

THE BEAUTY OF BALCHIK IS NOT SERENE

By ANTONIA BONTSHEVA

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Die Schönheit von Baltschik ist keine heitere
Novel. German.
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»Borders, transculturalism, finding identity in the interplay between two cultures: the accuracy and power and defiant audacity of the portrayal in this text completely won us over.« Jury of the Bremen Literature Office in the artist's house Worpswede

»Don't touch the interesting ones, marry someone who knows how to cook.« Like all women in the Atanassov family, Grandma Denka is as happy to share her life's wisdom as her granddaughter, our narrator, is to throw it to the wind. She left Bulgaria shortly before the fall of the Berlin wall, and now lives with her husband and daughter in an apartment building in Bremen where hair curlers and soap suds rule. She feels alienated and misunderstood, even in her own marriage. When her father dies, she travels back to her hometown on the Black Sea. There, in her grandmother, mother, and mother-in-law, she encounters strong, dominant women who have always held the strings, and for the first time she investigates the blind spots that reach far back into the country's communist past. She comes to an understanding of how deeply she is woven into this colorful family web and recognizes which connections provide support and which threads need to be undone.

Antonia Bontscheva describes a generation of self-confident women, the history of individual fates in communist Bulgaria through the transition period, and the realities of migration and self-assertion. With passionate, sensual language, warm and humor, the author's human-centered gaze make this captivating novel shine.

»The sun poured its gold onto the water. A still-summery, lush, lavish gold upon a green and inviting water. Yet a thin, gauzy ache lay over it all. The beauty of Balchik is not a serene one. The beauty of Balchik is wise and somehow dramatic. It's beauty breaks your heart.«

Antonia Boncheva was born in Varna, Bulgaria and lives today with her family in Bremen. She studied German language and literature in Berlin, worked as a German teacher and as a journalist, including on a literary radio column for »Funkhaus Europa.« *The Beauty of Balchik is not Serene* is her debut novel, for which she received the Bremen Author's Scholarship from the Senator for Culture and a grant from the Bremen Literature Office in the artist's house Worpswede.

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