

A portrait of a strong woman

The Phoenix

CHIKA UNIGWE

Oge is a young Nigerian woman living in Belgium. She travels by train from her home in Turnhout to a hospital in Leuven where she has an appointment with an oncologist after having been diagnosed with breast cancer. But her life appears to be falling apart on other levels too: she and her Belgian husband Gunter barely talk and she is struggling to come to terms with the coldness and superficiality of social interactions in Flanders. Then, to make matters worse, her young son dies.

The work of a talented writer

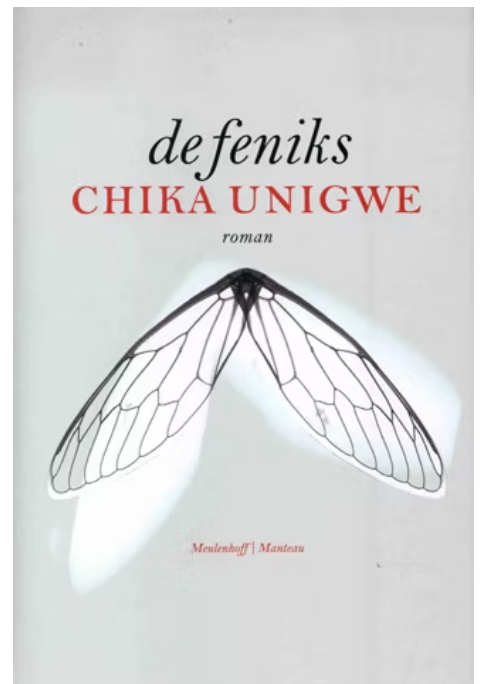
DE STANDAARD

When she meets with disinterest and a lack of understanding on the old continent, she misses her family more than ever. While mourning, Oge struggles to find a balance between her memories of Nigeria and the Belgian reality, and must get a handle on these differences and setbacks to find herself again.

Chika Unigwe does not shy away from the major topics. She explores the relationship between migration and loneliness, both of which are becoming more entrenched in modern European society. 'The Phoenix' is Unigwe's debut novel: the story of a strong woman who, hit by loss, homesickness and illness, tries to keep going.

This is a story about how tragic loss can totally consume a human being. Chika Unigwe's spare and accessible telling has created a truly poignant narrative.

IKE OGUINE



AUTHOR



Chika Unigwe (b. 1974) is a Belgian-Nigerian author who writes in English and Dutch. She is considered as one of the most probing, thought-provoking writers of the recent renaissance in African fiction. In her signature sober style, Unigwe writes novels, short stories, essays, poetry and educational books on themes that are close to her heart: migration, identity, loneliness, diaspora, love, loss and cultural and racial confusions. Her work is primarily populated by strong female characters. Unigwe was a judge for the Man Booker International Prize in 2016. She currently lives in the US. Photo (c) Koen Broos

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