



by Isabelle Ryf
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Fiction

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Konrad, Felix and I *Konrad, Felix und ich*

review

Konrad, Felix and I is a short, moving novel based on the observations of little Nora following the death of her older brother Konrad. Told entirely from Nora's perspective, Isabelle Ryf's debut introduces us to a young and inquisitive mind, including its surprising – and thought-provoking – ways of dealing with grief, loss and growing up.

Nora's young life is shattered when one of her older twin brothers is killed in a car accident. Like everything else in the book, we experience Konrad's death through Nora. Her thoughts are infused with images and the language of dying and death. She relates the events following the accident to us, including the viewing of Konrad's body, the funeral, her mother spending a night in a cold pond and Granny trying to inspire Nora's parents to have another baby by spreading red and pink paper hearts on their bed. We read on not only to find out what is going to happen next, but to see more of Nora's unusual descriptions. There is an element of suspense as the reader wonders whether Granny's attempts will succeed and whether the book might indeed end with a new sibling for Nora.

The book does not conclude with the birth of a new child, however, but with the remaining twin Felix's birthday party. It is not a straightforwardly happy ending where everyone has overcome the trauma. Felix does not talk with his friends and his mum is tired, but Nora seems to have regained her confidence and tells us, 'I am back on land'. The reader closes the book feeling positive that the family

will learn to live with the loss.

This is an original novel about loss and grief. The short sentences and quirky syntax are very effective at conveying the thought structures of a young child. Nora's thoughts move swiftly and are often fragmentary, distracted by Konrad's death but focused on the thing or the people at hand. The book is full of unusual observations and fresh perspectives on things most of us will have seen before but thought about differently. *Konrad, Felix and I* is a poignant read and the experiences of its young narrator are universally relevant.

press quotes

'Ryf has found a wonderfully apt language with which to talk about death and sadness.' –
viceversaliteratur.ch

about the author

Isabelle Ryf was born in 1986 in Niederbipp. She is an alumna of the Schweizer Literaturinstitut in Biel and studied law in Zurich. During the first half of 2015 she was a fellow of the canton Solothurn's atelier in Paris. Ryf lives in Olten. *Konrad, Felix und ich* is her first novel.

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Contact: Ursi Anna Aeschbacher

aeschbacher@diebrotsuppe.ch

www.diebrotsuppe.ch