



THE LAST RED YEAR

BY SUSANNE GREGOR



Das letzte rote Jahr

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On the 30th anniversary of the pivotal year 1989: A touching story about friendship

»I can't remember a life without Rita and Slavka. Though there was a time without them, as was explained to me, in which I was merely Miša, Rita was merely Rita, and Slavka was merely Slavka. Yet, from the moment that we moved into the house in the Vlčince district, we became Miša, Rita und Slavka.«

Miša, Rita und Slavka have been friends for as long as they can remember. They all live in the same house in the city of Žilina: Miša, the 14-year-old narrator, and her family in the middle, Rita, also 14, in the apartment above, and Slavka in the apartment underneath. They confide their secrets in one another and speak about their first loves. And yet, they could scarcely be more different. Rita is a staunch Youth Pioneer, which makes her parents' confidential plan to escape to Austria seem all the more scandalous. Rita is outraged: she doesn't want to end up like Slavka whose father absconded to Sweden 10 years ago. Slavka cares little for politics. Rather, she is interested in the new history teacher, Comrade Baník, and in gymnastics, her real passion. Miša is the most sensitive of the three. Her love is literature, which nobody – least of all her father – can really understand. Miša has the feeling that life will always continue on in the same manner. The opposite is the case: It is 1989 and nothing will ever be as it was. Three friends and their families experience the year before the collapse of the Socialist regime in Slovakia. Opportunism or rebellion; adaption or revolt – the girls on the brink of adulthood and their parents, each face socialism's decline in their own way.

In precise, elegant language Susanne Gregor insightfully explores the external and internal worlds of the three young friends. By means of small shifts, she allows huge transformations to become tangible and with a steady hand, leads the reader through the seasons of the year 1989. It is »The Last Red Year.«

Susanne Gregor, born in 1981 in Žilina (Czechoslovakia), moved with her family to Austria in 1990. Since 2005, Gregor lives in Vienna where she teaches German as a foreign language. In 2009, she received the ›Hohenemser Literaturpreis‹ Advancement Award and the ›exil-literaturpreis‹ in 2010. Her debut novel ›No Place of One's Own‹ was published in 2011, the novel ›Territories‹ in 2015 and the short story collection ›Under Water‹ in 2018.

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