



by Caroline Wahl
DuMont Verlag
May 2024 / 256pp
Fiction

Gale Force 17 *Windstärke 17*

review

Rights sold: Neri Pozza, Italy

Caroline Wahl's absorbing novel tells the story of a young woman coming to terms with the death of her alcoholic mother. A sequel to her acclaimed debut, '22 Lengths', which was also featured by New Books in German, 'Gale Force 17' nonetheless works perfectly as a standalone text.

The novel begins as Ida, in her early twenties, is leaving her childhood home, not long after her mother's suicide. Ida has neglected her university studies in literature and lacks a focus in life. She suffers from panic attacks, triggered by the traumatic experience of finding her mother's dead body. When her older sister Tilda sends her a train ticket so she can come and stay with her in Hamburg, Ida ends up staying on the train past Hamburg and travelling to the Baltic island of Rügen.

Ida gets a bar job on Rügen, and is taken in by the kindly proprietor and his wife, Knut and Marianne. Their home is like nothing Ida has ever experienced and she revels in the comforts of the well-ordered household and carefully prepared meals. Ida continues to wrestle with guilt and anxiety over the responsibility she feels for her mother's death. She tries to control her grief with punishing early-morning swims in the bitterly cold Baltic, as well as running to the point of exhaustion.

The novel depicts Ida's chaotic, unpredictable behaviour, alongside her developing relationship with a local man, Leif Jansen, who was born on the island, and who has had a similarly troubled upbringing. Ida is devastated when Marianne is diagnosed with cancer and is unable to cope with her intense emotions. Leif helps her to navigate her feelings, as well as to find a way back to her sister, Tilda, and eventually even to begin to face her mother's death.

In the novel's moving concluding scene, Leif and Ida visit her mother's grave. Ida must combat huge inner resistance, experiencing an off-the-scale 'gale force 17' emotional hurricane, but with Leif's support she manages it. At her mother's graveside she is finally able to tell her mother that she loves her.

Wahl's writing is apparently simple, yet deeply engaging. The prose flows effortlessly, enlivened by frequent passages of dialogue between the characters. Readers are swiftly hooked by Wahl's sympathetic portrayal of a fascinating cast of characters whose lives we cannot help but want to know more about.

about the author

Caroline Wahl was born in Mainz in 1995, grew up in a village in Baden-Württemberg, and studied German in Tübingen and Modern German Literature in Berlin. She has worked for several publishing houses. In 2023, her first novel, the Spiegel bestseller and Independent Bookseller's Favourite Novel 2023 *22 Bahnen*, was published by DuMont and went on to win the Ulla Hahn Authors' Prize and the Grimmelshausen Sponsorship Prize. Caroline Wahl lives in Rostock.

Previous works: *22 Bahnen*, DuMont Buchverlag (2023).

rights information

DuMont Buchverlag (Germany)

Amsterdamer Strasse 192

50735 Cologne

Contact: Judith Habermas

judith.habermas@dumont.de

Tel: +49 (0)221 224-1942

www.dumont-buchverlag.de