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Title: Reap the Hot September Harvest Book 1: Desiree

Author: Harry W. Kendall

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Genre: Fiction

Reviewed by: Candace L. Barr

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Author Harry W. Kendall opens his Reap the Hot September Harvest series with *Desiree*, a short novel that follows the title character from a brush with death, through a journey of spiritual development, and a whirlwind relationship. Desiree Pierson is a freedom rider who becomes a bit of a celebrity for a short time for actions she can barely remember. After she is discharged from the hospital, time spent in hiding, and recovery, leads to further trauma, which takes years for her to recover from. After finally finding the right path for herself, she meets Alan Duberry, a pastor who is trying to find a new way to reach the Black community. Though his ideas are sometimes upsetting, Desiree finds herself drawn to his company.

The story mostly focuses on the personal and social aspects of trauma and healing. Uncle Mal, to whose care Desiree was entrusted after her release from the hospital, had been running away from wartime trauma only to meet a young woman who makes him realize there is no escape. Desiree and her family try to attack her issues from different angles until something finally clicks. Alan is an unconventional minister who wants to heal collective trauma which he feels cannot be healed by the very same church that

inflicted it, unless the church confronts its faults and reconciles itself with the African spirituality the Black community was forced to abandon.

I appreciate Alan's ideas about Black American spirituality and history do not completely ignore West African history and culture. However, he still heavily focuses on Egypt, and I would have liked to see more emphasis on the traditions of the people of Mali, Ghana, and the like. Still, it's refreshing to see mention of often ignored places like Sankore University in this kind of discourse.

Kendall sets out to educate, and he accomplishes that in this novel. When people think of the Freedom Riders, the Mother's Day Massacre is far from the first thought that comes to mind, and it isn't something you normally hear about in a history lesson. I also appreciate the inclusion of the plight of the Black World War II veteran and other issues which are normally overlooked in civil rights era discussions. Unfortunately, the dialogue is awkward at times, favoring exposition over believability. As a resident of the area in which some of the dialogue takes place, and having talked to people who were the characters' contemporaries, it is hard for me to imagine some of these conversations happening as written, even 50 years ago. Additionally, while there is visible character development, there isn't much relationship development.

The novel does a good job of exposing the reader to a lot that gets left out about the civil rights movement and the problems faced by both the major figures and the unnamed individuals who have undertaken the difficult task of healing a community. There is a lot to like about this book and these characters, and the ending is a special way to bring book 1 to a close for the upcoming books.