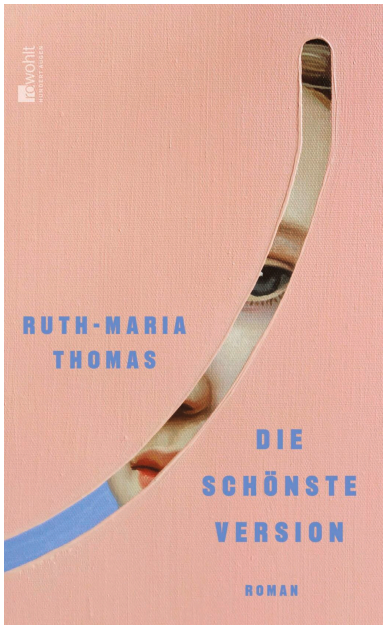


by Ruth-Maria Thomas
Rowohlt
July 2024 / 272pp
Fiction

Longlisted for German Book Prize 2024

# The Most Beautiful Version

## *Die schönste Version*

## review

*The Most Beautiful Version* by Ruth-Maria Thomas is a powerful and affecting debut exploring friendship, domestic violence, and coming of age in the early twenty-first century.

The opening of the novel seems idyllic: Jella, the narrator, and her boyfriend Yannick are spending a summer day by the lake. The peacefulness soon shatters though: back home, Yannick breaks into a rage, almost strangling Jella and threatening to kill her. Terrified, she manages to flee – but when she tells the police what happened, they seem more interested in the fact that she hit Yannick in self-defence than in the bruises on her neck. The police officer informs her that they will be pressing charges not just against Yannick but also against her.

Jella moves back in with her father, staying in her old childhood bedroom. The next few days, in which she tries to process what has happened, are interwoven with memories of her childhood and school days, and of her relationship with Yannick.

Jella's family moves from a village to a small town when she is five, and she desperately misses her friends and her grandma. When her parents divorce and her mother moves to Berlin, Jella refuses to go with her, convinced that change can only ever be bad. Jella's parents are loving but removed from the reality of her life: her closest relationships are always with her friends.

As a student, Jella meets Yannick in an overpriced new bar. He offers to buy her a drink but orders a gin and tonic without waiting to hear what she wants. After a whirlwind romance, Yannick becomes increasingly controlling, while Jella grows ever more anxious.

Yannick isn't happy when Jella decides to visit Paris with her friends, but the trip gives her a taste of the freedom and joy she had forgotten. She keeps a paper heart from the weekend to remind her of it, but when Yannick finds the heart – with the phone number of a man she met in a club scribbled on it – he lashes out. We return to the opening scene of the novel.

In the present, Jella writes endless to do lists ('1: buy panty-liners and pads; 2: get life back on track'), and desperately goes over the details of what happened, second-guessing herself and the fear she felt. Her friends, once again, are the people who see her through.

*The Most Beautiful Version* explores a scarily prescient topic: in July 2024, the UK police deemed rates of violence against women and girls a national emergency. Thomas approaches the dark subject matter with the skill and care of Joelle Taylor in *The Night Alphabet*, making for a moving and urgent debut.

Find out more:
https://www.rowohlt.de/verlag/rights/book/ruth-maria-thomas-die-schoenste-version-9783498006952

## press quotes

> *'Herein lies the great advantage of this author: that she allows her readers to take part in Jella and Yannick's persistent, uncompromising and radical explorations.'*

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

> *'In attempting to use literature to explore the social nature of violence against women, Thomas situates herself in a tradition that stretches from Ingeborg Bachmann to Lana Lux. Thomas tells a story that is as unflinching as it is empathetic, a story that is far from being an isolated case — and yet is deeply personal.'*

Deutschlandfunk

## about the author

Ruth-Maria Thomas was raised in Cottbus. She studied at the German Literature Institute in Leipzig and is a co-founder of the erotic literature magazine Hot Topic! In 2022, she was a finalist in the Open Mike competition. Her writings, which have been featured in radio broadcasts and literary magazines, often explore the pitfalls of female socialization.

Find out more https://www.instagram.com/ruthiliciousxoxo/

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