



Maleficium

Martine Desjardins

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Martine Desjardins delivers to readers of *Maleficium* the unexpurgated revelations of Vicar Jerome Savoie, a heretic priest in nineteenth century Montreal. Braving threats from the Catholic Church, Savoie dares to violate the sanctity of the confessional in this confession-within-a-confession, in which seven penitents, each afflicted with a debilitating malady or struck with a crippling deformity, relates his encounter with an enigmatic young woman whose lips bear a striking scar.

As these men penetrate deep into the exotic Orient, each falls victim to his own secret vice. One treks through Ethiopia in search of wingless locusts. Another hunts for fly-whisks among the clove plantations of Zanzibar. Yet others bargain for saffron in a Srinagar bazaar, search for the rarest frankincense, and pursue the coveted hawksbill turtle in the Sea of Oman. Two more seek the formula for sabon Nablus in Palestine or haggle over Persian carpets in the royal gardens of Shiraz. The men's individual forms of punishment, revealed through the agency of the young woman, are wrought upon their bodies.

Baroque in its complexity, Kafka-like in its inexorable mechanics, *Maleficium* by turns astonishes, amuses, and beguiles. Then author Martine Desjardins's Vicar Savoie—as in any confession worth its communion wafer—saves the best (or worst) for last.

Maleficium won the Prix Jacques Brossard and was a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award (French Fiction), the Prix des libraires du Québec, the Prix des cinq continents de la Francophonie, and the Prix France–Québec.

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