

A fingerlicking good story

Pork Chops

AMARYLIS DE GRYSE

Marieke is the youngest of four sisters in a family with an absentee father and an unstable mother. She works in a care home, where she's happiest in the kitchen, lovingly preparing pigs' cheeks with onions and gravy, oven dishes with a crispy cheese crust, vol-au-vents and spaghetti sauce. A sharp contrast with the bland, watery meals of sausage and apple sauce that are the usual fare for the old people in the home.

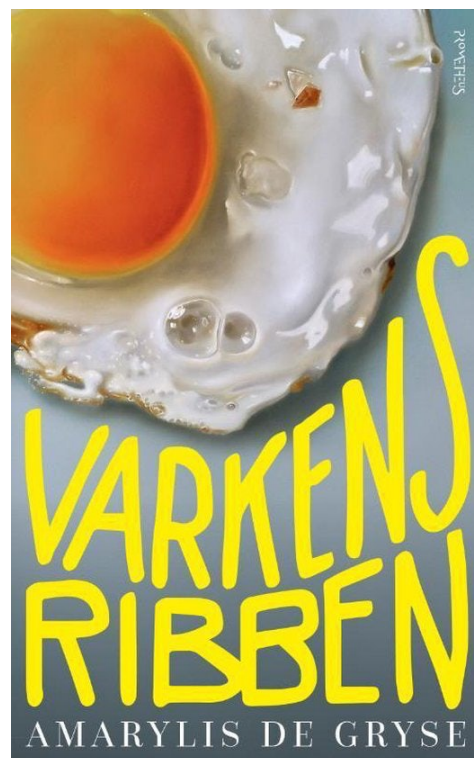
Marieke is kind and considerate towards everyone: the care home residents, her mother, her boyfriend Blok – who she's loved since childhood – and his interfering mother. But then her boyfriend heartlessly forces her to go on a diet. They grow ever further apart, and when Blok deludes himself into thinking that Marieke's having an affair, she doesn't contradict him. She's forced out of their home during a scorching summer, just when her summer clothes are stuck at the laundrette. While homeless, she finds consolation in comfort food and memories of happier times.

Written with engagingly dry humour, this is a captivating and touching debut

HUMO

Things aren't going too well at work, either. The home's relocation from old to new, more modern premises runs into problems, and Marieke finds herself left behind with the residents in the sweltering heat. She lavishes the affection she herself never gets on the old people in her care. Dressed in jeans that are much too hot, Marieke ends up going into battle about the appalling treatment of the home's residents and finds an unexpected ally: the husband of her favourite resident.

'Pork Chops' is a bittersweet story in which childhood memories intermingle with scenes of profound sadness and loneliness. It's a tragicomic tale about sticking up for yourself and about caring – but above all it's an ode to comfort food.



AUTHOR



Amarylis De Gryse (b. 1989) lives in Antwerp, where's she retraining as an organic farmer. She writes in a little wooden house next to the motorway. De Gryse soon stood out in the writing talent programme set up by the literary organisation deBuren. Her work is notable for tragicomic and absurdist elements, and a delicate prose shot through with melancholy. De Gryse is honing her skill as a narrator of down-to-earth tableaux: she has a good eye for *la Flandre profonde* and for family entanglements. There's a lot of meat on the menu in her debut novel 'Pork Chops'. According to De Gryse, this was her way of saying farewell to certain dishes now that she's adopted a vegan lifestyle.

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