

The Indian Summer of Mary Margaret Masters

Betty R. Pritchett

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Though most readers might associate Indian summer with a warm autumn, it also means a flourishing time occurring toward the end of something. The title of this wonderfully written, character-rich book refers to the introspection of protagonist Mary Margaret Masters, also known as Maggs. She is generally happy with her well-to-do life as a wife and mother in Mobile, Alabama. But she is beginning to feel that something is missing, and she thinks “the something might be herself.”

Maggs, who is fifty-two, loves caring for Stephen (her husband of thirty years), their four children, and their three young grandchildren. She enjoys all of her activities, but she feels “like a hamster running inside one of those brightly colored wheels, not knowing where she was going or how to get off, but almost always exhausted at not getting anywhere.”

Maggs is thrown a curve ball—or possibly a lifeline—when she inherits Myrtlewood, the family estate in South Carolina, from her Great Aunt Eleanor, who requires Maggs to live in the house for one month before deciding what to do with the property. During her stay at Myrtlewood, Maggs starts writing her first novel and meets a man who makes her question her life in Mobile.

The Indian Summer of Mary Margaret Masters is Betty R. Pritchett’s debut novel. She’s retired and lives in a small Alabama town. It’s a testament to Pritchett’s talent that her characters’ language and relationships are so authentic. For example, Maggs’s daughter, Leah, who gets on her “high horse” and can be judgmental, will be a familiar character to many readers.

The author shows that many situations in life aren’t black and white; they can be gray, with no real villains and heroes. Maggs knows Stephen is not the “bad guy” in their relationship; as a couple, they’ve just grown apart over the course of many years. She knows that she, too, isn’t to blame for wanting more out of her life.

Pritchett’s writing is wonderful. For example, the intricacies of characters are mined for such pearls as this one, describing the taciturn caretaker of Myrtlewood: “Tom came in from his evening chores, the journal had been reduced to ashes, and he found them drinking tea in what he might have described as a conspiratorial mood if he had been an articulate man.”

The author notes that she began the manuscript for this book nearly twenty years ago. While the questions at the center of the novel are timeless, technologies have, of course, advanced in the intervening years; the story’s absence of cell phones unintentionally complicates the lack of communication between Maggs and Stephen, which is central to the plot.

This book is recommended to those who enjoy stories that have great true-to-life characters and are told in beautifully crafted language by a very talented storyteller.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (May 13, 2013)

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