

The pain of being a father

Fathers Who Mourn

CARMIE MICHELS

In her debut story collection, Carmien Michels exposes the fragility of fatherhood. Her six short stories are really mini novels, in which her characters face illness, memories of a difficult childhood, stalking, rape and death. All fathers have a hard time, but some rather more than others. They fall short of expectations, miss their children, or struggle to emulate their own fathers.

An impressive story collection, in which Carmien Michels proves herself an extremely intelligent and sensitive storyteller.

HET PAROOL

Michels does not skirt controversy in her stories. In 'The neighbour's chicken run' she addresses the issue of elder abuse. The story begins innocently enough. Felicity turns up one day unannounced at her father's door after years of absence and asks to sleep in his double bed for a few nights. Her demands rapidly escalate; her father is increasingly banished from his own house and step by step he loses his self-esteem. Michels' characters echo the universe of Roald Dahl, in which children tyrannize their parents and character traits are magnified to become grotesque.

In the electrifying and provocative stories in 'Fathers Who Mourn', Michels demonstrates her literary audacity. The collection is cleverly composed and Michels experiments with various approaches and tones, from absurdist to realist. Animals have an important part to play. The struggles of the fathers, all of whom take a beating in life, are colourfully expressed. They find it hard to put their fight into words. And although Michels can be merciless in her portrayal of fathers, in this collection compassion and love carry the day.



AUTHOR



Carmien Michels (b. 1990) is a poet, author and performer. Dancing between the urban and the classic, her passion for rhythm and poetry reached boiling point on the spoken word scene. In 2016 she won both the Dutch and the European Poetry Slam Championships, and came third in the World Championship in Paris. Collaborating with various artists, she has been touring ever since. Alongside poetry, she has published two novels as well as the story collection *Fathers Who Mourn*. Michels has a preference for characters who do not entirely belong and are searching for connection, for meaning, and for a place of their own. *Photo © Matthias Hannes*

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