



by Meral Kureyshi  
Limmat Verlag  
February 2025 / 216pp  
Fiction

🏆 Literary Prize of the  
Canton Bern, Switzerland

🏆 Longlist Hotlist 2025

## We Were Never in the Sea

*Im Meer waren wir nie*

### review

'We Were Never in the Sea' is an exquisitely crafted meditation on life, death, love, and belonging that will appeal to readers of Rachel Cusk and Deborah Levy.

Set in present-day Bern, Switzerland, this introspective novel explores the emotional life of an unnamed narrator as she reflects on her relationships with those closest to her, particularly the recently deceased ninety-five-year-old Lili, whose presence continues to ripple through the lives of those she left behind.

The novel opens with Lili's funeral, but death is not the end here; rather, it is a beginning. The narrator, who was paid to visit Lili regularly during her final years, becomes the keeper of her stories, letters, and secrets. As Lili's past slowly unfolds – including her lifelong love for a man named Winter, whose ashes were scattered in the sea – we gain insight not only into Lili's life but also into how love and loss shape memory. The narrator follows Lili's instructions in her last letter, scattering Lili's ashes in the same ocean as Winter's.

Kureyshi masterfully balances intergenerational relationships: the narrator's tender but complex bond with Lili's niece, Sophie and her outspoken young son Eric, her ambivalent closeness with her younger sister Nuri, and her memories of their father, who died young and is buried in Kosovo. Through these dynamics, the novel explores themes of migration, cultural dislocation, and the effort to belong –

between languages, customs, and countries.

Written in spare yet lyrical prose, the novel uses brief vignettes, poetic images, and white space to invite reflection. The narrative is gentle and understated, and Kureyshi has a knack for capturing small, mundane details and imbuing them with meaning: a shared swim, a missed conversation, a child's candid comment in a supermarket.

The novel concludes on a quietly hopeful note: the narrator, who has secretly accepted a new job far away, reconnects with a man she once met on a train. Their meeting hints at a new beginning, a subtle promise of love and forward motion.

'We Were Never in the Sea' is a slow, contemplative read. It is a graceful exploration of how life continues, reshaped but not undone, in the wake of loss.

Find out more:

<https://www.limmatverlag.ch/programm/titel/972-im-meer-waren-wir-nie.html>

## press quotes

*Bern author Meral Kureyshi has achieved a major success. Her work includes many poetic one-liners that would be ideal to tattoo on your forearm. She is and remains one of the most important voices in contemporary Swiss literature.*

Timo Posselt, Die Zeit Schweiz

*Meral Kurey's unusual novel about love and family is a thoroughly poetic book, as quiet as it is powerful, and one of the best works currently available in Swiss literature.*

Daniel Graf, Republik

*Meral Kureyshi's language eschews all superfluity; her writing is light yet haunting, sometimes very funny, and deals with everyday, first and last things. The sea is the characters' shared place of longing, a place you can dream yourself away to, a place of freedom and transition. A magnificent novel.*

Christian Kosfeld, WDR Westart

## about the author



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Meral Kureyshi was born in Prizren, Kosovo, in 1983. She moved to Switzerland with her family in 1992 and now lives in Bern. She studied German Language and Literature. Her debut novel 'Elephants in Our Yard' was nominated for the Swiss Book Prize, won several awards, and has been translated into many languages, including English, French, Italian, and Croatian. Her second novel, 'Fünf

Jahreszeiten' (Five Seasons), was published in 2020. In the same year, she was invited to Klagenfurt to compete for the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize. Her third novel, 'Im Meer waren wir nie' (We Were Never in the Sea), was acclaimed by critics and audiences alike. The Croatian rights to the text have already been sold.

Previous work: Elefanten im Garten, Limmat (2015), Fünf Jahreszeiten, Limmat (2020)

Previous translations: Elephants in our Yard, Noumena Press (June 2022)

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