



Summer Heat

Defne Suman

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Intergenerational family secrets reemerge in Defne Suman's devastating novel *Summer Heat*.

Melike is a Turkish art historian who agrees to guide Petro, a documentarian, through Byzantine churches. But intimacy with Petro challenges Melike's resolution to cease her extramarital affairs. Bittersweet memories of her grandmother, Safinaz, and absent father, Orhan, resurface, forcing confrontations with inherited wounds.

In *Summer Heat*, warfare, politics, and cultural conflicts are inextricable from personal histories. Orhan's political stances were dangerous; in childhood, Melike ended up displaced on a remote island, far from the warmth of Safinaz's Istanbul hearth. That pain was amplified by her father's later betrayal.

"Witchy" Safinaz's past is also fractured by expulsions. Melike guesses that "Safinaz was a Greek girl who had somehow eluded the compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923." As she unfolds the mystery of Safinaz's convoluted ancestry, its echoing intergenerational effects collapse cycles of historical retribution into family trauma.

Against its explorations of historical and personal violence and subsequent reconstructions of selfhood and nationhood, the novel emphasizes women's storytelling. Its prose is nonjudgmental, giving Melike ample space to narrate her own discoveries. Her self-depiction is complex, intimate, and embodied in shifting washes of contradictory curiosity, rage, grief, and ecstasy. Petro, her parents, her grandparents, and other relatives challenge her, and the stories of other women are just as significant. For example, along with the centrality of Safinaz's secrets, key confessions from Melike's estranged mother, Gulbahar, alter perceptions and judgments. Empathy for the inner voices and buried desires of women is made paramount.

Piecing together a family's fractured story within the context of history, *Summer Heat* is a moving novel.

ISABELLA ZHOU (July / August 2024)

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