

Løn concludes *Hvis barn* . . . on a note of partial conciliation; the author hints to some small measure of happiness and professional, even personal fulfillment in the future. Bianca might very well be on the road to a better life because of Benny, a loyal companion through thick and thin. However, Løn's central character will never quite escape her past: "She knows that she will bear everything along with her through life, you can move the pieces, shuffle the cards, but nothing is ever really ended until life itself ends." In *Hvis barn*, Anne Marie Løn offers us a portrait of a family clinging to a form of Christianity that hands out hell and damnation to those who may be secret victims rather than open transgressors; Bianca Holm Knudsen is regrettably one such victim.

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■ **Oscar van den Boogaard. Een bed vol schuim.** Amsterdam / Antwerp. Arbeiderspers. 2002. 142 pages, ill. \14.95. ISBN 90-295-0432-3

"THEY HAD SEEN IT HAPPEN in other people's lives, even very close, but one day it happened to them." That is the opening sentence of Oscar van den Boogaard's *Een bed vol schuim* (A bed full of foam). Hardly anything happens in this well-written short novel that confronts the reader with a few quintessential questions about love. Two anonymous lovers are ending their affair for no reason in particular, though it seems that he does not want to become an integral part of her life and wants to secure

his individuality. Love has become a habit, and one day she realizes it is over. She dares him to tell her that it is over, and so he does. As simple as that. They look each other in the face and think of the years they have had together. Then she shakes his head for the last time, and he takes some luggage, closing the door behind him. She is thirty-one and alone. They keep in touch, however, phoning each other regularly while trying to establish a new life. She refuses to see any difference between an ex-lover and a lover and seems convinced that the break is only temporary, as can be derived from her optimistic response to a text on a painting she comes across in an art gallery: "We only really value a relationship when it survives our best attempts to destroy it."

After six months, he comes back to her. She expects him, prepares for the meeting. She does not know what to wear, which music to play, because she feels a different woman with each choice and knows that the course of the evening will be determined by that choice. Maybe even the course of her life. He arrives and they talk of their past together, their present, the new woman in his life, their definitive separation. She reads to him from a book in which a woman completely works herself into the skin of her lover, becoming him, and he refers to a couple who completely deformed each other. He leaves the apartment but returns almost immediately and joins her in bed, as if nothing has happened.

The book is so full of long dialogues, without clear indication of who says what, that everything becomes interchangeable. In between: memories and flows of thoughts, and quotations of other authors to give a broader perspective. Although it might seem complex, it is all very pertinent, especially where love, the pursuit of unity, and the longing for individuality are concerned.

There is not a trace of detached irony in *Een bed vol schuim*. In this stylistically daring and surprising novel, van den Boogaard is genuinely interested in the so-called great values. He wants to get hold of the subtle nuances and changes of mood that define love, and he manages to tackle his subject very seriously without ever becoming moralistic or slowing down.

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