



by
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Fiction

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And then Someone Stands Up and Opens the Window

Und dann steht einer auf und öffnet das Fenster

review

Quietly funny, moving and subtle, this is a surprising book about palliative care and a subtle analysis of a father-son relationship.

Fred, remarkable for his unremarkableness, has just completed his training to assist terminally ill patients. He sets out to meet his first client, Karla, who is dying of cancer. A solitary, slightly stropny figure not much older than Fred, she accepts his support only reluctantly. Fred's son Phil, a quiet pre-teen who writes poetry, eats unwillingly, and is too short for his age, becomes involved as well when Karla, a former Deadhead, hires him to digitise her extensive photo archive of concert footage.

Just when Karla seems to have come out of her shell a little, Christmas arrives, and with it Fred's misguided plans to surprise her. He has invited her estranged sister to the small get-together he is hosting. It backfires, and Karla refuses all further contact with Fred. Only Phil is allowed to continue seeing her. However, a mishap with an elevator brings Fred back into Karla's life, just in time to do what he was there for all along: keep her company during her dying days.

This is not a novel about bucket lists, nor is it a tearjerker. It is a realistic, often very funny slice of life from an unusual angle: the story of a woman dying from cancer told from a carer's perspective, somebody who hardly gets the chance to know her. Fred and Phil are

sympathetic, engaging narrators. Phil's teenage poetry, Karla's past as an obsessive Grateful Dead fan, or Fred's wish to get everything just right make them feel like distant, but friendly acquaintances. This is aided by Pásztor's ear for dialogue.

Having trained as a volunteer working in palliative care, Pásztor brings an interesting perspective to her topic. The scenes depicting self-help groups are particularly well observed and lively. She rejects traditional happy endings – there will be no reunion for Karla and her sister, no miracle cure, no love story. Fred and Phil's life will have changed, but subtly and, for the reader, all the more satisfyingly.

With this flawlessly written antidote to bucket-list tearjerkers about cancer, Pásztor has delivered yet another great novel that will cement her status as one of Germany's finest observers of human relationships.

rights information

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Contacto: Iris Brandt

Tel.: +49 221 37685-22

ibrandt@kiwi-verlag.de

www.kiwi-verlag.de