



by Sophia Klink
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Fiction

Kurile Lake

Kurilensee

review

Wrestling with her feelings about wanting to have children despite the grim outlook for the planet's environment, a biologist spends a summer with her partner and other team members in a vast, unspoiled landscape, studying the spawning grounds of salmon on the shores of Kurile Lake.

Anna's part in annual field trip to the southern part of the Kamchatka Peninsula involves the examination of microscopic organisms. Vova, her partner, is responsible for observing the behaviour of salmon. In this setting, surrounded by bears, eagles and plant life, their specific mission this year is to assess whether feeding the lake's phytoplankton with chemical fertilizers will be beneficial to the dwindling numbers of fish.

Anna sees the world at a cellular level, and the ecosystem as a set of finely attuned elements – human interference can easily tip the balance. Vova, on the other hand, has a name for every bear, feels an emotional connection to each salmon he touches, and finds the contradiction of their interference easier to cope with.

The differences between them resurface in their personal lives: Anna is grappling with the moral dilemma of having children when the ecological balance of the world has reached a tipping point. While Vova is away for a week counting salmon, she ventures outside of the bear enclosure, becomes lost during a storm and falls ill. While she is

recovering, the fertilizer plan is approved although a member of their team uses delaying tactics to postpone it.

By the time she has recovered, Anna has reached a more sanguine state of mind and realizes that she has little control over the fate of the lake or, indeed, the global climate. As the summer draws to an end, the team hastily pour the twenty tons of phosphate into the waters. Anna and Vova make plans to stay at the research centre during the winter to observe how their actions affect the fish.

Sophia Klink's blend of nature writing, based on her own research in a similar field, and Anna's moral dilemma features lyrical descriptions of the unique environment in this little-known area of the world. Inspired passages describing the scenery and Anna's thoughts about her relationship alternate with her analytical, scientific view of the ecosystem of the lake and the workings of the human body and mind. A compelling, evocative debut novel by a winner of the W G Sebald prize.

press quotes

Sophia Klink writes about majestic bears and volcanoes, but she also writes about a nature that is invisible to the naked eye, about plankton, proteins, hormones, and she finds a visually powerful language for it.

Marion Poschmann

about the author

Sophia Klink (b. 1993 in Munich) studied Biology and is currently doing a PhD on the symbiosis between bacteria and plants. Her nature writing has earned her a Literary Fellowship from the city of Munich and the Wolfgang Weyrauch Advancement Award at Darmstadt's Literary March festival; she has also been awarded fellowships from the British Council and the Foundation for Art and Nature. Klink has been a finalist of 'open mike', and a visiting fellow at the Roger Willemsen Foundation, the Adalbert Stifter Association and Villa Sarkia in Finland. An extract from her novel Kurilensee ('Kurile Lake'), which was inspired by a research residency in Russia, was

shortlisted for the W. G. Sebald Prize. Kurile Lake will be published in autumn 2025 by the Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt.

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