



The Hunger Angel: A Novel

Herta Müller

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A masterful new novel from the winner of the 2009 Nobel Prize, hailed for depicting the "landscape of the dispossessed" with "the concentration of poetry and the frankness of prose" (Nobel Prize Committee)

It was an icy morning in January 1945 when the patrol came for seventeen-year-old Leo Auberg to deport him to a camp in the Soviet Union. Leo would spend the next five years in a coke processing plant, shoveling coal, lugging bricks, mixing mortar, and battling the relentless calculus of hunger that governed the labor colony: one shovel load of coal is worth one gram of bread.

In her new novel, Nobel laureate Herta Müller calls upon her unique combination of poetic intensity and dispassionate precision to conjure the distorted world of the labor camp in all its physical and moral absurdity. She has given Leo the language to express the inexpressible, as hunger sharpens his senses into an acuity that is both hallucinatory and profound. In scene after disorienting scene, the most ordinary objects accrue tender poignancy as they acquire new purpose—a gramophone box serves as a suitcase, a handkerchief becomes a talisman, an enormous piece of casing pipe functions as a lovers' trysting place. The heart is reduced to a pump, the breath mechanized to the rhythm of a swinging shovel, and coal, sand, and snow have a will of their own. Hunger becomes an insatiable angel who haunts the camp, but also a bare-knuckled sparring partner, delivering blows that keep Leo feeling the rawest connection to life. Müller has distilled Leo's struggle into words of breathtaking intensity that take us on a journey far beyond the Gulag and into the depths of one man's soul.

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