

Love, Blood, Story, Home:

The Same Wonderful Old Story

by Andi Diehn

The world isn't actually shrinking, but information travels faster than ever; images of the other side of the world are a click away, and the policies of one country—economic and otherwise—have repercussions far across the oceans. Translated literature has an opportunity to serve as diplomat between global populations. Through stories, we share the joys and trials of identity. An American living next door to a multi-level grocery store might not realize what it's like to ration wheat over the course of a year. People raised in peace can experience, to some extent, war and its various horrors. We need to care about countries on the other side of the world, and it's easier to do this by first caring for individuals, even fictional ones. People in different countries may speak different languages, eat unfamiliar food, and express their fear and doubt in radically different ways, but they love the same and they laugh the same, and perhaps it's the similarities that will save us—and will help us save each other.

Love in the Time of Blood

The title *Human Love* (Arcade Publishing, 978-1-55970-857-9) by Andreï Makine seems tragically ironic during the first few pages in which the nameless narrator, held prisoner in a region between Angola and Zaire, watches while a woman gets raped, shot, and her mouth searched for hidden diamonds. But as we dip into the life of professional revolutionary Elias Almeida, we come to see that this book really is about just that, love, and the ways in which revolutions can be, must be, steps towards tenderness.

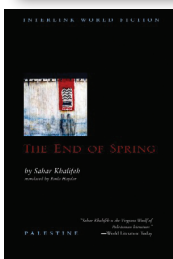
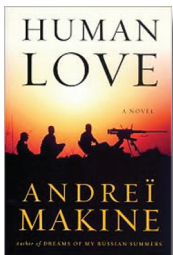
Seeds of revolution are planted in Elias when his mother is unceremoniously dumped back home after a spell in prison. Her broken collarbone juts out from her emaciated body and Elias is powerless to help her; she dies in her bed. This image recurs again and again as an explanation for his growth into a man who fights, spies, endures torture, and witnesses endless barbarity; his loyalty lies steadfastly with the idea that lives can be made better.

His creed is defined not only by his dead mother but also by his relationship with a Russian woman. She brings him to her childhood home in frozen Siberia, and there he encounters people whose history is full of atrocities, but who have managed to redefine themselves into creatures of happiness, or something like it.

Makine's prose, first written in French though the author himself is Russian, injects a sense of beauty into even the most horrific descriptions of depravity. We want to look away from the beatings, the rapes, the murders, the children left alone and mentally destroyed, but we can't help but turn page after page after page. This, his tenth novel, is a movement toward hope.

In *The End of Spring* by Sahar Khalifeh, (Interlink Books, 978-1-56656-681-0) love is the same creature in a different land. "Religion is history," says Rachel, an English protester, to Ahmad, who lives in Palestine and works with the emergency services in his own meager attempt to staunch the flow of blood among his people. But for the Arab characters in the novel, history is very much a part of the present; religion and faith are the structures against which they measure everything in their lives: their work, their families, their love.

Ahmad and his half-brother, Majid, come to the revolution by accident. Ahmad, a dreamy boy who excels at art, is caught trying to release his beloved cat from a cage at a Jewish veterinarian's and is mistaken for a terrorist. After being tortured, he is released with new ideas on where life may lead him. Brother Majid flees his rented room when he fears he will be accused of murdering his benefactor; a carload of revolutionaries picks him up and "just like that Majid became a fugitive in the hands of a band of revolutionaries and just like that a new page was opened in the life of the young



Andreï Makine / Zaire & Siberia Sahar Khalifeh / Jerusalem