

We Have Never Lived on Earth

Kasia van Schaik

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Kasia van Schaik's *We Have Never Lived on Earth* is a linked short story collection concerned with the young adulthood of a millennial woman.

Charlotte, the daughter of single mother and an immigrant from South Africa, spends her school years in British Columbia. Nineteen stories depict her coming-of-age, via her awkward employment situation at the house of a wealthy classmate, the cruel yet humorous antics of teenage boys and the ways that she and her friend respond to them, disturbing experiences of sexual harassment, the traumas of being a child of separated parents, and romantic relationships of varying intensities. Suffused throughout is the tension between her individual life and the exigencies of the changing Earth. First kisses and forest fires commingle. Charlotte moves from Vancouver to Berlin, Montreal, Amsterdam, Vrolijkheid, and Crete, and the formal fragmentation of the stories that cover these movements echoes the fragmented existence of life on the brink of climate disaster.

Van Schaik's prose is at once lyrical and concise, laden with rich, specific details. Her writing has a literary heart; it is both Woolfian and peppered with enriching references to writers including William Butler Yeats and Samuel Beckett. It indicates a profound understanding of how good fiction works, balancing descriptions with dialogue, and revealing information at the right pace.

Charlotte is a compelling heroine whose story captures the specific strangeness of contemporary women's comings-of-age with pathos, poetry, and humor. The collection is engrossing, compulsively readable, bold in its formal experimentation, and masterful on both the sentence and story levels.

We Have Never Lived on Earth is an impressive, fresh short story collection that centers a young woman's coming-of-age.

MIRANDA COOPER (September / October 2022)

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