

by Tamara Štajner
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Fiction

You win some, you lose some

Luft nach unten

review

A compelling and emotionally complex novel about fertility, family and inherited trauma, ‘You win some, you lose some’ explores one woman’s struggle to disentangle her own desires from the expectations and emotional legacies that have shaped her life.

Iva, a successful musician in her late thirties, divides her life between Vienna and the landscapes of her childhood around Lake Ohrid in North Macedonia. While undergoing fertility treatment with her husband Felix, she returns to Ohrid for the funeral of Marija, the woman who cared for her as a child. There she uncovers fragments of a long-buried family secret involving her father and Marija. She also reconnects with Slava, another maternal figure from her past, and Slava’s granddaughter Karmela, who quickly forms an unexpected attachment to her. Back in Vienna, Iva’s carefully maintained life begins to unravel. Her volatile marriage is strained by failed fertility treatment and mutual betrayals, and an affair with a Berlin gallery owner offers only temporary escape. As memories of her controlling, emotionally abusive mother resurface, Iva is forced to confront not only whether she can become a mother herself, but whether she truly wants to.

Rather than presenting motherhood as either fulfilment or tragedy, Štajner explores the many different ways women inherit, resist and redefine maternal roles. Iva is a strikingly imperfect narrator, impulsive, angry and contradictory. Her relationships with

Felix, her lover Gabriel, the fiercely independent Slava, the vulnerable Karmela and above all her own mother, reveal motherhood as something far more complex than biology alone. As the novel moves between Austria, Slovenia and North Macedonia, questions of family history, migration and belonging quietly enrich its emotional landscape without overwhelming its intimate focus. The result is an honest portrait of a woman standing at a crossroads, uncertain which future she is willing to claim.

Štajner writes with clarity and immediacy, creating a narrative voice that is both unsparing and unexpectedly humorous. The first-person narration draws readers into Iva's emotional contradictions, while the seamless inclusion of German, Slovenian, Croatian and English reflects the multilingual realities of contemporary Central Europe. Beneath its straightforward prose lies a nuanced exploration of memory, identity and the ways childhood experiences continue to shape adult relationships.

Following the critical acclaim that has established her as one of the most exciting new literary voices in the German-speaking world, Štajner delivers a confident and emotionally resonant second novel. 'You win some, you lose some' will appeal to fans of Ottessa Moshfegh and Fiona Mozley for its blend of a spiky narrative voice, deep underlying emotion and flashes of absurd humour.

Find out more:
https://www.fischerverlage.de/verlag/rights/book/sharon-dodua-otoo-so-in-etwa-ist-es-geschehen-9783103977059

press quotes

> *It is no coincidence that, in telling the story of the whole world through one woman's life, Štajner cites Tove Ditlevsen and Annie Ernaux as her influences … She depicts human relationships with clarity, vividly portraying individuals' disappointments and yearnings. She consciously keeps historical events in the background, as if casting a diffuse veil over a past that no longer exists. And in so doing, she offers up a response of her own, in the best traditions of autofiction.*

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

about the author



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Tamara Štajner was born in 1987 in Novo Mesto in Slovenia, and is a viola player and a writer. She writes in Slovenian and German. In 2024, she won the Merano Poetry Prize, and was awarded the Kelag Prize, which is part of the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize celebrations, for an extract from *Luft nach unten*. Her debut novel *Raupenfell* ('Caterpillar skin') was published in 2023. She lives and works in Vienna.

Previous works: *Schlupflöcher*. Gedichte (2022); *Raupenfell*, Das Wunderhorn (2023).

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