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Mira Feticu

Sweet Child of Mine

Original title: *Lief kind van mij*

NOVEL

Mira Feticu: the discovery of 2012.

Feticu's work was recommended to De Geus by Kader Abdolah

About the author

Mira Feticu (Breaza, 1973) is a Romanian-Dutch writer. She married a Dutchman in Romania, had a baby girl, came to live in the Netherlands and was unable to find her feet. She now works at the Central Library in The Hague, where, with Ernest van der Kwast and Oscar Kocken, she is a member of the editorial committee for the literary programme Literature Late Night. The critics regard Mira Feticu as an exponent of present-day Romanian literature and describe her work as intelligent, erotic and feminist but, more particularly, honest and direct. Feticu's work was recommended to De Geus by Kader Abdolah, whom she had contacted. We, too, were immediately convinced by her enormous powers of expression and her wonderful style. Although Feticu has lived in the Netherlands for only a few years, her ability to express herself in the Dutch language is phenomenal.

About the book

Sweet Child of Mine consists of novellas and stories in which Mira Feticu uses incidents from her own life in Romania and later in the Netherlands as a starting point. It is two years before the fall of Ceausescu when she is placed in a girls' boarding school. She describes, in a compelling manner, 'the imprisonment' and a desire for the outside world and boys. In other stories, she evokes life in a Romanian village: the poverty, the closeness within the family or community that sometimes gives you a feeling of being safe and at other times of being stifled. The reader also witnesses her marriage, her arrival in the Netherlands and a loneliness that drives her to distraction, until a liberating divorce promises the start of a new life. Mira Feticu's way of relating a story and her style both reveal an exceptional literary talent.

Mira Feticu, Lief kind van mij
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Excerpt from the book

In the morning we went to school. In the evening the girls played cards, they read, they hid from each other, practised spiritualism or climbed onto the wall behind the school with the idea of fleeing into the town. As far as I know, no one ever succeeded in escaping, although we all tried and regularly grazed our knees.

Just two years later, we would be allowed through the gate once a week, bearing a leave pass signed by the monitor, and we would go into town in a group, giggling with excitement and fear, each visit to the town frightening us anew. There we would kiss and be kissed for the first time, make our first dates, during which some girls – more generous than others – would open their legs wide or allow them to be opened. The town would also be the location of the first abortion, where we would be taken to the hospital by a chilly monitor. She, kicking us if we whined and not bothering to inform our parents about something so trifling, was also the one to take us, in a herd, for our cultural development every Thursday evening, to the concert

hall where we would occupy the first five rows, and the same monitor, sitting in the first row, would snore from the prelude through to the climax.

But for the time being, we tried to keep the room clean, each of us courageously washing our armpits and faces in the ice-cold water – those of a more Spartan disposition did it *every single* morning – and we worked in the canteen once a week, side-by-side with the cooking ladies. That is what we did the whole time, but there was also a short period between five and six in the afternoon when some lay on their bed, on a thick bedspread, and were silent. I then sneaked into the empty corridors, went to the back of the school building and, kneeling behind the widest tree, laid my head in my arms. I sobbed softly – mamma, mamma – without stopping, until the pain nestled a little more comfortably in my soul.

I was always still kneeling there when the gong resonated to announce dinner, and I had to run to join the girls who believed – just as I did, in fact – that life had something marvellous in store for us, something that our mothers and grandmothers had not been destined for, but that was ripening, either slowly or more quickly, just like the semolina pudding with marmalade that we would be eating every evening the next six years; who believed they only had to exist, who only had to wake up and throw cold water over their faces and breasts, and ensure they did not fall asleep during the lessons, wrap their sanitary towels in several pieces of paper before throwing them in the rubbish bin, and eat all their marmalade with semolina pudding.

The Revolution two years later would keep our belief intact, but the marmalade with semolina pudding would change into potatoes with cheese.

The girls changed, just like in a fairy tale, from being girls with eyebrows like Frida Kahlo to women with women's calves and loads of hair on their legs.