

A comforting story about friendship and loss

Down Day

KRISTIEN DIELTIENS & JESKA VERSTEGEN

Gaston lost his best friend on the day he accidentally dropped Fons's hamster. He wants to make amends but doesn't know how. It's hard for him to turn to his parents, because they're too busy with their course of fertility treatment. He finds a new best friend in a duckling that he's given as a present by his grandpa, and after a lot of thought he calls it Fons. As his duckling grows, so does his mother's tummy, at last. When the duck gets too big for her pen and flies to the park to build a nest there, Gaston has to say goodbye to her. Fortunately he finds his friend Fons again in that same park and everything seems to be working out fine once more. But then Gaston gets the sad news that his unborn sister has died. The ending, when Gaston makes a warm bed of duck down for his dead sister, is truly moving.

Kristien Dieltiens at her best

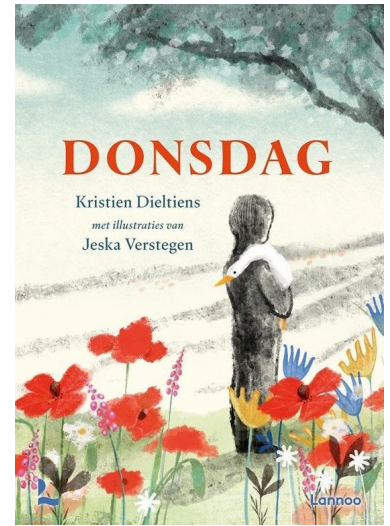
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Dieltiens tells this story of loss with great feeling, with perfectly chosen words, plenty of room for suggestion and wonderful characterization. The different storylines are woven together brilliantly, so that the story never feels too grave despite the many themes that Dieltiens touches upon. The subdued pictures in soft colours by Jeska Verstegen fit with the story seamlessly. Gaston, drawn in shades of grey, contrasts with his colourful surroundings. The images depict the insecurity of the central character in a way that is quite remarkable. Gaston moves through the story like a ghost, in the hope that he too will be seen.

'Down Day' does not avoid difficult subjects, and perhaps for that reason it's an exceptionally comforting book.

DE STANDAARD

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AUTHORS



Kristien Dieltiens (b. 1954) started writing and playing music at a young age. Since her debut in 1997, she has published over a hundred books, of which several have been translated. Dieltiens is at her best when writing historical stories. Her main characters are often outcasts who have to find a place for themselves. She writes evocatively, with humour and she loves a good intrigue. *Photo © Bas Bogaerts* **Jeska Verstegen** (b. 1972) is a Dutch illustrator and author. She has illustrated more than 100 books, published at home and abroad. Verstegen experiments with different styles and materials, from fairy-tale illustrations to stylized pen drawings in black ink, with variations including pastel chalk, acrylic paint, coloured pencil and collage techniques. She experiences imagination as something precious, and therefore it can always be found in her work.

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TRANSLATION RIGHTS Liesbeth De Bruyne - liesbeth.debruyne@lannoo.be, Gunther Spriet - gunther.spriet@lannoo.be

TRANSLATION GRANTS Lien Devos - lien.d@flandersliterature.be