



by Sophie Hunger
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Fiction

Waltz for Nobody

Waltzer für Niemand

review

Iconic Swiss singer-songwriter Sophie Hunger, renowned for her quirky, poignant lyrics often written in English, has written a coming-of-age debut novel with chapter headings borrowed from her own song titles. Even the book title is taken from a song – Hunger – released in 2013.

Using an unconventional structure that intersperses line drawings, pages from notebooks and paragraphs about the Walser people, who are part of Sophie Hunger's heritage, this story follows the close friendship of an unnamed young girl and a boy called Niemand (Nobody), who communicate through music. Their closeness partly arises because, as the children of military attachés, they have had to uproot and change location very often. So the pair withdraw, spending hours listening to vinyl and remapping the world on the basis of band names. At eight, the female narrator begins piano lessons, but her teacher ends up throwing the grand piano out of the window – it lands with a crash in the courtyard – hinting that the story is not to be taken at face value. Soon, she begins to compose her own songs.

When their mothers relocate to Germany, the two friends are even more isolated from the outside world. As teenagers, they are nearly expelled from school for possessing copious amounts of Jägermeister. A military officer they name 'Achtung' (Attention) is put in charge of them, but ignores them. Eventually, the narrator's career

as a musician takes off when she performs for the first time in a café in Zurich. After this, she and Niemand write the 'rules' that will govern their friendship and her music-making from then on; a hint that their alliance might not survive the test of the adulthood.

When a call from Universal Studios comes in and the narrator is asked to perform in Paris as a promising new artist, the two friends turn the journey into a road trip. But as the narrator leaves the stage, she realizes that Niemand has disappeared. She goes in search of him, only to find that his shoes are lined up next to the Pont Marie, suggesting that he has jumped into River Seine. From then on, she senses his presence every time she performs.

This original debut novel showcases Sophie Hunger's talent as a lyric writer and explores the intimacy and escapism music can offer. Introspective passages sit alongside the homage she pays to musicians that have influenced her meteoric career.

about the author



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Sophie Hunger is a Swiss musician. She made her debut in 2008 with the album *Monday's Ghost* (Universal Jazz France) and in 2010 was the first Swiss artist to play at the Glastonbury Festival. In Germany, she won the LEA (Live Entertainment Award) for Best Live Tour in 2015 and the Pop Culture Award in 2019. In France, she was awarded the Prix Lumière in 2017, for her music for the Oscar-nominated film *Ma Vie de Courgette*.

Find out more:

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