



by Sara Gmuer
Hanser Verlag
February 2025 / 224pp
Fiction

Eighteenth Floor *Achtzehnter Stock*

review

'Eighteenth Floor' is the story of a young single mother living in post-COVID Berlin who refuses to give up on her dream of being an actress. Sara Gmuer's pacy novel addresses poverty in ways that make it hard to look away.

Wanda is a second-generation single mother and aspiring actress. She lives with her five-year-old daughter, Karlie, in one of Berlin's *Plattenbauten*, a pre-fab high-rise housing project. Wanda is desperate to avoid her mother's fate of abandoning her aspirations for the sake of her daughter, and ekes out a living from small roles in commercials and occasional odd jobs, all the while hoping for a professional breakthrough that will enable her to begin a new chapter. Wanda's unwavering determination and drive to advance her career on her own terms while caring for her young daughter is nothing if not impressive.

An opportunity finally presents itself, and Wanda secures a film role. She excels in the role but the rest of her life starts to unravel: her daughter's daycare centre threatens to report Wanda to social services for child neglect; she receives an eviction notice from her landlord; and a budding romance comes to an abrupt end when her boyfriend discovers that Wanda has neglected to tell him about her daughter's existence. Karlie then becomes gravely ill, necessitating an extended stay in the hospital. At the end of the ordeal Karlie survives, but Wanda's movie role is history.

There is not a dull moment in Wanda's life, and she turns out to be an astute observer of her surroundings, telling her story in unvarnished prose without being overly crass. Her impressions of the world around her are perceptive, sometimes amusing, and always to the point. 'Eighteenth Floor' captivates the reader with its candour and unembellished truth as well as the protagonist's humorous assessments of reality. Hers is not the voice of a victim who has given up on herself. Nor is she the stereotypical, aggressive Berliner, who always has to have the last word. Juxtaposing the glamorous film world with life in social housing in a part of town everyone prefers to ignore is a deft strategy for propelling the narrative forward and piques the reader's interest in learning more.

'Eighteenth Floor' is a relatable and poignant portrayal of single motherhood, artistic ambition, and what it means to be disenfranchised within society.

Find out more:

<https://www.hanser-literaturverlage.de/buch/sara-gmuer-achtzehnter-stock-9783446283756-t-5586>

press quotes

Sara Gmuer's second book, 'Eighteenth Floor', follows the changing fortunes of Wanda, a single mother and aspiring actress. She sublets a dingy apartment on the eighteenth floor in one of Berlin's notorious Plattenbauten, a concrete high-rise housing project, from her uncle Pavel in Poland. Stuck in this soulless, concrete desert in the wrong part of town, surrounded by welfare mothers of various ethnic backgrounds, Wanda applies her considerable wit and creativity to overcome the limitations of her present life and to improve her own and her daughter's circumstances with drive and determination.

Renata Stein, NBG Reader

"Hard, raw and beautiful."

Mareike Fallwickl

about the author

Sara Gmuer was born in 1980 in Locarno and moved to Germany after graduating from the Zurich Film Acting School. She has appeared in films by Dominik Graf and Die Ärzte, and has performed as a rapper on stage. Writing songs and lyrics has enabled her to find her own literary voice. She lives in Berlin with her husband and children.

Find out more: <https://saragmuer.com/>;
<https://www.instagram.com/saragmuer/>

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Carl Hanser Verlag

Contact: Friederike Barakat
friederike.barakat@hanser.de

Tel: +49-89-99830-509

<https://www.hanser.de/>