



by Susanne Scholl
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Fiction

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Emma's Silence

Emma schweigt

review

Emma's Silence tells the story of an encounter between an elderly, small-minded Viennese woman and a woman who has fled to Austria from the violence in Chechnya with her son.

Emma, the old woman, first meets Sarema and her son Schamil in a supermarket, where they come to her aid after a fall. They watch over her while she is in her hospital bed, and when Emma is discharged her son Hansi asks them to take care of her. For Sarema, this is a welcome relief from the desolation and boredom of life in the centre for asylum-seekers, and she appreciates Emma's helping Schamil with his school work. Shopping, cooking and cleaning also distract her from the reasons why she fled Grozny: the violent fate of her husband and elder son; the slow deaths of her newborn baby girl and parents-in-law; her sister's abduction and her own rape whilst trying to buy her sister's freedom from a man who has sworn to kill her.

In the early part of the book, the narrative switches back and forth between depictions of Emma's difficult relations with – and disappointment in – her family, and the traumatic events that lead Sarema to Vienna by way of various traffickers and refugee camps. As the threat of deportation looms, other refugees encourage Sarema to go into hiding, and she realises that her link to Emma could prove useful. Yet when she asks indirectly whether she and Schamil might move into Emma's spare bedroom, she is met with mistrust. By the time Emma summons up the curiosity to search for the missing Sarema and Schamil at the asylum centre, it is too late; they are

already on the plane back to Grozny after their asylum application was turned down. Yet just as the reader steels themselves for the worst, Scholl offers a glimmer of hope when Sarema finds some jewellery sewn into the hem of her coat and prepares to escape Grozny for a second time ...

Susanne Scholl relays the intriguing encounter between the novel's two main characters by laying bare their unspoken impressions and suspicions. We are inside their minds, listening to the cultural prejudices distorting their judgements about each other. The novel's clear prose often feels closer to journalism than fiction, but it is no less emotive and effective for that, intertwining one woman's account of living through the horrendous years of the Chechen conflict with a tale of uprooting and migration.

press quotes

'The title Emma's Silence alludes to the fact that looking away is a lot easier than offering refugees simple help. "Sometimes it would be enough just to listen more!" And that is exactly what Susanne Scholl's readable and informative novel inspires in the reader.'

– Kultur Heute, ORF

'It's impossible to imagine the Austrian literary scene without Susanne Scholl. As a freelance journalist and author she succeeds time and time again in scoring with topics like human rights, abuse and inequity, in touching people and in getting them to reflect, shaking them awake.' – *Leben Heute, ORF*

'The laconic narrative tone in which Susanne Scholl masterfully interweaves the Chechen and the Austrian way of life is very convincing.' – *Kulturjournal, Ö1*

about the author

Susanne Scholl was born in 1949 in Vienna and studied Slavic Studies in Rome and Moscow. For many years she was a correspondent for ORF in Moscow. She has published numerous books and has received awards for her journalistic work and her social engagement, including the Concordia Prize and the Austrian Ehrenkreuz for Science and Art.

Previous works include:

Russland mit und ohne Seele (2009); *Allein zu Hause* (2011)

rights information

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Residenz Verlag was founded in 1956 in Salzburg. Early publishing lists concentrated on fine art and non-fiction titles. During the 1960s a fiction list was added, and leading Austrian authors including H.C. Artmann, Thomas Bernhard, Barbara Frischmuth and Peter Handke published their first work here. German and Swiss writers were gradually included, followed, in the 1980s, by international authors in translation. The non-fiction list includes books on contemporary history as well as monographs of nineteenth and twentieth century artists and books on music, theatre and architecture. Since 2001 Residenz Verlag has been publishing literary and artistic picture books and fiction for young readers too, in the Nilpferd imprint.