



by Zsuzsa Bánk
S. Fischer
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Fiction

🏆 US Jury Pick

Death in Summer *Sterben im Sommer*

review

Raw grief

Death in Summer is a heart-wrenching biographical novel in which the author recounts her experience of losing her Hungarian father to cancer during the long, hot summer of 2018.

Zsuzsa Bánk writes with conviction and assurance, guiding the reader through the tumultuous experience of losing a parent, of losing touch with one's homeland, and of grief in any form. *Death in Summer* is beautifully written and will appeal to readers of any nationality. She addresses the experiences of immigrants to Europe and of having dual nationality, as well as the complexities of the parent-child relationship. Similar in style to Rose Tremain or Anne Enright, Bánk's writing is at once deeply familiar and grounded in the everyday, while tackling deep themes around what it means to be human.

It hardly rains during the summer of 2018: the days and nights are bright and hot and entirely unsuited to grieving. The author's eighty-five-year-old father László's cancer comes back, a few years after the family think he has beaten it. The author describes the process of coming to terms with his death over the course of a year. She takes her father from their summer holiday destination near Lake Balaton in Hungary to various hospitals as they try to bring him back to Frankfurt. Bánk is asked to help her mother, her aunt, brother, and

her own children deal with the news. She alternates her lyrical descriptions of the process of grief with detailed accounts of battling with the bureaucracy of death, the endless phone calls and forms, uncaring doctors, and all the friends and relatives who need to be kept informed. She faces death and grief in a clear-eyed, honest way, taking the reader through her experiences, from first hearing the diagnosis to marking the anniversary of his death.

The autobiographical writing style is both factual and confessional, making us feel as though we are part of the intricacies of dealing with the death of a loved one. The bureaucracy, the anger and irritation, the mundane aspects, as well as the deeper themes that emerge – the profound sadness, the questioning of everything, the utter rage at the unfairness of it all – are all described in the author's signature lyrical, descriptive style. Zsuzsa Bánk is an accomplished writer who handles universal themes with deftness and flair.

'I devoured this book in a weekend, despite its deeply emotional and heart-wrenching subject matter. The author writes with conviction and an assurance that guides the reader through the tumultuous experience of losing a parent, of losing touch with one's homeland, of grief in any form. It is beautifully written and will appeal to readers of any nationality.'

Feline Charpentier, Reader

press quotes

'When such a story chooses us, when it finds us and makes us its protagonists, we are never prepared; we know nothing and have nothing to fall back on. It doesn't matter that others have gone through this before us and that we were part of their experience. What matters is that we are going through it. Our experience of it is ours alone, only we experience it in our particular way.'

Zsuzsa Bánk on *Death in Summer*

about the author

Zsuzsa Bánk was born in 1965. While studying journalism, political science, and literature in Mainz and Washington, she worked as a bookseller. She currently lives with her husband and two children in Frankfurt am Main. Her first novel, *Der Schwimmer* ('The Swimmer') was awarded the Aspekte Literaturpreis, the German Book Prize, the Jürgen Ponto Prize, the Mara Cassens Prize, and the Adelbert von Chamisso Prize.

Previous Works: *Der Schwimmer*, S. Fischer Verlag (2002); *Heißester Sommer*, S. Fischer Verlag (2005); *Die hellen Tage*, S. Fischer Verlag (2011); *Schlafen werden wir später*, S. Fischer Verlag (2017).

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