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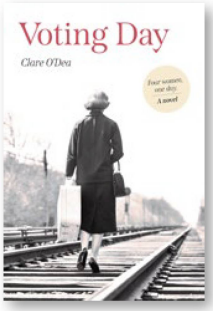
Voting day



CLARE O'DEA:
"Voting Day"
ISBN 978-2-9701445-0-2
119 pages, CHF 20

"It was going to be the best possible day. Vreni didn't care about the fog that had been smothering the farm since Friday...". Farmer's wife Vreni is supposed to be making sandwiches for the ballot counters, as she does on every voting day. But this year is very different, because she must travel to Berne for an operation. Her daughter Margrit, who works in the city as a secretary, is due to meet her there. But Vreni ends up having to come to her daughter's aid before going under the knife. Margrit is being sexually harassed by her boss and unable to stop his advances.

While in hospital, Vreni gets to know cleaning lady Esther and her boss Beatrice. Esther was taken from her Yenish family and put into care as a child. Now her own son has been taken away and put into a foster home. The boy works at Vreni's farm. Beatrice is a middle-class single woman who is devoted to her job as an administrator at the hospital. She has also been putting her heart and soul into the yes campaign for women's suffrage – the issue on which the country is voting on this particular Sunday in 1959.

In "Voting Day", author Clare O'Dea devotes a chapter to each of these four very different women whose paths cross – and life trajectories change – on this day in 1959. It is an important day for all Swiss women, because Swiss men are voting for the first (but not the last) time on whether women should get the right to vote. O'Dea tells the story as seen through the eyes of these four women, all of whom have different social backgrounds. She adroitly intertwines the characters' respective life stories to highlight the situation of women in Switzerland at the end of the 1950s. The author writes in a simple yet very affectionate way, recounting the fate of women who want to take control of their own lives.

Clare O'Dea was born in 1971 in Dublin, where she went on to study languages and work as a journalist. She has lived in Switzerland in the canton of Fribourg since 2003, on the invisible line where the French- and German-speaking cultures meet. She is an author, a journalist and a translator. Her acclaimed non-fiction book "The Naked Swiss" was published in 2016. "Voting Day" is O'Dea's short debut novel, available in the original English as well as in German, French and Italian.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

Life after the Lovebugs

ADRIAN SIEBER:
"You, Me & Everything Else",
Phonag, 2020

There has been no media fuss, nor is it official yet, but the Lovebugs – one of the most successful Swiss pop acts of the last 25 years – are quietly disbanding. Or, shall we say, they are putting the project on ice. Indefinitely.

And what has the frontman been doing to while away the time during this potentially permanent interruption? He has recorded a solo album. Adrian Sieber made his eponymous debut 12 years ago, and now the singer has doubled up during the Covid lull with "You, Me & Everything Else".

Sieber has already shown that he can write great melodies – Lovebugs hits like "Bitter Moon" and "Music Makes My World Go Round" are Swiss pop gold. The lead singer of Basel's favourite band is now back at his melancholic yet optimistic best, with a memorable collection of songs that create a sound that is both euphoric and vulnerable on the one hand and raw and multi-layered on the other.

Talking of sound, analogue synthesisers and drum machines are conspicuous throughout – as opposed to guitars from Sieber's band years. Opener "The Soft Revolution" features an airy, anachronistic synth rhythm, pimped computer beats and naturally a catchy melody – an aesthetic that runs through the entire album. The style is unmistakably 1980s – "The school disco music of my youth in Fricktal," says Sieber, tongue firmly in cheek.

For years, Sieber was able to live out his dream as a professional musician. He is now a 47-year-old father and primary school teacher, hence the album addresses themes such as growing older, relationships going sour, chemistry between people, and life in the real world. Some of the lyrics are wistful, but – typical Sieber – hope and happiness still shine through in every song.

This is a good album. Now all that is left for Sieber to do is perform his new tracks on stage when the pandemic is over one day. And, who knows, maybe the Lovebugs will also get back together.

MARKO LEHTINEN