

KIRKUS

REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

A SUMMER OF GOOD-BYES

Fred Misurella
Blue Triangle

BOOK REVIEW

A middle-aged man makes peace with his life choices in this novel.

Ben Alto was still in his prime when he first met Anne-Marie in France, an arresting native who completely swept him off his feet. In the present, his marriage to Lee, a New York-based artist, is not without its challenges, beset as it is by the daily plod of domesticity. Ben has carved a life back home in the United States, quashing his hopes of becoming an artist and resorting to teaching art history and writing about painting instead. As he and Lee desperately try to start a family, Ben is haunted by his trajectory: “I had begun to age, and to mellow; I had begun to lose confidence in any sort of important future—as a painter or a critic—and although I tried not to be bitter, my lack of prominence weighed on me.” Eventually, Ben and Lee adopt little Misha and cobble together a life of middle-class plentitude with its attendant joys and disappointments. When a life-altering event shakes the couple out of their complacency, they decide they will travel to Europe again, revisiting their favorite places, including St.-Rémy-de-Provence. Reaching out to Anne-Marie during their visit, Ben finds that life has not been kind to her: she is struggling with a rebellious teenager, Celestine, and her love, Zach Douglas, is slowly losing his battle to cancer. Middle-aged ennui and long-lost loves are tropes that have frequently been mined before, but Misurella (*Arrangement in Black and White*, 2014, etc.) tinges the story with enough pathos and color to craft a standout. There is plenty of nuance in a narrative that could easily have slipped into melodrama, but doesn't. The gorgeous Provençal countryside—with its rippling lavender fields, quaint markets, and striking abbeys and churches—is rendered vividly; one can almost imagine the page as an artist's canvas here. Impressionist and Postimpressionist paintings of Provence come to mind, including those by Ben's favorite artist, van Gogh. What emerges is a moving account of the necessary compromises people make in their lives.

A stirring reminder that the most beautiful moments can be frustratingly evanescent and that everyone needs to learn the delicate art of letting go.

EXCERPTING POLICIES

Please review Kirkus Media's excerpting policies before publishing any portion of this review online or in print for any use. To learn about proper attribution and to ensure your use is in compliance with our guidelines, we invite you to visit <http://www.kirkusreviews.com/indieexcerpts>.