



by Mariana Leky

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Fiction



The Goethe-Institut supported the English translation of this book.

The Men's Outfitter DuMont Buchverlag *Die Herrenausstatterin*

review

Leky's uplifting and highly entertaining novel strikes a comfortable balance between the real and the fantastic, the tragic and the surreal, to tell an emotionally rich and readable story of one woman's attempts to rebuild her life. In a rich tale full of twists and turns, the novel's heroine loses her husband and finds a new partner – but the journey there is far from conventional ...

Katja is at her wits' end – her husband has confessed that he is having an affair, and she is about to lose her job with a translation firm. Just as it seems that things cannot get any worse, her husband is killed in a car accident. This ultra-realist and brutal opening is then turned upside-down by the arrival of 'Dr Blank' and Armin the fireman in Katja's life. We follow Katja's burgeoning relationships with these two characters – one of whom (the name gives it away) is a ghost, and one whose true identity remains shrouded in mystery. Is he really a fireman, since his uniform looks like it came from a fancy-dress shop? And why does he start to burgle houses when this peculiar threesome go off on a road-trip to Holland?

The narrative moves seamlessly from the real – Armin is far from the ideal lover and even rejects Katja when he reveals that she is pregnant – to the surreal: holes begin appearing in Dr Blank as he gradually fades away, and the reader shares in Katja's distress as she desperately patches him up with plasters. Katja's role as translator is transposed into these new relationships, as she

'translates' between Dr Blank and Armin, who can neither hear nor see Blank, and as, in a moving scene, she attempts to help Blank to communicate with his widow through the upper-floor window of her apartment. They are hoisted up in the cherrypicker of Armin's fire engine (so perhaps he is a real fireman after all ...), but Blank's wife cannot see him, and merely continues to kiss her new lover. While this scene contributes to Blank's gradual withdrawal, it brings Armin and Katja closer together, and Armin accepts responsibility for the baby.

With consummate skill and ingenuity, Leky successfully binds these real and unreal elements together, drawing the reader through a story full of warmth, humour and invention to a 'happy ending' that is poignant, too. With this, her second novel, Leky has proved herself to be a brilliant and original voice.

press quotes

'As with the magic realism of South American authors, in Leky's story the unusual and the unreal are embedded in the everyday.' – *Kölner Stadtanzeiger*

about the author

Mariana Leky was born in Cologne in 1973 and now lives with the author Tilman Rammstedt and their son in Berlin. Both her volume of short stories *Liebesperlen* (2001) and her first novel *Erste Hilfe* have earned her several literary awards.

Previous works include:

Liebesperlen (2001); *Erste Hilfe* (2004)

rights information

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