

AUSSER SICH

BESIDE OURSELVES

By Ursula Fricker

GENRE Novel, LANGUAGE German



“This is a great novel because it poses the only really important question: what makes us human beings?” FREITAG

Nominated for the Swiss Book Prize 2012.

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URSULA FRICKER was born in 1965 in Schaffhausen and now lives outside Berlin. She was a social worker, actress and newspaper reporter before publishing her first novel 'Fliehende Wasser' (Fleeing Waters, 2004) to great acclaim, winning several literary awards. In 2009 she published 'Das letzte Bild' (The Last Picture).

Beside Ourselves, by Ursula Fricker

Excerpt translated by Katy Derbyshire

I entered the room. I saw something lying in a bed. A mask, almost as white as the sheet. I walked. The long distance from the door to the bed. I saw nothing, only this notion of a face, tubes emerging from the mouth and nose. So unfamiliar, so unfamiliar the hands, as if arranged for a journey from which he would never return. I placed my hand on his. Cool. Quite cool. Bastian. My head was empty, so empty. What had happened? How many times? Where were we? Something like this couldn't happen to me, could it? To us. Not to my - Sebastian. I felt I was still on the highway. Moving faster than a person can stand. Driving into a wall that suddenly shoots up out of nowhere. That wasn't like us. Who was that in the bed? Was it someone I knew? I didn't understand. Whose hand? What was I doing here?

I stroked the hand with no life. That once strong, sinewy, warm hand. I could still feel its touch on my face. Feel the fingertips gliding along my eyebrows, hesitating over my eyelids, stroking over my cheek to my lips. Me seeking his finger with my lips, my eyes closed, taking it into my mouth, the two of us sleeping together. Those hands so deft, so tender, so good. Lying here now, mute and half dried out.

No, I said, that's not him. As if I had to identify a corpse and as if it was entirely up to my testimony whether my husband was alive or not. I turned around to Doctor Manke. It's not him, I said again, aloud, angry. The telephone rang at the same moment. He had to go now, the doctor said, sorry, be brave. He left.

I drew up a chair and sat down. That face waxy pale. Eyes closed. Bastian, I said. His name. My voice sounded hoarse, echoed as if desperately seeking the ear to go with that name. Bastian, I said. Life goes on, you have to wake up. You have to do some driving too now. Bastian? Jana and Bernd and the children are waiting. The children, yes. There's something I want to tell you tonight. A nurse came in and sent me out of the room.

They were going to do the coiling now, she said, I couldn't stay. Did I have a long way home? What a question. If only she knew – my home was just being demolished, all that would remain were shreds of wallpaper, splintered mirrors, misshapen pipes, a pile of rubble.