



# *Naked*

By Iva Procházková

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## **Information**

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## **Short summary:**

A hot summer, Berlin and a rural idyll in the borderland between Saxony and the Czech Republic: This is the backdrop against which the quite different stories of five young people unfold. There is highly talented Sylva, who finds school utterly boring and loves to spend all her time out in the open nature. Niklas would like to become a film-maker but gets bogged down in the drug scene with beautiful Evita. While her quest for absolute bliss has taken her too far down the spiral of drug abuse, Niklas manages to break free just in time. Filip is in love with Sylva, but his intellectual manner makes him his own worst enemy. It is not until another girl takes Sylva's place that he manages to overcome his inhibition. Robin tries in vain to live up to his father's expectations, denying his inner self all the time. Only when he meets Sylva does he finally learn to give rein to his own feelings.

## **Sample review:**

"How puberty feels, how painful and helpless – only few authors have described this in as sensitive a manner as Iva Procházková [...] Iva Procházková demonstrates the qualities of a good book for young adults in an unspectacular way: a striking story, that immediately concerns the reader, an enthralling language that creates an appetite for reading and an ending that inspires the imagination and moves the heart."

*Deutschlandradio Kultur*, 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009

**NOMINATED FOR THE GERMAN YOUTH LITERATURE AWARD 2009 (in two categories)**

### About Iva Procházková:



Iva Procházková was born in what is now the Czech Republic in 1953. In 1986 she went to Germany for a ten-year period. She has written books for children and adolescents for many years, winning the German Youth Literature Award, as well as a nomination for the Hans-Christian-Andersen Medal in 1997. Her title *We Will Meet When They Are All Gone* was awarded the Friedrich-Gerstäcker-Award in 2007 and the Protestant Book Prize in 2008.

### Young Adult Book Jury:

#### ***Naked***

'Adolescence is a unique time. You can't repeat the experience. In adolescence people are naked, and feel everything very directly. This is exciting and painful. (...) Only when you get older, do you begin to clothe yourself.'

Five people who couldn't be more different: gifted Sylva, who has withdrawn from having a social life; Niklas and Evita, who are losing themselves in drugs; Robin who is struggling with his past; and Filip, whose intelligence is sometimes his biggest problem. But all of these young people have one thing in common. They are naked.

In her book Iva Procházková gets to the core of what it is to grow up. She guides her protagonists realistically and without clichés through the plot's twists and turns. Her fine literary sensibility has created multi-layered images to fill the heads and hearts of young adult readers. The book does not try to present any panaceas, but readers will find traces of their own lives in this novel whose mosaic of pieces forms holds up a mirror to everyone.

### Author's Synopsis

Sylva has an unusually high IQ, but she is not able to fit in with the demands of today's society. She is unruly, wild and instinctive. What she would really like to do would be to shake off all society's conventions and live in the wilderness. But where can you find that nowadays? The sixteen-year-old changes schools as easily as other people her age find a new favourite band. It looks like not even her mother's determination and her father's extraordinary empathy will get her to her stay in school until 18. Sylva thinks the leaving exams are an unnecessary formality. Things that can be learnt at school can be experienced in a much more exciting way out of it. For example with Niklas, her best friend growing up, who now has a secret and is avoiding meeting Sylva. Or with Robin, who Sylva met on the roof of the building in Berlin where her mother lives, and who is obviously afraid to let anyone come close to him. Sylva's time in Berlin is like a walk on jungle trails, and it is only when a strange animal is found that it becomes clear which path she should follow.

Niklas has a secret. Although he is in love and feels a boundless happiness inside, his relationship to drop-dead gorgeous Evita has turned his life into a crazy rollercoaster ride that he can't jump off. A few months ago Evita initiated him into the world of drugs, and now both of them are on the edge of an abyss. They live in the middle of Berlin, but also in their own separate world, which is becoming ever more distant from the real world. Niklas' talent for seeing the world with a filmmaker's eye and even his first success – a short film that won his school's competition – are echoes from the past. He lives from day to day now, falling further and further. His relationship to his mother, which once was harmonious, is now a source of recriminations and a reason why he is always running away from home. The turning point comes on the day when Evita disappears with stolen money. Niklas goes out looking for her. Several days of wandering through the streets of Berlin not only blow some

fresh thoughts into his head, but also help him to face his own weaknesses. In the end he loses Evita (more tragically than he expects), but he finds the strength to return to 'normal' life.

Evita does not. From the start we sense a feeling of hopelessness about her, the absence of any goal. Her inner imaginative life is strong, and her desire to discover what lies beyond the horizon. Even in her childhood she started to live in a dreamworld. At first it enriched her life and helped her to come to terms with it: her father's disappearance, her mother's death, the children's home in a desolate small town, those are the visible markers of her life. An inner compass points her to Berlin, where she hopes to find freedom. This appears in her life in the form of drugs, recreational at first, and then harder ones. Instead of the independence she had hoped for, she is suddenly dependent – not only on the drugs, but also on the people who supply her with them. At the point when she meets Niklas, she no longer has the strength to reciprocate his love for her. She doesn't manage to give up stealing and tricking people, and her magical dreamworld starts to sour and darken.

Filip is Sylva's friend from her former school. He deals with her leaving like a true intellectual – he clothes his feelings in words, in cleverly formulated thoughts, in his own original poetry and in unoriginal quotes. He feels spurned and in despair, but that doesn't stop him from remembering Goethe, Jack London, Tolstoy and Kerouac, and to find parallels between their protagonists and his own life. A demonstration by eco-activists, a meeting with the lively Berenika, a clash with the police that ends in his arrest – in the course of one evening and night these events shatter the values and principles that Filip had accepted until then. He doesn't in the end write the letter to Sylva that he had been composing in his head the whole time, instead of that he is capable of a wonderful and crazy nakedness, where you are touching everything ... where you are everything ...

Robin draws a circle around himself and doesn't let anyone inside. It wasn't always like this and it didn't happen for no reason. His unapproachability dates from the Big Bang, from the evening in a mountain hut when he was accused of raping a girl from his school. Robin's father is a lawyer and successfully challenges the accusations, saving his son from the tricky situation. But the relationship between the two suffers. Robin feels that his father doesn't believe him, and so he retreats into himself and starts to wonder what is at the heart of a relationship between two people. His ex-girlfriend's attitude leads him to believe that romantic declarations need not be honestly felt. Sylva's authenticity and spontaneity slowly bring him to think differently. Their risky adventure at night, and his ensuing emotional turmoil, as well as their rescuing of an exotic beast of prey, finally break through the circle he had drawn around himself.

Naked is a story about sixteen-year-olds and their everyday life. I have tried to reveal a whole spectrum of maturing emotions and attitudes which are formed not only by young people's natural inclinations, but also by us grown-ups and by the most recent developments in European society. Technology influences our life everywhere: behind our own four walls, on the motorways, in sight of CCTV cameras, and where our mobile phones have reception. That needn't be experienced as a limitation. But in certain key moments, in which these conditions contradict young people's basic needs and their longing for a real, direct experience of life, things can come to a head. For some of my protagonists this clash plays out almost unnoticed below the surface, for others it leads to rebellion or dramatic situations.