

My Mother Says

Stine Pilgaard

Hunter Simpson, Translator

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In Stine Pilgaard's novel *My Mother Says*, an eccentric woman who faces roadblocks in her academic career and relationships uses humor to sidestep her pain.

After breaking up with her zookeeper girlfriend over their age gap and their conflicting takes on motherhood, the heroine moves back in with her father, a pastor who's obsessed with Pink Floyd, and her stepmother. Her mother visits often, nagging her to finish her thesis (and to write a song and a speech for her upcoming sixtieth birthday party). She leans on her doctor and her best friend, Mulle; they keep her from tipping into ill mental health.

The line between the heroine's conversations and her internal thoughts is thin: "Why do you always have to be so strange, darling, my mother asks." She perpetuates family habits of fabulism: her mother impersonates a cancer survivor to solicit charity donations, then a restaurant critic to enjoy a boozy lunch. Likewise, her daughter entertains impulsive fantasies of running away to India or opening a breakfast restaurant.

Still, the heroine doesn't brood on her heartbreaks or her parents' divorce; instead, she is sarcastic, focused on the present, and light in her approach. She indulges in absurd conversations, wielding comedy to deflect her sadness. Her ex summarizes her misbehavior thus: "you're just such a bad advertisement for yourself sometimes." From her mansplaining doctor, she learns that the brain's hippocampus is named for its seahorse shape. This inspires "Monologues of a Seahorse," interludes of stream-of-consciousness association in which she addresses an unnamed "you"—at various times representing her mother, her ex-girlfriend, and a new partner.

Experimental and whimsical, *My Mother Says* is a quirky gem of a novel that delivers a deadpan narration of everyday woes.

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