for the layperson (or the PETA member).

Harkening back to a time and place when hunting was considered a rite of passage, as well as a useful skill, de la Valdene makes no excuses for his love, yet he does display an unwavering respect for nature and its inhabitants. There are lively stories of successes and failures followed by large dinners of freshly prepared game and bottles of good wine. As he grows older, he begins to explore his own guilt over the animals that he has hunted. And in the end, he surrenders to the beauty of birds in flight even though he continues to participate in the sport, albeit without actually shooting any prey.

While the author's lengthy transgressions into the history of all facets of hunting can be distracting, they are also extremely informative and well written. For the sportsman, his nostalgic recollections of different times are touching and humorous. Any true sportsman will

find a knowledgeable and friendly compatriot in this lyrical homage to the hunting life.

Monica Carter