

Translated excerpt

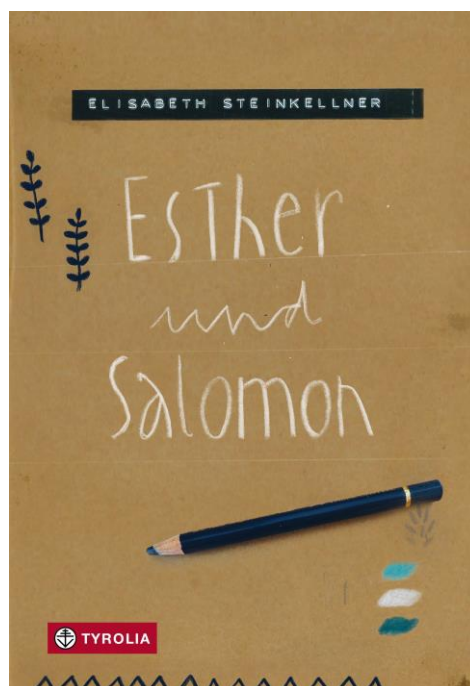
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Esther und Salomon

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Esther and Salomon

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We go down to the beach - on our own.
It's teeming
like an ant heap
and I din it into Flippa
that she mustn't run off
as I'd never ever find her
amongst all the people.
She nods, obedient, and I know at once:
she'll keep her word:
we make a good team, the pair of us do.
Every row between Mum and Dad
pulls *them* further apart
and us closer together.

Sitting near us
are a couple of girls
much the same age as me,
constantly pulling out their mobiles
and taking photos
of themselves.

I watch them
and wonder:
what matters more to them -
the actual moment
each photo aims to catch,
or the moment
their post clocks up
its hundredth Like?

Flippa's found a
playmate,
they're digging in the sand,
making channels,

piling up ramparts
then tamping them down.
They keep dashing to the sea
to fetch more water
in their cheerful little buckets.

Then they stand
by their castle
slathered with sand
from top to toe
gesticulating wildly -
deciding no doubt
which princess
should have which room,
and whether the dragon
in the nearby cave
is nice or nasty.

“So where are your parents then?”

The little girl gives me
a cheery glance and
vaguely, briefly
points a finger.

“Aisha and me
are already best friends!”
Flippa scampers about
in such delight
that I forget at once
how bored I’d been
all afternoon.

“Aisha? What a pretty name!
So where’s she from?”
“That hotel over there”,
says Flippa,
“And guess what:

they don't get
pineapple for breakfast there!"
She looks at me, indignant,
and I want to take her in my arms
and tell her
how much I love her.

Instead
I stroke her hair.
"I meant, what *country*
does Aisha come from?"
Flippa shrugs.
"Greenland praps?
Or Sandland?
Anyway:
tomorrow I'm bringing her
some pineapple!"

She trots on ahead
and the blissful spirit
she trails behind her
wafts right back to me
embracing us both,

and vanishes only when we
reach our hotel and glimpse
the stressed-out faces
of our parents.

If only I could stick Mum and Dad
in the audience
and make them watch
their very own tragedy
unfold before their eyes:

the strident rows,
reproachful silences,
angry accusations,

contemptuous glances.

I'd like to watch
as horror spreads
across their faces,
then ask them:
Do you see now
how much this hurts us?
Do you realise now
how much your volleys of bitter words
wound *us*, the bystanders, too
– Flippa and me –
and how deep the wounds are,
ripped open time after time
and far too big to be improved by
handy little sticking plasters
heedlessly applied?

People can suffer inner death,
soundlessly and unobserved.



Quiz question:

Who or what
bears the greatest blame?

the daily grind
boredom
an excessive workload
inattentiveness
stress at work
their parents-in-law
Dad getting fat
Mum's orange-coloured skin
Dad's female colleague
Mum's male friend from her schooldays.

Or is it in fact

us two kids?

who have to be cared for
who are always in the way
who constantly need things:

your time
your understanding
your love

She's racing to the beach
at such a pell-mell pace
that I can scarcely
keep up with her.

In her hands
held tight as tight
a bowl
of pineapple pieces.



Flippa and Aisha are so happy to see each other,
they dancing for sheer joy.

My mobile pings:
a text from Valerie
to say she's missing me.

For a second
- honestly,
just for a second -
I consider

sulking
as she's left it for days
before bothering
to answer.

But then I type
a whole line of love-hearts
and tell her
I'm missing you too.

It's not that they
actively avoid me at school.

It's just that
no one seeks me out.

It's probably
not the case
that they just don't like me.

It's probably just
that they think I'm odd
for being so fond of my ancient Polaroid
and so genuinely interested
in schoolwork.

Anyway, who decides
what's normal and *not* normal?

I wish
I could go to school
with Valerie.

I'll be spending



eight hours a day
on two hundred days per year
for another four years
at a place where I'm always
lonely.

That's quite a big chunk
of my life.

'Hi!'

Glancing up,
I see him,
and get it straightaway.

"Are you Flippa's sister?"

I nod my head
much longer
than any normal person would,
and feel that tiny earth-tremor
that triggers something
completely new.

"I'm Salomon."

"I'm Esther."

To begin with
that's all we can
think to say.

The biggest adventures always start
when you least expect it.

