

BOOK REVIEW OF *'WHAT YOU NEED FROM THE NIGHT'* BY LAURENT PETITMANGIN

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Laurent Petitmangin's debut novel, "What You Need from the Night," delves into the profound consequences of political extremism on a family, examining the complex dynamics between a father and his two sons. Set in a run-down industrial town in northern France, the story follows the father as he raises his sons alone following the death of their mother, unveiling the growing chasm between him and his eldest son, Fus.

From a young age, Fus assumes the role of a mature adult, shouldering the responsibility of caring for his younger brother, Gillou, after their mother's diagnosis of a fatal cancer. In a town lacking opportunities and facing a declining Socialist party, Fus finds himself drawn to a local far-right group, despite his socialist upbringing. Initially seeking camaraderie, Fus becomes entangled in activities that, on the surface, may seem harmless but ultimately lead to a violent confrontation.

Petitmangin's novella expertly explores the intimate dynamics within the family, showcasing the strains that emerge between the father and his eldest son. Fus, while fiercely protective of Gillou, gradually withdraws from his father, leaving Gillou as the bridge between them. The father, a member of the Socialist party, finds himself at odds with the rising influence of right-wing ideologies in his town. When he discovers a fascist symbol on Fus' bandana, it provokes a deep sense of shock and dismay, leading to a further divide between father and son.

The unnamed father narrates the story with a simple and direct language that packs an emotional punch. Although the events unfold in France, the themes explored are relevant and resonate in a broader European context, reflecting the rise of populism and the consequences it has on communities. The setting of Lorraine, a region fertile ground for far-right movements, provides a backdrop that highlights the lack of opportunities faced by young people, who often have to leave their hometowns to pursue their ambitions.

As the narrative progresses, the family experiences a tragic domestic incident that serves as a catalyst for Fus' radicalization. Fus, a decent and kind-hearted young man, finds himself lonely and vulnerable, easily swayed by the smooth-talking extremists who present themselves as champions of the underprivileged. Meanwhile, the father grapples with his own turmoil, watching his family disintegrate as he falls apart emotionally.

"What You Need From The Night" is a powerful work of fiction that forces readers to confront the destructive nature of extremism and its impact on individuals and families. Petitmangin's poignant exploration of family dynamics, political ideologies, and tragedy is conveyed through his concise and impactful prose. However, readers should be aware that this novella is not for those seeking light entertainment, as it delves into dark and thought-provoking themes.

Overall, "What You Need from the Night" is a gripping and compelling novel that provides a harrowing glimpse into the effects of extremism on a family, leaving a lasting impact on readers long after the final page is turned.