



by Laura Vogt  
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Fiction

## The Year of Chalk

### *Das Jahr des Kalks*

#### review

Laura Vogt's compact novel takes grief seriously without dressing it up. A writer in her early thirties is bracing for the death of her beloved uncle, Per, while also living with an absence that dates further back, that of her father, Per's brother, who left the family years earlier and has effectively erased her from his life. The book's quiet premise is simple: when the emotions are too large to hold, the writer reaches for something concrete.

That 'something' is lime and calcium. What begins as a practical concern for a houseplant (a fig tree inherited from a therapist's office) turns into a sustained, oddly steadying line of research. Calcium becomes a way to think about bodies and bones, about what endures and what crumbles, about the raw fact of change. The narrator's curiosity is not a quirky flourish, but rather a coping strategy, a method for staying upright.

The present-day narrative centres on waiting. Per lies in hospital, visible from the narrator's workplace window. He is close enough to haunt her, yet unavailable enough to keep her circling. Her home life is sketched lightly: two children, a supportive husband, the pressure of ordinary days, while her mind keeps returning to what is ending. When Ingrid, Per's wife, finally calls her to come and say goodbye, she sets out remembering the things she wants to tell him, only to arrive too late.

This grief runs alongside the sharper wound left by her father. Vogt handles it with a restrained, almost offhand directness that lands hard, the narrator's father passing her in public, refusing to acknowledge her, and the one moment of contact coming with a threat: don't write about me. The novel never forces a catharsis; it lets the reader feel how these losses overlap and resound.

The structure is linear, but threaded with memory and fragments of correspondence, including emails to someone in connection with a lime kiln. The short chapters create space, and the prose is crisp, pared back, and emotionally legible, a record of a mind moving through grief, fixation, and the slow work of re-entry.

This hybrid, essayistic work about mourning and family fracture will appeal to readers who respond to the emotional clarity of Max Porter's *Grief Is the Thing with Feathers*, the reflective intimacy of Sarah Moss, and Deborah Levy's quieter, object-anchored writing.

Find out more: <https://doerlemann.ch/produkt/das-jahr-des-kalks/>

## about the author



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**Laura Vogt** was born in 1989 in Eastern Switzerland. She read Cultural Studies at the University of Lucerne and Creative Writing at the Swiss Literature Institute in Biel. Her published novels to date are *Die liegende Frau* (2023; *Woman, Idle*, tr. Caroline Waight, Héloïse Press, 2025), *Was uns betrifft* (2020; *What Concerns Us*, tr. Caroline Waight, Héloïse Press, 2022) and *So einfach war es also zu gehen* ('It was so easy to leave', 2016). She has received numerous grants and scholarships for her works. She lives with her family close to St. Gallen.

**Previous works:** *Die liegende Frau*, Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt (2023); *Was uns betrifft*, Zytglogge (2020); *So einfach war es also zu gehen*, Edition Literatur Ostschweiz (2016)

**Previous translations:** *Woman, Idle*,

Heloise Press (2025); *What Concerns us*,  
Heloise Press (2022)

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