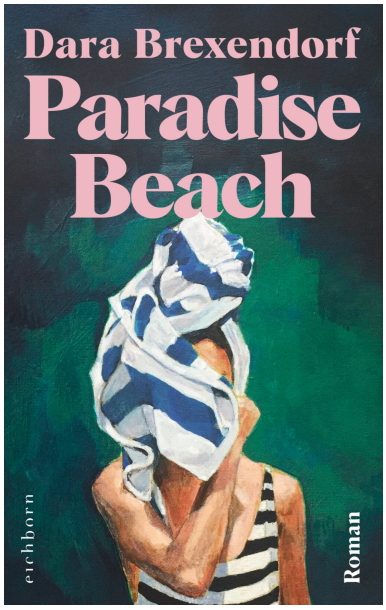

by Dara Brexendorf
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Fiction

Paradise Beach

Paradise Beach

review

‘Paradise Beach’ is a moving contemporary debut set in a quiet German town on the Baltic coast.

The novel is a tender coming-of-age story that explores the protagonist’s first love, her deep bond with her grandmother, and her changing relationship with a body shaped by the harsh realities of endometriosis. Structured across thirty-four succinct chapters that peel back like the layers of an onion, the narrative flits between the past and present.

‘Paradise Beach’ opens in 2018 with Ada, the protagonist, recovering from surgery for endometriosis. During a series of sleepless nights, she sorts through old photographs while listening to the rhythmic throat-clearing of her neighbour in the flat above. The images springboard her into the summer of 2003, when she falls in love for the first time and gets her first period, experiencing the onset of the debilitating pain that comes to define her physical existence.

That summer, Ada and her cousin Lill spend their days at the local beach, preoccupied with the adolescent pressure to perfect their bodies. Everything shifts when Ada meets Elja at basketball practice. An intense fascination takes hold, leading Ada to ‘spy’ on Elja and her family at the beach until the two become friends. As Ada and Elja share secluded swims and walks in the woods, Ada experiences the stirrings of a first love that sets her apart from Lill.

Parallel to these memories is the clinical reality of Ada's present. The reader follows her long struggle to have her pain acknowledged by a medical establishment that repeatedly dismisses her. Eventually, she finds an empathetic gynaecologist, Dr. Ahmadi. In her state of post-operative exhaustion, Ada finds a strange solace in her neighbour's absence, befriending his dog to gain a sense of security. The novel concludes as she prepares to return to work – still facing a future of unanswered questions regarding fertility and chronic pain, but feeling better-equipped to face the world.

Brexendorf employs a remarkably concise style, with short, punchy sentences and correspondingly brief chapters. The use of medical photography from Ada's operation alongside personal childhood snapshots is a striking and original way of bridging the two timelines.

Although endometriosis affects one in ten women, it is rarely explored in fiction. With its delicate prose and focus on a woman's sense of self, 'Paradise Beach' contributes to the cultural dismantling of menstruation taboos, recalling the work of Yael Inokai and the atmospheric weight of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. It is a beautifully crafted, necessary debut.

Find out more:
https://unternehmen.bastei-luebbe.de/en/foreign-rights/online-rights-catalogue/paradise-beach

press quotes

‘Paradise Beach is full of bodies. Dara Brexendorf depicts them honestly, in all their small and large imperfections. The novel poetically and eloquently addresses the muteness of the system in the face of female pain, and the text is thus more than just a literary gift.;

Paulina Czienskowski

‘A powerful, tender novel about bodies, loss and the rediscovery of stability – words to sustain us when the world seems on the brink of collapse.’

Fikri An?l Alt?nta?

about the author

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Dara Brexendorf was born in 1991. She lives in Kiel and works as a freelance author and literary workshop leader. She moderates an open mic event for writers at the Literaturhaus Schleswig-Holstein, features on the podcast *Literarisch, Solidarisch*, and works for the literary magazine *Der Schnipsel*. She read Literary and Media Studies in Kiel and Mainz and then Literary Writing in Hildesheim. In 2025 she was awarded the Liliencron Nachwuchspreis für Lyrik aus Schleswig-Holstein, a poetry prize for young writers.

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